Present chapter deals with a comparative study of women’s struggle for existence in selected novels of Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De. There are three categories of women projected in Indian fiction: 1) Rural. 2) Educated middle-class. 3) Upper strata, urban women. Deshpande’s heroines Saru, Jaya, Indu and Urmii belong to educated middle class category, while Kamala Markandaya’s Rukmani belongs to rural category and Namita Gokhale’s Paro and protagonists of Sahagal and Shobha De present, upper strata, urban women. Shashi Deshpande’s Novels usually begin within an unconventional marriage leading to the problems of alienation, accommodation and adjustment, therefore marriage is an adjustment, rather than a real involvement. It is one of the necessary bonds of human life which basically rest on the proper understanding between husband and wife. It is this very relationship which helps to exist in this world. The error known as ‘misunderstanding’ is largely responsible for the matrimonial crisis among married couples.

Shashi Deshpande has given voice to women’s feelings and their struggle for existence in the society. Feminism is the key issue in her novels. Her novels mainly dwell on desperation and frustrations, misunderstanding and incompatibility, Loneliness and alienation of sensitive women pitted against an ill mated marriage around them. So Hooks rightly comments:

Feminism, as liberation struggle, must exist apart from and as part of the larger struggle to eradicate domination in all its forms. We must understand that patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppressions, and that there is no hope that it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact. This knowledge should consistently inform the direction of feminist theory and practice.\(^1\)
Hook’s approach depends on the claim that sexism is a particular form of oppression that can be distinguished from other forms, e.g. racism and homophobia, even though it is currently interlocked within other forms of oppression. Thus, feminism’s objective ends in sexism. Shashi Deshpande presents the middle-class educated women. Besides, they are fit to show the clash between tradition and modernity, idealism and pragmatism. In her novels, the Indian middle class woman is engaged in an unconscious struggle to release herself from the bound society. She tries to transcend it but fails. She raises a protest against social taboos and norms but ends up in a stifled whisper. Deshpande’s women are neither the old, orthodox type nor the modern, westernized variety. They are the familiar Indian women of the middle class society; the challenge taken up by the Indian writers in English, specially by women novelists like Anita Desai, Shobha De, Rama Mehta, Jai Nimbkar, Shashi Deshpande etc.

Shashi Deshpande’s main focus in her fiction is essentially on woman and her role in male-made mundane society. The culture that created a Sita and Gandhari has denied existence to woman except in the role of a daughter, Sister, a wife, daughter-in-law, a mother and mother-in-law. The women in Shashi Deshpande’s novels depict the women’s struggle against all odds. One half of the humanity cannot be neglected in this modern world. Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer is her women characters, their pain, their suffering, and their own solutions to the problems created by the world, where they flourish their desires and dreams but to face disillusionment makes them bold enough to face the fact.

Shobha De is also essentially a feminist writer. Like Shashi Deshpande. She is gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspect of human life tactfully. The way she narrates each and every aspect of human relationship in general and man-woman relationship in particular, is
really wonderful. She concentrates on women’s problems and gives a new approach to them. She is a modern novelist who recognizes the displacement and marginalization of women and attempts to turn this pattern upside down. Through her writings she constantly tries to shatter patriarchal hegemony and raises a voice of protest against male dominance. For this, she explores the world of urban women in India. Shobha De makes her intentions clear. Her women are not going to be emotional, subdued and weak ladies of manners. On the contrary, they are to be assertive, prognostic and strong. As the action of the novel unfolds, these girls continue to indulge in their single-minded pursuit which is to lead a life of luxury, wealth, comfort and pleasure, a perception quite alien to those women who seek a heavenly bliss in the domestic duties and prefer to revel in a spiritual illusion rather than chasing a material reality; but Shobha De’s women, “Symbolize the overpowering materialism and the lack of spiritualities that characterized modern age.”

Shobha De asks women to pay attention to a few but essential conditions for their freedom like honor, empowerment, betterment, health, rights, independence and security. Shobha De says:

> I feel education and economic independence are key to woman’s existence. Let her herself evaluate her freedom, self help is the greatest help. If the woman on grass root is educated, she could help herself.

So in all her writings, she asks woman to concentrate on Education, Economics, power, experience, female integrity, mutual co-operation, moral and ethical values, character, and hopefulness-cum-courage. Even such women folk who are kept under the constant vigil by trustworthy men are not safe, only those are secure, who can defend themselves by their own virtues. Shobha De’s idea is similar to that of Dr. Radhakrishnans: “Give us good women, we will have a great civilization, give us good mothers, we will have
a great nation.” Shobha De believes that, only through betterment of women, a nation can progress and prosper because they will enlighten the life of all the family members. Children are the future of a nation and they may be called the backbone and makers of the future of a nation, society and civilization, which would ultimately result in the betterment of entire human kind. Thus what women need today for their emancipation, empowerment and enlightenment are education, economics, equality, opportunities, honor, co-operation and courage?

Since Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De are women and have women protagonists occupying centre stage in their novels, their feministic outlook bounds to surface, as their roles are traditionally associated with women. The thoughts of these women characters are sure to appear unexpectedly in their struggle for their existence in male-dominated world and their relationship with them.

Comparison of their Novels:-

1) Dark Holds No Terrors and Socialite Evenings:

Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors is about a well-educated, economically independent woman’s search for her identity which leads to uncover the dormant strength inhuman beings. It is the story of Sarita and her relationship with her parents and her husband and her agonizing search for herself. It is the story of a marriage on the verge of breakdown and of a woman who has been made acutely conscious of her gender since child-hood. The novel opens with an italicized prologue. The prologue speaks about a woman’s experience of the mind deserting, “the shamefully bruised body, disowning it, meaning it insensate.”

A nightmare experience of rape at the hands of a stranger, who is, however, Sarita, the main character, realizes eventually, her husband,
Manohar. Her husband a normal loving person during daytime becomes a brutal monster at night. Saru is terrified by her trap like an animal, which leads to the terror of darkness. Her desperate attempts to solve the problems by making him realize his sadistic tendencies are unsuccessful. Her problems increase when she starts reliving in memories of her dead brother Dhruva, when they were children. In her childhood, Saru recollects her younger brother Dhruva exhibiting fear of darkness. Saru being older to him by three years, asserted her supremacy by comforting him that *The Dark Holds No Terrors* at all. The terrors are within us and not in the darkness. The innocent solution given then to Dhruva does not help Saru in her adulthood, encroached by the same fear. She is unable to confront the terrors in her

The theme of the novel is woman’s predicament. Her struggle to create an identity for herself in the family is depicted. She wants to prove her living overcoming all the obstacles that came her way and lead a life of worth. Surprisingly mother’s attitude towards her changed with the death of her brother. She sensed “I just did not exist for her, I died long before I left home.” Mother cursed her in agony, “why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?” The conflict between Saru and her mother represents the clash between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. Her mother is an obstruction in her path to self-realization. Saru’s education helps her to accept the rational thinking and reject the unreasonable irrational ideas. The irrational ideas are her mother accusing her for Dhruva’s death and taking care of Saru with obligation.

Home gives security for everyone. But for Saru home is a place of disappointment to her, in childhood home becomes a place of hatred because of her mother’s accusations. She at most struggles to win the heart of mother in futile. So the escape route is Bombay. Her marriage with Manu gave her a secured feeling temporarily because of his love though during the early year
she lived in one room house with common bathroom. Her recognition as a lady doctor, the rise in income flow, a new house, luxuries, gave her satisfaction and security. The sense of security of home diminishes by her husband’s sadistic behavior. So she leaves that house and goes to her parental home to find solace. Twice in the novel Saru faces a sense of homelessness Saru’s parental home symbolizes tradition whereas the Bombay house represents modernity, modernity itself is not a solution. One should always remember the roots as they help to pursue the present life in a proper manner. Ignoring the past leads to stumbling in the present. Saru’s attempts to move from one home to another exhibit her insecure feeling she blurs out in anger, at her helplessness and the discovery that she had no home at all. Towards the end of the novel, however, she goes to her husband’s house with a determination and a change in her outlook. Her father helped her to understand the concept of life that escaping or running away from situations leads to more complications. Problems have to be faced boldly and tubule them in an amicable manner. In Hindu philosophy a woman’s permanent home is her husband’s house, which she breaks away only at her death.

Saru, the two-in-one woman, is a successful doctor during day time and a ‘terrified trapped animal’ at night, her traumatic experience necessitates her to crave for freedom from domineering influences. She wishes to become a free individual and wants to avert an identity of her name, lover’s livings as a human being she says: “My life is my own.”

Alienated from her husband, she comes to her parental house to see her sense of belonging to the world but the same eludes her. Initially, as Saru comes to her father’s house, she feels like a ‘stranger’, as Sudama standing at the gates of the palace of Krishna and Rakmini. She is conscious that she is no humility. But she gets a cold reception at her father’s house. At times Saru
regrets her visit: “why habit seemed so important to come here, and at once?” 9 As Saru stays her parental house, she gets a chance to review her relation to her dead brother, and within her husband her dead mother her dead brother, with her own children. Her earliest memories are those which speak about the gender discrimination shown by her mother in favor of her brother Dhruva. Saru has had an insecure childhood. As per sense of reasoning and questioning develops, she feels she is unable to tolerate the preference shown towards her and preference shown towards her brother. She feels jealous of her brother when he gets all the parental care and attention. She struggles to attract her father’s attention and succeeds only to some extent. Saru’s mother’s strong preference for her brother drives her to a sense of restlessness and alienation.

The partisan attitude of her parents has a devastating effect on Saru. She becomes rebellious in nature. When her brother dies by dawning in the pound accidentally, she mutely watches the whole sense without rushing to his help, her mother points out, “you killed your brother.”10 Pramila Paul attempts to lay bare Saru’s mind when she says: “Dhruva’s demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment.” 11

Life becomes more desperate to Saru after Dhruva’s death. There are no celebrations at home, her own much awaited birthday passes off in silence both at schools and at home. Saru’s mind is filled with deep and indelible scars as her mother constantly pains for her dead son and rejects even the presence of her daughter. At every given opportunity Saru’s mother snubs her. This sense of rejection by her mother fills the adolescent Saru’s mind with feeling of hatred towards her mother as Adeshpal observes:
For Saru the very word “Mother” stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a being …….. thus the strange childhood experience false up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others.  

Saru’s confrontation with her mother riches its peak when she decides to marry Manu. Her choice of a boy from a lower caste is a sign of her rejecting the traditional way and values her orthodox mother adheres to. She recalls the conversation with her mother where she confronts her with intension of marring Manu. “What caste is he? I don’t know A Brahmin? Of course not” The word her mother has used, with disgust, hatred and prejudice of centuries so enrages Saru that see replies “I hope so.” “Thus the little rebel of your whom used to resent her mother’s gender bias mutely becomes overtly defiant…….” After her marriage Saru’s hurt to hear from a mutual acquaintance that her mother has said, “let her know more sorrow that she has given me.” She even thinks at one point that she is unhappy and destroyed in her marital life because her mother has cursed her. But gradually her hostile attitude towards her mother changes to a positive one she even begins to see her mother changes to a positive one. She even begins to see her mother as the creative essence of the feminine. She makes efforts to understand her and even identify herself with her mother, V. Rao finds this as:

……a search for her own feminine side and for the reunification of her spilt self…. and finally we see ‘rebirthing her own individual personality separate from her mother’s.’

Thus, she finally emerges from her ordeal a person more whole, more capable of accepting and forgiving herself that she has been at the start.
However, the very thought of marriage unnerves Saru. Perhaps it is the fear of sex, the unknown. Till they get married, Manu and Saru are quite innocent in their relationship. This may be because of their middle-class inhibitions. Marriage opens the sesame of all enjoyment for Saru. After the first moment of apprehensions, there is never anything withholding in her. “I was insatiable, not for sex but for love each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved, of my being wanted.”\textsuperscript{18} Manu and Saru’s marital life becomes quite good. As Manu says: “when we’re together, its heaven ….”\textsuperscript{19} To Saru all this seems to be difficult to believe. She feels that all these things could only happen to girls in movies. Saru by marring Manu has a permanent break in the relationship with her mother. At a point Manu fears that cutting Saru off from her parents will be painful for her. Saru, on the other hand, feels quite detached from her parents. She explains this in a more scientific manner:

Have you seen a body being born? Do you know, Manu, how easy it is to cut the umbilical cord and separate the baby from the mother? Ligate, cut and it’s done. There’s scarcely any bleeding either. It’s as if nature knows the child must be detached from the parent. No, Manu, for me there will be no trauma, no bleeding.\textsuperscript{20}

The mother in her turn successfully erases from her mind every crazy of Saru and even predicts the fate of Saru’s marriage thus: “It is love for a few days, then quarrels all the time.”\textsuperscript{21} It is from this moment that Saru takes a vow never to see her parents. Saru’s happy with Manu, though they live in her dingus one-room apartment. But soon this happiness turns out to be only an illusion. As long as Saru is student, Manu has been the bread winner. They had peace at house despite its filth and stench. But problems begin to slowly creep in the moment Saru is recognized as a doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure and this casts a shadow
on their married life. The seeds of jealousy are sown in him when there is an explosion in the hereby factory. Burnt and mutilated bodies pour in where Saru has to talented on them.

Shashi Deshpande does not glorify Saru’s sufferings, though she tries to enlist suffering. Though she tries to enlist a sufficient amount of sympathy for her protagonist it is not merely on the grounds of her being a female sufferer. Saru being a realist perceives the ultimate human reality and its process of decay. She finds loneliness as a painful but inescapable human condition. She also understands that the suffering of multitudes does not mitigate one’s suffering in any way and that one has to watch patiently the way happiness recedes from one’s self. It is this realization that helps her understand her mother’s words: “We also alone. We have to alone.” Further the feeling of homelessness drives Saru occasionally to the longing to be released from existence itself she wonders.

Would it always be a failure, any attempt to reach out to another human being? Had she been chasing a chimera all her life, hoping for someone? Perhaps the only truth is that man is born to be cold and lonely and alone.

However, Saru is not destroyed by her sense of alienation. She is able to think sensibly and logically. Her self-confidence is revealed when she says:

All right so I’m alone. But so everyone else. Human beings…….. they’re going to fail you. But because there are just us, because there’s no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can’t believe in ourselves, were sunk.

Saru understands that despite loneliness, man seeks meaningful life, inhuman interdependence too. The perfect partnership between her father and Madhav is a pattern where they make no demands on each other. It’s
partnership “As all good partnerships should be.” It is ironic that father whom Saru has always considered as negative man, incapable of strong feelings and who always avoids things, the truths, facts, and life’s confrontations is the one who ultimately urges Saru to confront focus. Even the courage to admit to her that her orbit comprises her children, her home, her practice, her patients and that 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.” At the end, Saru’s father urges her to confront reality. He tells her that “she can’t run away this way.” 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.

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. Saru seems to be tried of comparing the fearful stranger of the night and then rather pathetic Manu of other times hating him yet pitying him too. For he is groping in the dark as much as I am. Saru realizes that she has to accept all these selves-daughter, sister and wife as they are, for she wants to accept these selves to become whole again. They are not all for her. Saru understands that integration alone would make her whole again and confrontation of the disintegration elements would never make that possible. “Escapism is no solution; a permanent solution has to come from within.” You are your won refuge, there is no
other refuge. Saru realizes, that one has to be sufficient within oneself because here is no other refuge elsewhere and Saru needs to apply to herself what she has cautioned Dhruva ones. There is no need to escape from the darkness or cure the darkness.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors.* That the terrors are inside us all the time, we carry then with us, and like traitors, they spring out when we Least expect them, to scratch and maul.30

Darkness makes one incapable to see things clearly and objectively. Darkness is also a source of constant fear when viewed from outside. Saru is in the process of gaining her identity as an individual. She is brave enough to realize that:

Walking along around going on and on knowing with sinking feeling that something, somebody awful and 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.31

Saru understands that it is she, who self-assertive and that she has been cruel to her people like her own brother Dhruva, to her mother and her husband, Manu. She feels that till her last breath, she will not be able to get rid of the thought that she was cruel to them. “The deception had cracked so completely… shafts of truth pierced her, causing her unbearable pain.”32 Her realization is swift and nearly perfect when she thinks “It is not what he’s done to me, but what I’ve done to him.”33 She realizes that her ego is responsible for all the problems that crept in her life As A. K Awasthi observes: “No atonement can never redeem her of the feeling of guilt.”34 Inspired by the roots of Indian cultural Saru realizes now that she is no longer a “guilty sister, undutiful daughter, the unloving wife.”35 Despite all such awareness and her father’s plea of “don’t do it again.”36 She packs up to take an escape route unsure of where to go escape has always been her mode
of resolving the tangled knots, exchanging old horrors for new ones. Towards the end of the novel however, Saru receives a letter about Manu’s arrival. Initially, on hearing about Manu’s arrival, she feels indifferent and thinks perhaps Manu might turn away, tried after knowing at the door. That is exactly what she wants. She wants to put herself in another’s hands. At this moment of utter despair, it is the call of her profession that steadies her and gives her the courage to confront reality. Saru sets out to attend Sunita who is sick. Saru says. “Baba if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I’ll be back as soon as I can.” 37 These words stand as a proof of the asserting of her individuality and her willingness to confront reality. Setting out to attend her patient is an indication of Saru’s assertion of her career, without any compromise. Albeit 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 the 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 realized in their own lives.38

This is exactly true of Saru who is the representative of middle-class working women in modern India. She rebels against traditions, but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. This is because, Saru lives in transitional society. Saru passes from the illusion to reality, from frustration to submission and as the wheel finally comes round, she makes an ultimate attempt to reconcile herself: all thought her life; Saru avoids facing the moment of open discussion but has waited for the solution to take its own turn. Saru at the end is ready to have a life outside the family and face the
hard realities of life. Saru desires to liberate herself from the shackles of tradition and exercise her right to reveal her individual capabilities and realize her feminine self through identity-assertion and self-affirmation. In the words of S. P. Swain: “Saru’s journey is journey from self-alienation to self identification, from negation to assertion, from diffidence to confidence. She learns to trust her feminine self.”

Shashi Deshpande has picked up the pet Indian theme of rise of status of the wife in the society. The matters almost come to the boiling point when Saru addresses a group of girls and out of sheer anguish because of the intolerance of the society say the following words, ironically:

Listen girls, she would say, whatever you do, you won’t you get married and have children. That’s what they tell us? And we have to believe them because no one has proved it wrong till now. But if you want to be happily married, there’s one thing you have to remember. Have you girls seen on old fashioned couple walking together? Have you noticed that the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? That’s important very important, because it is symbolic of the truth. A wife must always be a few steps behind her husband.

No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal. But take care that it’s unequal in favour of your husband if she scales tit in your favour. “God help you, both of you.” And in case of Saru she scales did in her favour. She was a successful doctor and was getting handsome returns for her services. On the other hand Manu, her husband was just a struggling
writer. In fact something that happens here is really strange. Chaman Nahal Writes:

I define feminism as mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome: whether it is the husband or the father on the community or whether it is a religious group ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome, and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes.  

Obviously, most of the dependence of women is economic dependence. Even this economic dependence is not common to all societies. To a great extent this economic dependence is absent among modern educated women like Saru. Even in the pre-historic early Hindu Societies the problem was taken care of the concept of stridhan. Bharati Mukherjee in her Hindu women normative models writes:

The property of women thus assumed the characteristic of a ‘separate estate’ to be owned and enjoyed by them alone. The separate economic entity of a woman was respected by kautilya and that entirely appears to have had aaria to play in society. Thus aspect of woman’s status namely, her right to separate property was considered by Manu to be a unique feature of Hindu jurisprudence.  

In fact, Saru’s independent mode of existence including her economic freedom becomes the thorn on the path of her normal life and contrary to what Prof. Nehal says it disables her from realizing, whatever feminist ideology she ever had. Once a girl news reporter who came to interview Saru
was also introduced to Manu while everybody was having tea the reporter asked Manu “How does I feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?” 44 May be this pinpointed question changed the attitude of Manu towards Saru. True, the women in Saru was after Manu to receive an iota of love even after child birth:

The hands that probed her body while she was in labor had been utterly distasteful. But this sucking had setup an intensely erotic response within her. So that she had, unable to control herself, forced Manu to make love to her as soon as possible after she went home there had been a kind of withholding in Manu then…. May be he had been shocked by her urge, may be had been afraid of hurting her. But it had not worried her. Her desire had been so strong. So purely physical her from having satisfaction.45

Saru, who was so much after Manu and pining for his, loves of her that sheer physical love of Manu for her. May be unpalatable question of the reporter has around the beast in Manu to have better control over this the woman in Saru is not able to digest particularly because in the love act Manu is not an equal partner but predator but to established his superiority over the female impedes her impulse to freedom on discretionally not of the kind where out of sheer ecstasy the lovers lose their identity. Commenting on this terrible phenomenon’s Ambika writes:

The financial ascendance of Saru comes to have a terrible negative impact on Manu. It renders Manu important. The only way he can regain. That potency and masculinity is through sexual assault
upon Saru. Which for him becomes on assertion of
this manhood, and which becomes in him a set of
perverse nocturnal abnormality. Strangely enough,
he is a cheerful normal human being, a loving
husband during day. Who turns into a rapist at
night. It terrifies and humiliates Saru so much that
she cannot speak about them, even to him.46

Obviously all these protestations of Saru against her husband is an
extension of her childhood accusations against her mother who was the
product of an outdated society totally callous towards the right of the girl
child. The feminist voice of Deshpande singles out all such retrograde
aspects of the society and reacts in its unique way:

It had merely been a place to dry things in summer.
The Tulsi had been the spot of green. But that had
gone as well of course it had served its purpose.
She had died before her husband. Wasn’t that all
women prayed to the Tulsi for? 47

Her husband is something that is very natural. However, at the end
she behaves like a typical Indian woman who in spite of the carrier bitterness
cannot forget the marital bliss of early years even though that is very short
lived. After all being Indian they make sacrifices for everybody they
consider to be their own and sometimes even for outsiders. And perhaps with
this spirit of sacrifice she broods over her past and is filled with a sense of
guilt and remorse obviously the protagonist through her such actions
proclaims harmony and understanding between two opposing ideals and
conflicting selves which is the typical Indian attitude. Siddhartha Sharma is
right when he says this about her: she is neither the typical western liberated
woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself
get overwhelmed by the western feminism on its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one’s identity within marriage. Saru the protagonist in Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* represents the sensitive women of post independence India who are introspective, self-aware, convent educated but tradition bound. Saru represents that new woman while remaining confined to the familial bonds asserts her identity, struggles for her rights and eventually reaches to self actualization. She represents a realistic picture of the contemporary middle class, educated, urban Indian woman who despite being educated and economically independent remains a victim of injustice within the family.

Saru’s tough journey in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a beginning into the mystery of human existence. She realizes that parental home is not safe haven. Neither her father nor her mother can provide her shelter. She is her own refuge. The parental home prefaces the protagonists understanding of the ins and outs of human life. She broods over the imponderables of human predicament: Thus Saru’s journey is seen from self-alienation to self-identification, from negation to assertion, from difference to feminine self: “And oh yes, Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”[^48] Thus is assertion of her individuality, her willingness to confront reality and not to run away from it. The new liberated women of Saru’s generation are non-conformists who are unhappy with the speech making of equality between man and woman. They want to liberate themselves from the shackles of tradition and exercise their rights for the manifestation of their individual capabilities and the realization of their feminine selves through identity assertion and self-affirmation. Saru epitomizes this struggle for liberation of the self.
Socialite Evenings by Shobha De deals with women who represent the Indian high class. These women have money and status, rich powerful husbands and a string of devoted lovers. In Socialite Evenings, Karuna the female protagonist is a die-hard Mumbai Socialite, Karuna marries for money. She leaves her husband as soon as she finds him incompatible. Her desire for freedom & self existence makes her change her life style drastically she becomes a reckless and self-absorbed woman with friends like Anjali and Ritu who have no regard for conventional moral values and whose sole motive is to achieve whatever they want. What Ranbir Roy remarks to Karuna on her flourishing career in advertising and refusal to marry him is indeed significant.

The novel carries the theme of women’s struggle against their objectification and materialization in the male dominated society, Socialite Evenings gives a stark picture of the marginalization of the Indian husbands at the hands of their wives. Karuna the heroine of the novel comes from a middle class family. She revolts against the traditional family and uses her body as ladder to success in her career she beds with the New Delhi ad film-makers in London. Again Ritu has an affair with ex-gigolo of Anjali and then lives with Gul, an N.R.I as his concubine. What does it show? Women though make their husbands grovel at their feet, grovel themselves at other men’s bed for pelf.

Socialite Evenings is the most vindictive of her novels aimed at taking revenge on men. Thus she puts women in the boots of the corrupt husbands of the Indian family life and makes them have several posts. Marital sexual relations and diverse their husbands, and the husbands are made to bear all this and finally accept their wives. Shobha De forgets that one wrong cannot undo another wrong. Such a reactionary figment of her imagination is not even acceptable to the woman of India and the novel is so
mean that it does not deserve a place in literature. De’s protagonists are not meek and submissive for example Karuna and Anjali in *Socialite Evenings*. They are human beings and as such must not be treated as objects. They must be given the right to exist on their own right. In a patriarchal male-dominated society it is the male who shouts, hurls abuses bullies reproaches, criticizes and it is the woman who listens, tolerates and remains passive. But Shobha’s women are different like Karuna they are not mere binding vine, ‘yes-persons’ to bow down in meek subordination. They are like the new woman who fights back, resists and shouts back. The subordination of women as housewives stems from as castration-panic on the part of the husband.

The Indian male is presented by Shobha De as a person terribly threaded by self-sufficient women. He is inadequate and incomplete as a husband since he lacks the traits of an ideal husband. Fear of the loss of domination and control over the self-affirming wife makes him resort to several defense mechanism. One of these strategies is his male chauvinism and power-assertion ventilating in bullying and committing atrocities upon his wife. But his stupid self-conceit and ego restricts a free exchange of views among sexes Karuna inquisitively wonders. How could we communicate anything at all to men who perpetually sat reading pages of *The Times of India* while concentrated picking their noses? Karuna learns from Ritu. Whom she chances upon at a finance director’s party that mean like dogs could be conditioned through reward and punishment. But could she condition her husband in the like manner? She was fed up with her husband’s compulsive socializing, his horrible safari suits and the gum he constantly chewed. She could not turn to anything in such a boring milieu save her books and her fantasies. Cross words and newspaper chess were other alternatives to utter boredom. She realizes that despite her little acts of
protest, she is a well-trained Indian wife. But she shared the made rational human nature as men do. Karuna is not “the toy of man, his rattle which must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused.”

Karuna’s imaginary craving for the fulfillment of her physical desires finds reflection in her fantasies. Anjali’s fancy in Malabar Hill, the regular haunt of Karuna is symbolically the projection of her fancy, her dream which in reality is but a myth. A woman lives in a world of fancies, insignificant but profoundly imaginative. Virginia Woolf says about women:

> Imaginatively she is of the highest importance. Practically she is completely insignificant... Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips, in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell and was the property of her husband.

To examine Karuna’s views about the meaningless marriage in which she is trapped:

> I think our marriage was over the day our awful honey-moon Started. We’ve got nothing going. I don’t love you never have. As for you- I really don’t know to this day why you chose to marry me. I don’t think you even know who you married. You don’t have a clue what sort of woman I am. I’m tired of your smugness, your irritating mannerisms, the way you take me for granted and expect me to fall into your overall scheme of things- I was another one for your well calculated deals.

Karuna was leading a life of emotional frigidity. There was no meaningful communication between the partners. No smiles and laughter, no free exchange of thoughts and ideas, no queries and questions but silence, only silence. Karuna admits: “It wasn’t that I never tried, but there was no question that my husband and I inhabited different planets.”

Despite these
emotional voids in her conjugal life, Karuna toed the track of an ideal housewife conforming to the demands of tradition. She did not protest but dutifully obeyed her husband. The house was kept in order; everything was well-trimmed, clean and tidy. Her husband is a compromising and forgiving type of person who is not a cruel and merciless individual to throw her away for her affair with Girish:

I’m not a mean man. You’ve been a good wife—I’m prepared to cancel this one black mark on your performance record and start with a clean slate. But you have to swear you’ll never see or keep in touch with that man again… you have sinned but must be generous and forgive you.  

He is unable to look deep into the biological need of Karuna’s female self. If Karuna had any affair with Girish, it was only a means to fulfill her psychological and emotional need. It was her attempt to attend wholeness of personality for without a man, a woman is a fragment. A partial self, such an involvement on the part of Karuna may also be a strategic escape from the claustrophobic and cloistered milieu of her marital life where they lived as two separate islands. Karuna says: “you never cared to understand me as a woman.”  

Basically Karuna is pure, for she is spiritually untainted and unsullied the modern new woman. Independent in all respects, Karuna is a respectable, conservative Hindu housewife, wrapped in yards and yards of sari. The role of a wife restricts a woman’s self-development. It circumscribes it. Rose Marie Tong says:

Sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to ask because they have to in order to survive psychologically. Virtually all women engage in the feminine role playing.  

In Socialite Evenings Karuna play different roles at different times to quench her emotional and psychic thirst. She is a model, a housewife, a
society lady and an actor-writer and a paramour. Marriage subjugates and enslaves women it leads her to “aimless days indefinitely repeated life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose.” Like Karuna unlike other married women who have practically no choice left to them save what their husbands wills and desires, Karuna has independent thoughts, she has her own say and is free to choose her ways and means. The husband interferes but it is only by way of guidance and advice. There is no superimposition on her thoughts. Karuna’s is a life of instincts and urges. Unlike other married women slavishly tagged to tradition, she has her own say. She unveils and unfurls herself to activate the creative urge stifled within herself and this act of unburdening herself is a compromise with herself. Karuna’s husband treats her as matter, a more object subjected to his own will. Karuna’s humorously sarcastic approach to her problems in the patriarchal male culture apparently deconstructs the traditional gender hostility used to elaborate the polarities of connubial ties. Karuna undermines male superiority. She loathes her husband’s dwelling in post-mortems. She makes an ingenious declaration about her inner urge to express herself through love.

I love this friend of yours, and I want to be with him in Venice. There is a good chance that I will feel thoroughly disillusioned after that. May be he will have some truly foul personal habits that will disenchant me. In which case it will really be a death in Venice. You know by now that I’m not the flighty sort. I don’t flint at random like my other friends. I’m steady and grounded. It’s the Taurean in me that’s surfacing these days. Treat this as a short-term, mania that will wear itself out.

It means that Karuna has just a formal relationship with her husband. Intimacy between the husband and wife is lacking for Karuna who never
calls her husband by his name but derogatorily as ‘Black Label’. Shobha De resorts to the technique of manipulating language in order to deconstruct the male ego. She views a woman not only as passively defiant but also as the embodiment of power. In Karuna this power syndrome assumes a positive figure but in Winnie it is a negative force, the destructive image the image of Kali. Karuna’s husband says about the bewitching Winnie: “She is a very strange and powerful woman. I feel ashamed to admit this, but I’m scared of her. I can’t do anything because I know she will destroy me. She has that power.”

In Socialite Evenings we do encounter a liberal Indian husband who allows his Indian wife to go abroad and get herself screwed once for all as the last gesture of good-will! Anjali throws of the traditional conventions of moral values and seductively rise to the social status of the upper classes. She enacts a marriage of choice with Abe, “an experienced rake with a wild reputation.” And rejoices in orgiastic acrobatics. Having a passion for illimitable sex, she has frequent sex encounters. Karuna does not hesitate to restrain her husband from a week long sexual orgy with Krish in Rome. Anjali, Karuna & Ritu are the proverbial succubus who reigns supreme in their world of licentious and a restricted libido.

Thus De’s novel shows the struggle of woman against the predatory male-dominated society. But her vamp ideology of feminism provides no redemption for the deviant and fallen women who in their frantic struggle to escape male-domination and attain individuality, meet with failure and are victimized in one way or the other. In enacting the drama of seduction and betrayal in her foray against patriarchal structures, the glamorous vamp in De’s novels “may end up being as seductively treacherous to women as to men.” In dealing with the problems of women in the andocentric society, she fails to provide viable solutions to the plight of the ailing woman. A
woman in Indian society marries not just the man but also his family and subsequently loses her identity in marriage relinquishes her freedom and sets about pleasing everybody. But the new generation of women with their new-found release from matrimonial bondage. Adopt different perspectives, and revolt against the old order. De’s women are such liberated individuals in search of a niche in their lives through escapades and escapades. Karuna detests her husband’s flattering nature, his duplicity and deviousness. He who had earlier rebuked and reproached her for having an illegal child is now satisfying her female ego by sly and base flattery. By saying that it was their legitimate child, but this is wrongly timed and too late for Karuna, protracted pangs of an abortion. Hence demolition of the male ego: “You are even more of a worm than I thought. You deserve Winnie. I hope she’s got a wax doll of yours. I’ll send her some extra pins to stick into it.” Karuna is a different Bombay socialite. Unlike them, she defies the preconceptions and presumptions of a phallocentric patriarchal society a world poles apart from her own rational of life. Other women hardly defy the norms of the andocentric world. Anjali for instance has her own hang over following her separation from Abe. She is in search of a suitable life-partner. Hence her amorous drift into the life of Kumar whom she chooses as her husband. De’s women like Anjali and Karuna project their passions onto others as a female power play in order to deconstruct the male ego. Ritu exploits her sexual breakthrough, her female potentiality to keep her husband within her reach. Within her control look, what she tells Karuna about her strategy:

Make them feel you have done them a favor by marrying them. Make them feel insecure. Let them think you’ll walk out of them if they don’t toe the line. That’s what keeps them in their place."
Like Ritu, one has got to play the game, by flattering their male ego to suck anything out of them. Such an ideology of sexual power politics where the female is assigned a superior position and the male politics where the female is assigned a superior position and the male ‘a conditioned dog’ has not been fully exploited and elucidated by De’s vamp feministic ideology culminating in cheap sexual encounters between the male and the female almost a vile pornographic picture of man-woman relationship. But such a perspective does not promise one a safe life. Hence Karuna’s mother prefers the traditional way of life.

A woman cannot live alone. It is not safe. We are here today- but who knows about tomorrow? A woman needs a man’s protection. Society can be very cruel…Woman’s real place is in her husband’s house-not in her parents take your time but marry. And marry the right one-that is important … Before we die, we want to see you secure and at peace.63

But the mother’s view is fraught with a lot of improbabilities and fallacies for is it possible for a girl to ‘marry the right one’ and is it possible to attain ‘Security’ and peace in the modern society, especially in the urban milieu which forms the backdrop of De’s novel? No longer in the Indian society the institution of marriage carries with it the traditional sense of security. Karuna rejects the hierarchization of male values where the female factor is reduced to a negative and almost nullified. Her statements express her desire for the affirmation of her feminine self. It is in fact a search on her part of the genuine female self in a male-centered phallocentric world. But hers is not a traditional one. It is an esoteric quest, something weird and grotesque on the part of an Indian woman. But Karuna never bothers about the social repercussions her esoteric quest might entail. She is isolated from the traditional. Indian heritage and its social implications taking up a non-
conformist stance she adopts a radical feminist point of view all agog to “destroy the sex/ gender system the real source of women oppression and to create a new society in which men and women are equal at every level of existence.” The Plight of women’s present psychological situation is thus only one aspect of the problems involved in the growth of individual freedom. Viola Klein observes:

Being in the position of outsiders, intruding into a finished system, and restricted by a century –old history of submission, which had bred in them a sense of inferiority women’s chief claim in their struggle was, as a natural result, to prove that in all respects they were just as good as men.

De’s novels portray her feelings of alienation from the traditional fictional craft of other women writers especially her predecessors. They are pieces of self-dramatization. They symbolize a woman writers struggle for artistic self-definition an attempt at self-differentiation from her male counter parts as well as an urgent sense of her need for a female audience coupled with her dread for the orthodox and traditional male readers. Shobha De’s Socialite Evenings fails to offer a viable strategy to the readers for socialization though it may to some degree offer some panacea to the sex-starved unsociable. Ritu and Anjali who live a life of prevents, sex hungry brutes is not much different from that of Karuna’s Socialite Evenings present a world which is full of absurdities where genuine human communication and co-existence seems impossible. All characters in the story seem to pretend as it provides a safe passage through clash of egos, ethos and preferences. Karuna the protagonist in the narrative tells how her family applies ‘protagonist’ as a strategy against the difficult situation:
Father pretended he didn’t know I was doing the show mother pretended she didn’t know where I was going three afternoons a week. And I pretended I didn’t notice them pretending not to know.66

Shobha De’s protagonists emerge from a male dominated middle-class society which is conservative in its outlook of life. Educated as these women are, they are conscious of their individuality and desire to live their lives according to their own values. The clash in prevailing socio-cultured values and their own value system brings out the absurdities and oppressiveness of their environment. Karuna’s awakened consciousness leads her to resist and refuse to bear the oppression of the dictate of the traditional morality which permits little scope for a woman to express her individuality. This awakening provides her strength to take her decisions and the responsibility subsequently. Having gone through many unpleasant experiences she becomes aware of the absurdity of life and meaninglessness of human relations which are devoid of mutual trust. She cannot communicate honestly with her parents also:

But buy now these daily lies and games had become something of a joke between us. I’d tell myself too bad. They don’t want to hear the truth. This was so. I was perfectly willing to be frank. But the responsibility of my condor was too much for them.67

Disillusioned as she is Karuna attempts to transcend the absurd and meaningless propositions of materialism and this enables her experience a new awakening in herself. This new realization brings her a sense of completeness. In Socialite Evenings Shobha De presents the absurdities of life in Bombay which pushes its inhabitants into a mechanical world of glitz
and glamour. In fact, it’s the story of Bombay, the city which offers its people lofty dreams culminating into anxiety. This fact is illustrated with Karuna’s dissatisfaction with her simple middle class environment and her state of desperation.

How desperately I wanted to be in that charmed circle of rich girls who had everything. And how cleverly how brutally they kept me out. My first reaction was pretending not to care.  

Karuna’s and Anjali’s aversion to the middle class world of needs and wants justifies their being engrossed in the glamour and glitter of high society. Karuna’s infatuation with Anjali, when she first meets her reminds one of Mohan in *That Long Silence*. Karuna is surrounded by males and Females with exotic sex lives but she herself keeps aloof from sleeping around indiscriminately. She refuses to follow the high society woman like Jinx, Si, Ritu and Anjali who show little scruple when it comes to sex. She is “narcissistic and vain to a neurotic degree and quite an item on the gossip hotline.” She is a perfect animal who is always interested in sex and food. “On other occasions she’d breeze in asking for food. Saying, Anjali I’m starving! Screwing is strenuous business.” Though, to Karuna, these women exhibit their sexual orientations in varying degrees, they exist on the same plane. Anjali’s Situation seems to be the outcome of Electra complex. Karen D. Horney a neo-Freudian psychologist, who deviates from the Freudian concept of Oedipus/Electra complex, discusses it in new light:

… Horney feels that it is not a sexual aggressive conflict between the child and his parents but an anxiety growing out of basic disturbances for example, rejection overprotection and punishment in the child’s relationships with his mother and father.
Her sense of insecurity and anxiety due to rejection, indifference and lack of warmth her wallow in self-pity to gain others, sympathy married life of Anjali and Abe has no emotions and feelings for each other. Abe is always looking for a new woman for sex he follows a simple plan. Karuna whom the fails to seduce, finds him “cheap and decadent and offensive.” For Anjali sex with Abe is nothing but a tiring mechanical and painful exercise. Anjali’s ridiculous marriage finally comes to divorce. Her way of reacting to this new development in her life brings out shallowness as well as fickleness of the people around her.

There were suddenly whole hosts of sympathizers—mainly male—willing to listen to her tales of neglect, abuse and torture. What a bastard that man is. Would run their refrain as they counted the minutes to when their sympathetic shoulder could be switched for an even more sympathetic bed.

Though Karuna is not a sex maniac like Anjali she too does not find her won marriage very meaningful. She is utterly dissatisfied. With her marred life which lacks mutual trust and compatibility and is in search for something fulfilling. This quest for fulfillment refers to her need for self-esteem. She has fulfilled her lower level needs for material things in her rich husband’s home. Now it is the quest for self esteem that bothers her. Karuna and Anjali are stuck with their own different levels. She thinks about her predicament: “I was stuck in an increasing meaningless marriage and Anjali in a meaningless divorce.” Both react in different ways according to their basic nature. Whereas Anjali finds it difficult to survive without a man around her, Karuna tries to stick to her marriage despite her liberated woman ideas and the fact that her husband is just an average Indian husband—unexciting, uninspiring, untutored. This situation exposes them to the gross absurdity of life where nothing meaningful seems to happen. It is because
they refuse to accept the established system and rules of the institution for marriage in their own individual ways.

Towards the end it seems Karuna as a person who has understood herself fully. Confidently comes out with a statement single is good for me a decision the result of her constant intensive search of herself. She is so sure of her decision though she knows it is an unusual feeling about Indian woman. This makes Ranbir Roy, the reporter from the. ‘Washington Times’ a second generation American a friend of Karuna to comment: “Anyway cut to you as you are now disgustingly self assured and revoltingly self sufficient.” Karuna’s quest has ended here not remains a question. Towards the end one can see Karuna looking blankly into space, all alone in her room. Man is a social animal. He is an emotional and intellectual being. It is in the nature of man or woman to share their feeling. This quality in man always searches for a companion.

Karuna is no exception. She needs a company but she is a burnt child. She cannot venture. Economically, mentally and physically she is a liberated woman yet as a human being she might be craving for that sort of companion who won’t rob her off her freedom which she has gained. In this respect she represents the woman of twenty first century who is torn between freedom and instinct, the proper decision is yet to be taken. The quest may not end her it might continue to take new decisions.

One can find some similarities and contrasts between the protagonists of the two novels that are Saru and Karuna, Anjali and Ritu after a close study of the novels. The protagonists are educated young women. Both Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De, present the new educated women’s world today and deal with the problems of their marital life, and how they struggle for existence. In The Dark Holds No Terrors Shashi Deshpande tries to show only one main woman character and her problems. But Shobha De’s
*Socialite Evenings* shows three women suffering in different problems. Like Karuna, Anjali & Ritu. Karuna is protagonist of this. Saru and Karuna are urban women. Both have had love marriage and both are submissive, but Karuna marries for money & Saru marries for love. Both Saru and Karuna from middle class family background both women are career-oriented Saru is a doctor and Karuna is interested in films.

Karuna was leading a life of emotional frigidity. There was no meaningful communication between the parents, no smiles and laughter, no free exchange of thoughts and ideas. No queries and questions but silence only silence Saru also suffers as same situation. Saru’s mother thinks that her son dies by drawing in the pond accidentally; she mutely watches the whole scene without rushing to his help, her mother says she killed her brother. In this reason life becomes more desperate to Saru after Dhruva’s death. There are no celebration at home her own much awaited birthday passes. Off in silence both at school & at home. Saru’s mind is filled with deep and indelible scars as her mother constantly pans for her dead son and rejects even the presence of her daughter.

Home gives security for everyone but for Saru & Karuna home is a place of disappointment. For Saru childhood home becomes a place of hatred because of her mother’s accusations. Her utmost struggle to win the heart of mother is futile.

Both play different roles at different times to quench her emotional and psychic thirst. And every time both try to prove themselves or own identity. **Karuna** plays the role of a model, house wife, a society lady, an actor-writer and paramour & **Saru** plays the role of a daughter, wife, mother & doctor. Both struggle for self existence.

*Socialite Evenings* presents the absurdities of life in Bombay which pushes its inhabitants into a mechanical world of glitz and glamour. In fact
it’s the story of Bombay, the city which offers its people lofty dreams culminating into anxiety. This fact is illustrated with Karuna’s dissatisfaction with her simple middle class environment and her state of desperation.

Whereas *The Dark Holds No Terrors* presents the painful life of parent’s home and after marriage husbands home. Both Saru and Karuna are not satisfied in their married lives. Saru is happy with Manu, though they live in her dingy, one room apartment. But soon this happiness turns out to be only an illusion. As long as Saru is student, Manu has been the bread winner. They had peace at house despite its filth and stench. But problems begin to slowly creep in the moment Saru is recognized as a doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure and this casts a shadow in their married life. 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. Karuna’s husband is just an average Indian husband, un existing uninspiring, untutored. This situation exposes them to the gross absurdity of life where nothing meaningful seems to happen. It is because they refuse to accept. The established system and rules of the institution of marriage in their own individual ways. Towards the end it seems Karuna as a person who has understood herself fully confidently comes out with a statement. Single is good for me. A decision the result of her constant intensive search of herself she is so sure of her decision though she knows it is an unusual feeling a mount Indian woman.

**Karuna and Saru** both face many problems in their married lives and try to struggle for their self image in the society. Both Karuna and Saru have extra-marital relationship. Saru’s relation with her class mate Padmakarrao and Karuna’s relation with her husband’s friend Krish. But both are failure to satisfy their emotional need.
Saru rebels against the traditions but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. Torn between tradition and modernity, Saru goes back to Manu finding secure place now here and comes to know inevitability of woman’s life, being a typical Deshpande’s heroine.

Siddhartha Sharma opines:

She is neither the typical western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the western feminism of its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for the wholeness of identity she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one’s identity within marriage.\(^76\)

In an interview with Vanmala Viswanathan, Deshpande admits that.

It is needed. It is necessary for women to live with relationship but if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I’ve tried to convey in my writing.\(^77\)

Proving herself true to tradition, Saru returns to Manu. Though she resolves overtly to no more fear of darkness but it is the realization of insecurity that forces her to go back to her husband. But Karuna does not return her husband’s home. She needs a company but she is burnt child she cannot venture. Economically, mentally and physically she is a liberated woman.

Saru has no friends in this novel but Karuna has two friends and one sister in this novel they also struggle for their self existence suffering so many problems like Karuna and Saru.

Saru has two children but Karuna is childless. Saru and Karuna’s tough journey in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *Socialite Evenings* is a beginning into the mystery of women’s existence. Saru, Karuna, Anjali and Ritu epitomize this struggle for the liberation of the self.
2) Roots and Shadows and Starry Nights:

Indu is the central character in the novel *Roots and Shadows*. She struggles hard to safeguard her identity and individuality. Indu, in the novel recollects her days of childhood and adolescence in a very sorrowful mood. She remembers how she was hated as an unclean object during her period of menstruation and how her idea of womanhood was thrust upon her, she says:

> My womanhood… I hood never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally gracelessly on me the day I had grown up, “you’re a woman now, kaki had told me.” You can have babies yourself. a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone on to tell me badly, child’s oneself consciousness about my own body had for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it. And don’t forget she had ended. For four days now you are unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything.  

This traumatic experience which Indu suffers always haunts her thought her life. She develops a sense of aversion to the natural biological development and function of a woman which later on culminate in her apathy towards giving birth to a child. She feels that her womanhood will pose various unwanted breaks in her way of completeness and independence. It is a story of daughter who has come home after a long time. The protagonist, Indu, is the motherless child, who had lost her mother at the time of her birth, something due to which she had not realized till others had told her much later that she had no mother brought up in a huge joint family of uncles and aunts. The gap had been so fully and completely filled in by what the family gave her-tender and loving cave from Atya, deep affection from
Kaka and perfect understanding from old uncle. The most important figure in this joint family is another widowed relative Akka, who is dominating in nature and the family, is ruled by Akka. She commands respect not only because of her age but also because of her wealth. It is Akka, the rich widow, who makes Indu come back home, when she is on her death bed. Akka leaves all her wealth to Indu, even though she knows that there are many well descrying candidates living in the ancestral house itself. Indu brave away from her family out of anger and married for love in outer to assert her freedom. The family four generations of them lived together in the ancestral house which was built years ago by Indu’s great grandfather.

This huge family lives in the old building. Indu’s father remains on the periphery, who very occasionally visits the family. Indu’s relative Naren, who through his disregard for the norms of the family is almost on outside to it. Indu has married someone from another caste and lives in a city.

Ten years I stayed away from this house. And yet, each day of these ten years, I woke up to the same sound. For few seconds of each day, I was back in this house. But this time it was real.79

Thus Indu’s attempt at going away, breaking off from this old ancestral house and the joint family, and also its tradition; she wants the change in the form of freedom which she had always hoped for she had been very choosy in her liking right from her childhood. But the moment she saw Jayant. She knew he was the only man for her and she married him. She left the house and got married to Jayant to assent her freedom and it was she who proposed to him first. Indu who switches over from the traditional old house to the upper middle class life has opened up a ‘modern’ life. The change of location and the change of life style has not brought any possibility of hybridist.
Indu reckons her roots in breaking away from the family but she ultimately discovers that these family-bounds are the roots of one’s being and keep on dogging on like shadows. In fact these roots are the shadows. Shadows that one can’t ran away from we flatter ourselves that we’ve escaped the compulsions of the past; but we’ve still pinioned to it by little things.80

Roots and Shadows explores the inner self of Indu who symbolizes the new woman who is educated and who lives in close association with society keeping aside all narrow social conventions. She has the freedom to take about anything she likes and is also free to think of her own caged self besides politics, corruption and many other things. Through the character of Indu, Shashi Deshpande is portraying the inner struggle of an artist to express her, to discover her real self through her inner and natural potentiality, of creative writing. The new woman has to be more than her domestic self as a submissive housewife. She has to become a ‘society’s lady’ as Shobha De put her so and she take pride in such suffering. But we do not find Indu expressing such pride in such suffering. She cannot bear with the suffering she had to face in the family and hence she breaks away from it and marries Jayant. In the family she was on incomplete being, without a sense of wholeness of personality. But with Jayant she feels a sense of completion and wholeness. “I had felt incomplete notes a woman but as a person. And in Jayant I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self.”81

Shashi Deshpande rightly expresses Indu’s identity when Indu realizes that she is incomplete without Jayant, modern or otherwise, a woman can’t be complete without her husband. In Indu, we find modern Indian woman who is trying to search out her own self most of the lights were on. That becomes the metaphorical indication that Indu is going to
search out herself and the matter related to it. The image of cobweb indicates that she is retracted and guided by the rules and regulations of traditional Hindu family, she becomes a helpless fly caught in a cobweb to be finally devoured by outdated Hindu tradition. Significantly, the reader notices through Indu’s eyes the cobweb. The pattern of the cobweb was still incomplete somewhere inside it; there was a spider, pain sparingly completing its work. It is a novel about the discovery of self and discovery of others too. During the morning of Mini’s wedding it is through Indu we come to know the two aspects of the personality of Kaka. “White he is seen as a ‘agential host’ at one dimension, at the other he is found out by Indu, when his mask came off, when he was by himself to be bewildered and lost man.”

Indu’s awareness of wedding in general not only reveals what marriage was for her and what it is for all the Indian women in general. Marriage has nothing romantic about it. She discovers that after looking at the bridegroom of Mini who had heavy coarse features and crude mannerisms. Here Mini feels she had committed a great crime by being born a girl.

The drab Indian wedded life is evoked by Indu’s what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold-blooded barging to meet, male and reproduce so that the generation might continue.

Similar concept becomes a rooted thing in the mind of the elderly people like kaki for whom, it was marriage that mattered, not the man. Jayant sees in Indu the picture of Akka because to him she is in domitble. And she has her victims as Akka has one of them in Mini. In Mini Indu sees her own self and the self of women in general. “The women had no choice, but to submit, to accept, and I had often wondered have they been born without
wills, or have their wills atrophied through a life time of disuse?" In this connection Bhatnagar comments:

She (Indu) reminiscences the feelings and emotions that is associated with the house in which she lived but not splayed. 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 was right thing to do, one era ends so that the other might being. But life will continue endless, limitless, formless and full of grace.

As a woman, Indu is hardly left with any choice. Her life is so highly bounded that she cannot make quick decisions and hence fails to arrive at real determinations:

Inner strength…. I thought of the words as I looked down on Mini’s bowed head. A woman’s life, they had told me continued no choices. And all my life, especially in this house, I had seen the truth of this.

Women like Indu can neither express themselves nor choose for themselves. They can neither love nor hate but be satisfied with the gift of silence. That marriage had thought them. I silence, Indu pines for love, almost madly:

Jayant and I…. I wish I could say…. But I cannot… I want to be loved, I want to be happy. The cries are now stilled. Not because I am satisfied, crypt hopeless, but because such demands now seem to me to be an exercise in futility. Neither love nor happiness comes to us for the asking.

Marriage is a fate traditionally certified to women by society. But marriage is not the same thing to a man as to woman. The two sexes are
different from each other, though one has the need of the other. As T. S. Eliot evokes in *Four Quartets* old stone to the new building, so Indu has become a new woman pillar, as it were against the old one which has been replaced by her. Jayant observes “New pillars take the place of the old, you’re a pillar now yourself. Don’t you know?”

Mutual understanding and love for each other are among those pillars on which the institution of marriage stands boldly. Self centeredness and the aim of individual peppiness in life give the feeling of love and understanding for each other. A woman like Indu has no direct influence upon her husband, neither upon the future nor upon the world. She has to reach out beyond herself towards the social background only through her husband. But her husband is not influenced to her emotional urges. Instead, it is Indu who has to cater to the needs of his inner urges and drives.

T. S. Eliot has rightly pointed out in *Four Quartets* that our hope may be hope for the wrong thing. Our thought may be thought for the wrong thing. Therefore, we are asked to wait without hope, without love, without faith. This neatly ties up with Indu’s quest for her freedom, her identity. Therefore, Indu feels: “Neither love nor happiness came to us for the asking. But they can sneak up as when we least expect them.”

Her every argument with her husband becomes an incident for the discovery of herself. Her plans to give up the job of writing are not liked by Jayant. These conflicts enable her to see her position. She realizes that all things are interconnected in a Hindu joint family: “All things are connected. Yes, they are which is why no one can be completely free, freedom has to be relative.”

Significantly, she remembers her talk with old uncle who shows her a way out of her sticky situation: “why not, Indu? There have to be some rules so that life can have both dignity and grace. We always find measures of freedoms within these rules.”
She further recalls her old uncle’s words that, “To fulfill one’s obligation to discharge one’s responsibilities, can one find freedom within these circles?” The idea of the circle and the concept of the web image which Indu notices on the morning of Mini’s wedding. She, as a fly is struggling to escape from the impositions achieved by traditional society. She gets aware that her freedom can be achieved within the limits of rules and regulations imposed by the traditional Hindu society. Indu learns that there is beauty and security in life through compromise. She is happy when Jayant tells her that he will publish her work if no publisher comes forward. Further, her dependence and subordination to the editor and to her husband stares in her face when the story that the writes is not accepted by the editor, not only that, but she is called an idealistic by the editor and herself is exposed to her:

I could have fought against anger, abuse, and hostility. But I could be nothing against this ridicule. I looked at myself through his eyes and sow myself not as brave, but as foolish and naïve.

Shashi Deshpande’s Indu is interested in creative writing. Indu wants to present tedious service life but her husband, Jayant is not one with her. He is on obstacle to her feminine support for self-expression since he believes that one person like Indu can do nothing against the whole system by wielding her pen. She intends to tell Jayant, that she is going to resign her job. But when Jayant opposes, she mildly accepts her husband’s decision not to give up job: “I went to Jayant and asked him if I should resign.” To that he replies:

This life what can one person do against the whole system: No point making a spectacle of yourself with futile gestures. We need money, don’t we? Don’t forget. We have a long way to go.
She wants to ask him ‘go where’, but she did not ask him. She did not tell him that she could see only that dusty road ahead of her and hated herself for it and she works up each day with the feeling that she was trapped. As well, it troubled her to realize that she had left behind to family only to become a part of the success oriented society. She had silently gone back to her work, hating it and noting herself. Herself alienation increases as she becomes aware of the opposition between her wish to conform to a cultural ideal of feminine passivity and her ambition to be a creative writer. Thus Indu perceives herself as a shadow of the female self, a negative, and an object. Her initial failure as a creative writer glares into her face even though she wants to put on the responsibility of the unacknowledged legislator of the world. She realizes:

*It is not in me, the material of which revolutionaries are made, I no longer have desire to mould people, to change them, to reform society. There is only one thing I know I can do…. I can write.*

Miller observes that: “when one is an object, not a subject, all of one’s own psychical and sexual impulses and interests are presumed not to exist independently.” The trap of the womanhood and the spider’s web come with a new import “Feeling trapped, seeing myself endlessly chained to the long dusty road that lay ahead of me.” In the meanwhile, Akka’s summon gives her an escape routes from all this mess of subordination. In Akka’s house she meets Naren who is instrumental in creating awareness in Indu’s self identity. He has taken deep interest in her creative writing, through which he recognizes otherness in her personality as opposed to all other people in the novel. She further opines:
But my marriage has taught me this too. I had found in myself an immense capacity for deception. I had learned to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage.

Through this she becomes instrumental and submits herself or surrenders herself to her husband by becoming his wife. Purposes fully, she loses her identity in the identity of her husband. She always expects something more from her husband. But these expectations are never fulfilled by him. Jayant betrays her hopes her harmony and integration, for peace and happiness. Indu willingly bears all and acts up to the expectations of her husband.

Always what he wants what he would like, what would please him? And I can’t blame him. It is not he who has pressurized me into this. It is the way I want it to be…. Have I become fluid with no shapes, no form of my own? At that moment a savage truth had started me in the face…. Without wants there is no. ‘I’ on my way to becoming an ideal woman? A woman has shed her ‘I’ who loses her identity in her husband?

A woman’s response and involvement to other’s needs may detract her from her own sense of identity, of her becoming as fluid as to assume any shape. Indu feels as if she had become so fluid that she has no shape. No form of her own. Without wants of her own, what is her identity in the family? Indu minus the “I” of course turn into her an ideal woman. “A woman who bears everything without a drop of tear. Marriage has reduced Indu to a state of total surrender.” She eagerly surrendered before him. In any thing that she did, her only thought had been will he like it? What does he want? What will please him? And it was not he who pressurized her to do
so; she did it of her own will. It was as if they were on two different planes and she chose her plane according to his. She thought that the women believed that the greatest good luck for them was to die before their husbands did, to die ‘Suhagans’. She also wanted Jayant to be always by her side. Her greatest sorrow was the realization that she could never be complete in herself. To care for any one too much was a pain because it made you so dependent. She felt ashamed of her husband. Through Indu, Deshpande voices her views of marriage. Marriage to her after all is a trap or a cage where one’s individuality and personality are neatly kept outside. For Indu,

Marriage may be the comic strip version of marriage a cage with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other... isn’t so wrong after all. And it’s not a joke, but a tragedy. But what animal would cage itself? 102

Her concept of marriage as glaring hatred at each other is totally negative and derogatory. Through her conversation with Naren she reveals that she writes like a man only because she feels hedged in, limited by her sex she resented her womanhood feminity in creative writing. Because of this fear scores of women have written under pseudonyms. She suppresses her natural sexual urge only to please Jayant’s attitude towards her: Marriage subjugates and enslaves woman. It leads her to. “Aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that skips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose.”103 Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom. Simon Beauvoir highlights that such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too high for anyone since the kind of self-contentment and security that marriage offers woman drain her soul of its capacity for greatness:

She shuts behind her the doors of her new home.
When she was a girl, the whole countryside was her homeland; the forests were hers. Now she is confined to a restricted space.... 104
Indu, true to her feminine qualities, plays the role of an ideal housewife but the role of a wife restricts, rather defines her self-development—firstly by taking away her freedom of thought and expression and secondly by denying her the scope of giving free play to her creative potentiality. Regarding a woman’s role-playing, Rosemarie Tong observes:

Sometimes women play their role not so much because they want to, as because they have to in order to survive economically and/or psychologically, virtually all women engage in the feminine role playing.¹⁰⁵

Indu is dissatisfied with this fated role of a woman. She has so many choices but for a married woman like her, she is left with a few or practically no choice to save what her husband wills and needs she cannot unburden herself. Her feminine nature is limited and suppressed. Despite all these, she is unwilling to admit failure with her marital life which encloses and sends down her true self. She confesses no Naren: “As a woman I left hedged in by my sex. I resented my womanhood because it closed so many doors to me.”¹⁰⁶ Even her professional life too, she has to restrict her freedom and submit to the order of the editor. She cannot give up her job which fails to be self-satisfactory. Jayant wants her to compromise with the profession of a writer. But Indu compromises and surrenders before Jayant just for show only. She is the very by word of the feminist principle which is an uncompromising promise. This uncompromising position that Indu assumes is shown through her dialogic imagination. Indu fails to establish emotional relationship with Jayant for it shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. She confesses to Naren:

I knew these women had their own standards for judging people. Nothing about me…. My academic distinctions, my career, my success, my money… none of these would impress her. To her I was a
childless woman. To get married; to bear children to have sons and then grand children… they were still for them the only successes a woman since I had left home now, seeing them like discovering a new world. Each one of them riddled with ignorance, prejudice and superstition, was a world of darkness in her. And even more amazing was their ignorance of their own darkness. It was almost superb.  

Indu identifies herself as a coward to continue with Jayant in her loveless marriage. For her this trait has its roots in the traditional concept of the role of woman. She realizes the loves and needs of Jayant; she decides to get back to him taking care not to 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 doesn’t want to be like the one whose feelings are suppressed just to please one’s husband. 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 necessary to face the challenge of identity crisis that her marriage with Jayant had always posed-returns to suffer, to question and to find roots.

Indu asserts her position as a human being equal to that of a man and does not want to submit herself to anyone’s dictates. She is showing struggle between the age-old traditions and the emerging new ideas. Indu effectively depict her own reflections on the travails of a modern Indian women passing through the contain votary transitional stage in the evolving of social values. Sarabjit Sandhu briefly summarizes this aspect of the matter in the following words:
Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of the west.\textsuperscript{109}

Indu’s acceptance of western values and her search for liberty with unfettered growth and maturity of personality, even though there is insidious conflict between tradition and modernity, which results in her emergence as a woman of determination not yielding to the dictates of the patriarchal society:

\begin{quote}
I had surrendered to him, step by step; I realize now, that it was not for love, as I had been tiling myself, but because I did not want conflict. The hideous ghost of my own cowardice can fronted me as I through of this… that I had clung ten a piously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure. I had to show them that my marriage that I was a success, show women? The world.\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

Indu wants to escape from this kind of unhappy way of life but she is afraid of life and Shashi Deshpande is tease but of thought, and hence the readers are left wondering what lies ahead for Indu to see right her unhappy married life:

\begin{quote}
This is my family. These are my people. And yes…. I hate them. I despise them. They’re mean and petty and trivial and despicable, I had always told myself…. I won’t be like them. I won’t live like them. And I thought…. I’ve got away. But to what, Naren? …. Are we doomed to living meaningless futile lives? Is there no escape? I’m afraid, Naren … I’m afraid ……\textsuperscript{111}
\end{quote}
“Woman as a subordinate sex is characterized by obedience and submission and under male dominance women have developed a tendency to prevail by passion means.”

Women surrender before men whom they really love. But Indu is scornful of love. To her love is a big fraud, a hoax. She surrenders since she did not want conflict. She had clung insistently to Jayant, to her marriage not for love alone, because she was afraid of failure.

She wants to show to the family and the world that her marriage was a success and so she had put on the mask of an obedient and respectful wife. Indu is confused with the clarity of vision of life. Roots and Shadows explores the inner self of Indu, who symbolize the new woman who is educated and who lives in close association with society living aside all narrow social conventions.

How can I live without knowing what I want? I must know to live without fear....fear of being unloved, misjudged, misunderstood, displeasing without fear of failure ...such a tall order.

The final vision that we get along with Indu is of non-detachment, non-involvement from life and its problems. Indu cuts away all the uneven edged and thinks to be free but not detached. According to me Shashi Deshpande tries to escape from her fictional burden of creating self freedom of Indu. All of a sudden her vision became clear and she knew what she must do. Till now she had looked upon Akka only as a heartless and interfering old woman. But now she knew better. She knew Akka had been a pillar of strength which had enabled her to act according to her beliefs. She had allowed nothing to come into her way. She knew she must rise up to Akka's expectations. Akka chooses Indu, a great grand niece, as her heiress because she believed Indu was capable of showing the same indomitable courage and strength and become a pillar like her. She must show that courage and fulfill her duty and responsibilities, setting aside all other thoughts. Any freedom
she desired she must seek within the bounds of the compulsions and responsibilities. At last she could understand and appreciate what old uncle had meant when he had told her long back that rules add grace and dignity to life. Within them one is free to do what one wants.

Shashi Deshpande expressed Indu's problematical ways against sexual and gender roles forced upon women in a patriarchal culture. Such 'relative identity' or the 'received role models' deform her self-perception. Such a world reduces women like Indu to a mere thing or mind-less body. With her convincing and suppressed voice, her feminine nature for articulation is suppressed. Indu is ever ready to please Jayant, she agrees to his wills and desires and does everything to reflect his image. Indu gradually realizes that she doesn't exist for her but for Jayant, who is a kind of archetypical male, imperialistic and subjugate. She always carries with her fear and insecurity.

Indu ultimately realizes that she has been chasing shadows, leaving her roots far behind in the family and in Jayant. Naren with whom she develops an adulterous relationship is a mere shadow to her. Naren has no permanent place in her memory. She decides to go back to Jayant who she feels is totally innocent. It is she who blames for the married disagreement in their lives. She has created a hell out of a heaven. She has forgotten the roots, feeding on dreams and shadows. She has failed in love not Jayant. She has escaped from the familial responsibilities of the home. Yet she realized that marriage had underdeveloped her independence in a weak position for she saw it as a 'trap' and not a bond and that the home where the family is housed, she saw it as a 'cage'. Now she realizes that all those were false daydreams and not reality and all the struggles of her life were an act of senselessness.
But what of my love for Jayant, that had been a restricting bond, tormenting me, who I had so futilely struggled against? Restricting bond? Was it not I who made it so? ...had I not created my own torment? Perhaps it was true ... There was only one thing I wanted now. And that was to go home ... the one I lived with Jayant. That was my only home ... I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant.... I knew I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me.... That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together. But there were other things I had to tell him. That I was resigning from my job. That I would do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing.\textsuperscript{114}

Thus Indu’s uncompromising and paradoxical feminine self that longed for self-expression, for the expression of her feminine voice, finally finds its roots in the home and with her husband. Shadows disappear from her vision and she sees the clear light of day with the realization and discovery of her authentic female self. Thus in the end:

\begin{quote}
comes the realization that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination and the tenacity to adhere to it. That alone can bring harmony in life.\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

The modest, obedient and humble Indu finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus challenging the male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman's masked way of life. Her self-discovery is the frightening visions of the feminine self struggle for harmony and understanding nature. She comes out of her emotional upheaval, to lead a meaningful life with her husband Jayant. Her 'home-coming' is ironical since the home she had left becomes the place of shelter, of protection and consolation. It is Akka's house which makes her
realize many things and offers plenty of opportunities to know herself, her inner life. It is here that she is able to discover her roots - an independent woman and a writer and what the shadows are a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer. She begins to see life in a new light. She looks at Akka's house as:

Yes the house has been a trap too, binding me to a past I had to move away from now, I felt clean, and as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges off myself and free. But not detached. I would, I knew, never hanker after detachment any more detachment... it was for the dead not the living.\textsuperscript{116}

Indu now, feels a sense of hope for life, for existence. She negates the ideas of non-existence. She says:

No, there is no such thing. To accept it will be to deny the miracle of life itself. If not this stump, there is another. If not this tree, there will be others. Other trees will grow, other flowers will bloom, other fragrance will pervade. Other airs ... I felt as if I was watching life itself... endless, limitless, formless and full of grace.\textsuperscript{117}

Indu detests the idea of woman as a 'rearing machine', a caretaker of the child. In playing such a role she yields herself, though reluctantly, before patriarchy: "the systematic subordination of women."\textsuperscript{118} She questions herself as, why should women take care of the offspring, Why not men? She wants to eliminate this labor based upon sex the sexual caste system. But in thinking so, "women are socially and culturally conditioned to be mothers."\textsuperscript{119} She accepts the role of rearing a child like that of an ideal mother. But she does not; thereby separate herself from her feminist. Indu accepts the role of an ideal mother, she wants to assert herself and hence believes that motherhood is a patriarchal institution, each woman has to deny
herself, even temporarily, the experience of mothering, so that the patriarchal tradition is destroyed once and for all. Through this Indu's feminist vision is seen. But as women struggle to avoid patriarchal oppression in order to assert their feminity, they gradually become separated from the socio-familial surroundings for "feminity is itself alienating."120

The novel ends with a note of affirmation. Indu asserts her individuality as a woman and also a member in the endless cycle of life. She lives to see life with the possibilities of growth. Thus she has discovered the meaning of life in her journey to individuation. Through the character of Indu, Shashi Deshpande has listed her awareness of the arrest to feminine development brought about by an economic system given to total materialistic happiness and inhabited by philistines like Jayant, and a patriarchal family-structure which produces in women dependence, insecurity, lack of independence, and an incomplete sense of their identity.

She had refused to be influenced by Jayant when he tried to make change in her decision of giving up her job. He had been bewildered in the beginning as if she had cheated him. But finally he came to recognize her strength as well as her weakness which she had hidden from him so far. There was a better understanding between them and softness in their relationships that was not there before. She knew there was a better chance of happiness for them. For happiness sneaked up on her when she least expected it. She had cried despairingly to Jayant about the book she had been writing "if no publisher accepts it……I will publish it for you."121 Jayant had said putting his arms comfortingly round her. The culture in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposite ideals and differing selves. This is somewhat representative of the basic Indian attitude.
Indu's predicament also, is representative of the larger predicament of women in modern-day India where the new socioeconomic forces have taken aback old cultural modes. The break-up of the joint family, the center of Indian cultural life is the immediate and visible symbol of this imminent change. This breaking up had affected relationship at various levels, especially relationship at the husband wife level But with husband and wife constantly thrown together in the present pattern and with the wife sharing in many of the responsibilities which were earlier supposed to be only his, there has arisen the problem of incompatibility and maladjustment and expectations and despair. The society continues to be male-dominated and attitudes towards women continue to be the same. Women, on their part, are becoming more and more aware of the various movements. Shashi Deshpande shows Indu as an intelligent and sensitive person, and is very choosy in her affections, to resolve her doubts and uncertainties. Shashi Deshpande tried to prove that women do not lack courage.

**Starry Nights** is the story of the rise and fall of Aasha Rani, a popular film star, who actually never leaves the film world even though she cease to be a heroine and is not too happy with it. The film world is an addition to her and she continues to be associated with it, if not as heroine, as a producer at least. She imagines that Sasha would become what she had been earlier the sweet-heart of millions. She would rule the film world through her daughter who had the makings of a star, an unforgettable star. Shobha De moved far away from depicting characters in the tradition of Indian womanhood. She stepped out of the threshold of family and tradition to portray the harsh realities that await a woman outside the four walls of her house. **Starry Nights**, her most sensational and controversial novel, is the story of the struggle and survival of a woman in a sex-starved society. The search for identity is the central and popular theme of this novel. Aasha Rani
is the central character of *Starry Nights*. She is a modern Indian woman. As a modern woman she is no more passive and silent. She has become bold enough to face the challenges in life. She is capable of surviving in degrading moral values of life. She struggles and compromises with adverse situation, in order to assert her existence in the society.

Aasha Rani struggles hard to establish her identity in the society, which is male-dominated and ruthless to woman, she is very bold and ambitious. She is a typical woman character of Shobha De. The woman characters of Shobha De are full of rage and fury against the males who strive to keep the women under control and subjugation. Aasha Rani gives vent to her thinly-disguised hatred for men. In the eyes of Shobha De a woman is not an to be treated with as an how a man likes, a woman is a human being and she has a heart which palpitates and throbs and therefore she must be allowed to live in her own right.

Aasha Rani belongs to a family, which is totally disintegrated. Her father left her mother and the children to fend for themselves and he married another lady. Perhaps Shobha De does not have strong faith in the institutions of marriage and she thinks that marriage is one of the devices to keep woman under control. Regarding De’s distrust in the institution of marriage Pathak writes: “The age old institutions of marriage and family are under tremendous strain in Shobha De’s novel.”

So the family of Aasha Rani disintegrates and the mother has to work very hard to run the family. The mother pushes Aasha Rani to join a career, which no mother would do. She forces her to join the underworld of blue films. Like any other girls Aasha Rani is scared of seedy people who are making the film. Aasha Rani breaks into tears but has to submit to her mother’s command:
And that porno session? Dame it? She was just a child at that time. It wasn’t her idea … ‘Amma please Don’t, I’m so scared … How can I take off my clothes in front of all these strangest? Amma … said patiently, think of it like going to the doctor’s haven’t so many doctors seen your body? Examined it? …They see bodies all the time… Besides that man won’t really do anything. I mean it is all acting …’ Aasha Rani had unbuttoned her blouse … She (Amma) had gesticulated with her hand indicating how the bra was to be unhooked. Aasha Rani had shut her eyes and reached for the clasp … After that. She hadn’t really registered anything. .. Along with her eyes; she’d also her mind.¹²³

The mother of Aasha Rani thus forces her into the body business because of monetary consideration: “Don’t be stupid. These films will not be shown in the theaters. Nobody will know you have done them. There’s lot of money involves I’ve committed on your behalf.”¹²⁴ This passage shows how deeply the people of modern society have become engrossed with materialism. The excessive concern for materialistic games has tended to overshadow all other moral and ethical considerations. The poverty stricken family of Aasha Rani does not get any kind of financial support from any one, Aasha Rani’s mother decides to make her daughter great star in the world of films and that of glamour where plenty of money is involved. Amma is ready to stake her prestige and all morality for achieving material success. Amma emotionally blackmails her daughter Aasha Rani, for joining the blue films:

It is all acting. You just pretend and follow the doctor’s orders. Close your eyes and think of other things. Think of your poor sister and your Amma struggling to make you a big star do you know Sudha hasn’t paid her fees? ¹²⁵
Thus this novel deals with the theme of women’s search for identity and independence not only in terms of their relationship with men but also economic and sexual independence. The novel actually is not simply a treatise on sex but is a depiction of modern women’s search for an identity in the society, which is male dominated and sex-starved. The novelist is of the opinion that it is quite foolish on the part of woman to search for real love from men. What men actually demand from the women counterpart is fulfillment of their in satiable lust. Aasha Rani remembers how her own relatives have, with a sense of impunity ‘Sex plaited’ her. So she has developed a deeper hatred against her own male relatives. She recollects the nightmarish experience of her childhood when she was sexually assaulted by her uncle.

Aasha Rani sets herself on the path of progress with a dauntless spirit and massive vigor. In order to try her luck in the film world Viji comes to be known as Aasha Rani. And there after starts the story of a woman who is subjected to sexual exploitation. By each and everyone who comes forward for her support. Kishan Bhai was the first person belonging to the filmy world who for the first time taught her how to ‘part her legs’ during the first sexual intercourse she looked at Kishan Bhai with innocent eyes of a child sleeping on the impersonal bed in the hotel. “Aren’t you afraid? he’d asked … No, not at all why should I be? Those eyes had regarded him coolly and he’d wondered briefly if she was as innocent as she looked.”

The innocent Aasha Rani is thus sexually exploited by Kishan Bhai for the petty help he has rendered to Aasha Rani to make her stand in the world of films. She in fact could not get what is known as genuine love from a man. She develops fascination for a man called Akshay Arora. He is the greatest personality of Bombay filmdom. When Aasha Rani reaches at the top in her profession, she falls headlong in love with Akshay Arora who is a married man. It was his top position in the industry, his aristocratic manners,
high standard of living that swept her off her feet she admits “I feel like a villager in his presence.” But she does not give up her desire to be known and identified by the world. Shobha De very boldly and realistically portrays how boring the love and sex becomes in married life. Malini Akshay’s wife could never enjoy the consummation of sex with her legitimate husband. She fails to possess her husband because she cannot do an Aasha Rani to her husband who wants novelty and freshness in sexual intercourse at every time. Malini could not provide the kind of sex that Akashy needed. Aasha Rani boasts that she could provide the needed sexual orgy to Akshay. Regarding the difference between Aasha Rani and Malini, Nivedita Maitra remarks:

The real underlying them of *Starry Nights* is the gender bias Subordination of woman, male violence and the social taboos on woman which the woman herself unknowingly inflicts upon herself because of the prevalent social norms and as a result lead an unhappy life as she gets trapped within the set moral codes and social norms of the society meant only for women. Shobha De through some of her women characters like Malini and Rita has been able to portray a very vivid picture of the inequality between men and women which is prevalent in the society even today.

Akshay has to turn to Aasha Rani for sexual gratification. Shobha De thinks that “romance is not possible in marriage because romance finishes the morning after the wedding night.” Malini’s close friend Rita the film industry angel, she discussed these problems with her. As she too had heard of Akshay-Aasha affair, she asked Malini not to be worried of it. She told her that women like Aasha are schemers and trap people like Akshay for money. Her threat will serve the purpose Malini shared her secret of sex life with Rita and admitted:
In the beginning she used to pretend that she liked having sex since it was important to her to keep Akshay satisfied: After a point she’d stopped doing even that she’d allow him to make love as she lay there impassively with a martyred expression on her face, letting him know that it was his desire, his uncontrollable urge and she sooner he got it over and done with the better for both of them. While he was doing his business she would go over the words of a favorite Ghazal in her mind and plan her next day’s schedule.\textsuperscript{130}

But Rita was practical in her family life. She knew how to handle her husband Kailash and enjoy her own life without tensions. Rita advised Malini to remain firm in her approach towards family life. She must know how to protect her rights. If husband goes astray he must be checked firmly. If he behaves foolishly, he must be brought back on right path. This is the right duty of a wife in the above statements of Rita and Malini there is no protest against the flirting nature of Akshay and Kailash and hence \textit{Starry Nights} is not a treatise on feminism. Nivedita Maitra aptly remarks:

\begin{quote}
There is no protest from the women’s side, neither Rita nor Malini protest at the infidelity of their husbands. They just shut their eyes and do not want to know about their husbands ‘lafdas’ they are happy shopping diamond jewellery and attending kitty parties. They are thus very superficial characters who cannot even stand up for their basic human rights.\textsuperscript{131}
\end{quote}

In the society women’s feeling and sentiments are not respected and are not cared for. Aasha Rani loved Akshay Arora from the core of her heart and wanted to marry her but Akshay, except for few sexual escapades with Aasha Rani, did not reciprocate to her feelings. Aasha Rani wanted Akshay to marry her and change his religion. Her marriage formula is rather
simplistic. “We can both become Muslims! It’s easy … I’ll your legally wedded second wife. Muslims can have four, but you’d better stop with me.” But the very idea is repugnant to Akashy:

    You are so stubborn and so stupid … Just forget it. Besides I don’t want to become a Muslim. I believe in my religion. I don’t want to give up my faith. I was born a Hindu. I want to be cremated, not buried. I don’t want to change my name to Aslam Khan or something. How could you think such an absurd plan would work?  

These remarks of Akashy stun Aasha Rani who has looked to him for a kind and warm response so first she thinks of committing suicide but does not do that because Shobha De wants her female protagonists to take revenge against their exploitations by man. So Aasha Rani continuous her struggle to stand erect against the adversities in the male dominated society. *Starry Nights* has been described as “confession of a man-eater.” Shobha De in this novel indicates the arrival of a new Indian woman, eager to defy rebelliously against the well entrenched moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal society system. De herself considers the treatment of women, question as the most significant contribution made by her work. She once said: “I write with a great deal of sympathy towards women, without waving the feminist flag. If feel very strongly about the women’s situation.”

Shobha De in fact thinks that women should be treated at par with men. They should not be given a subordinate position in the society. Equal power to women would bring a kind of balance between man-woman relationships. Whenever this balance collapses, there is tension in society and double dealing and hypocrisy predominate. It was the high profile of Aasha Rani as actor that had attracted Akshay. Akshay takes interest in her because at the time of his first flop show Aasha Rani was the ‘Pricey hit’ and he
thought This was only surefire way for him to hold on to his niche at the top and it involve Aasha Rani. Aasha Rani is punished for the love she has shown to Akshay. She is humiliated by Akshay in the most abusive manner. Akshay shouts at her. “Bitch don’t you know your place? Following me around, I don’t like my women spying, you are aspy! Wanted to catch me with someone, didn’t you? Get out, get out!” Her humiliation does not end here Akshay beats her bitterly and Malini, his wife joins him. Severe blows are hurled at her face. One more blow across her mouth and Aasha Rani fell to the floor. Aasha Rani is thus unceremoniously kicked out of the place. Malini calls her a wear and a woman, stealing husbands, destroying lives. Aasha Rani becomes so frustrated that she decides to end her life but she is saved.

Thus Shobha De voices her protest against the treatment of women as an object in the patriarchal set-up. After Akashy Arora another person who comes in the life is Abhijit Mehra. He is equally selfish and untrustworthy. He comes to her in spite of his beautiful fiancée Nikita whom he marries later on. Aasha Rani feels tortured by Abhijit who comes to her only for sex Shobha De ridicules the pretentious nature of mankind. The best game in the eyes of Shobha De, with which women can give a befitting reply to men, is taking recourse to lesbian relationship. It is suggested in the novel that lesbianism is in many ways superior to hetero sexuality. Lesbianism can give more pleasure to women than her mating with man can give. Lesbianism is love making in true sense. Asha Rani’s first lesbian experience is with Linda. It is Linda who initiates her in the mysteries and pleasure of Lesbianians. Aasha Rani likes it, she feels pleasure when Linda cooks her down on the bed and kisses her on the lips.

Another reference to Lesbian Pleasure in the novel comes when Aasha Rani goes to Dubai after the fiasco of her affair with Akshay Kumar.
She goes there to nurse her lacerated nerves by courtesy of Seth Amirchand. Her host in Dubai, a gold smuggler is not interested in sleeping with her but she is provided with every comfort. She is attended on by two Thai masseurs from Bangkok and this is a first, the second exposure to lesbian pleasure. Aasha Rani has to undergo bitter experience in her carrier in order to achieve perfection and create her own identity. She came in contact with different kinds of males who used Aasha Rani to satisfy their own sexual urges. According to Shobha De probable sexual encounters and sexual exploitation are indispensable states in course of growth of women’s individuality and identity. Thus Aasha Rani has to undergo one more ordeal in order to establish her identity. The path of liberation chosen by the heroines of Shobha De is fraught with frustration, mental break down and disasters. Shobha De in fact provided no solution or alternatives to the problems Indian woman faces in the endocentric society that is why Sudhir Kumar, an India critic, brands her as “in line with the vamp school of feminism.”

Sudhir Kumar thinks Shobha De is in dilemma about the direction of feminize. The Indian brand of feminism has a long way to go. In search of identity Aasha Rani goes to Wellington where she marries Jamine Phillips known as jay. She gives birth to a daughter who comes to be called Sasha. In her relation with jay, further, she finds no fulfillment of her desire of being as equal to man. She again becomes a victim of the patriarchal order. Because very soon she comes to know that her marriage with jay is over. Jay tells Aasha Rani very clearly about his affair with Alice:

I love the girl. She loves me. And she love Sasha. Thing just worked out that way. I hadn’t planned it. I love you too, but differently. We’ve grown a part. We have been drifting. Off for quite a while now. I guess it was Sasha who was the common factor. Now that she’s older and has a mind of her own. We should allow her to choose the sort of life she wants herself.
After this incident Aasha Rani becomes very frustrated. She does not know where to go? Once again she confronts the problems of existence and belonging, what is her real place in the world? Where does she really belong? Who are her relatives? For whom does she live and who needs her? These are the questions that an ambitious woman has to face in the male dominated society. In the novel Aasha Rani, instead of escaping from life responsibilities, or yielding to the problems, chooses to struggle and survive through it. And she survives and achieves success. Many writers have portrayed the problem of the place of woman in the society, her true belonging and her place in marital relationship, but often the novels and where these problems begin, writers no doubt, raise the problems without offering any solution. Sometimes these in an escape from the misery of the world, sometimes they yield to sorrow of the world, Shobha De has very realistically presented the model before us. Her women are strong in character and take bold decisions to survive in society.

The Indian woman, in spite of her economic independence, does not feel secure without his protection of men, in her childhood. She receives protection from the parents, in her married life man protects her and later she is protected by the son. Passionate Aasha too, deprived of Akshay love, craves for protection which she has expected from him. Unable to find this protection she recollects her childhood and longs to relive a seven year old child in the lap of Amma who rubbed coconut oil into her scalp. She wants to cry as a child. Physically and emotionally drained she feels tried. Since none of her plans works the frustrated Aasha tries to commit suicide. As usual Akshay refuses all interviews. He remains silent in over matter related to them betrayed by Akshay. Aasha reluctantly tries to find relationship with Abhijit who offers her a holiday in a distant land where nobody can disturb them partially banished from India, Aasha goes to wellington. There an
admirer proposes marriage. Bored, troubled and confused she accepts the offer and becomes Mrs. Jamie (Jay) Phillips. Far from the world of cinema she leads a family life with a farmer. Her life fills with love. Satisfied with her present state of life; she tries to forget the past. She does not want to even think of India. When in one and a half year, she becomes the mother of a beautiful girl child; she finds her life filled with every happiness of the world, to enjoy this important event of life. She decides that she will share the mutual trust and understanding the most beautiful aspects of a mother daughter relationship with Sasha, her daughter. When Jay, her husband proposes that she visits India with the child the thought of her mother’s shatters her:

Nothing doing in way, I never want to go back. And please don’t give Amma. The news, I want to protect Sasha from her. I want to bring her up with all the love in the world. I never want her to meet her grandmother never.¹³⁹

On reaching India she finds herself in totally strange circumstances and feels a kind of responsibility towards her Appa (father) who is back home and is suffering from illness. Amma has lost her dictator’s image and totally depends upon the mercy of Sudha, her younger daughter, who has skillfully taken Aasha’s place in Mumbai cinema. During her stay in Madras Aasha receives an invitation as chief guest of the mahurat of a film from her old acquaintance, Rita. She accepts the invitation and as she steps into a blaze of flash bulbs inside the studio, she feels as if she had never been away. Everything comes back to her. The peculiar atmosphere of the studio, people crowding around, trying to touch stars, get near them smell them. She thinks she missed it all. It is only after such incidents, that it strikes her how much of an alien she was in New Zealand.
She prefers to stay in India especially in film society. Jay cooperates and leaves for Wellington along with Sasha. He gives Aasha a chance to fulfill her wishes. Her responsibility and above all to have a feeling of working and doing something in her life a feeling of achievement. Meanwhile she receives a call from Wellington from her daughter that Jay is having an affair with her nanny confused and desperate she thinks. “There was always a man in the picture a man using abusing and finally discarding a woman.”

Also considering the fact that Aasha Rani is going home to Jay and Sasha from the filthiness of the industry is it necessary to have a scene like this to show how degenerate unscrupulous businessmen are? Or it meant to describe the insatiable desire of Aasha Rani in which case Shobha De is only reiterating the stereotype of the ‘whorish’ female in the words of Andrea D. Workin. Whores exist only within a framework of male sexual domination. Indeed, outside that framework the nation of whores would be absurd and the usage of women as whores could be impossible. The word ‘whore’ is incomprehensible unless one is immersed in the lexicon of male domination. Whatever be the arguments and counter arguments what is crystal clear is that the novel deals with the struggle of a woman to establish her own identity in the society and her attempt finally is thwarted as she fails to escape victimization by male.

The two protagonists, Indu and Aasha Rani are rebellious right from their childhood. Through the character of Indu, Shashi Deshpande portrays the inner struggle of an artist to express herself, to discover her real self through her inner and natural potentiality, of creative writing. And Aasha Rani struggles hard to establish her identity in the society, which is male-dominated and ruthless to woman. She struggles and compromises with adverse situation in order to assert her existence in the society.
Indu is the motherless child. Her father remains on the periphery who very occasionally visits the family. Indu’s family ruled by Akka, she is dominating in nature. Aasha Rani’s father left her mother and the children to fend for themselves and he married another lady. So the family of Aasha Rani disintegrates and the mother has to work very hard to run the family.

Both Indu and Aasha Rani get attracted towards the men whom they marry. Indu marries against the wish of her family. Aasha Rani marries her own choice. Indu is issueless she does not beget a child because she is aware of her insecure relationship with her husband Jayant. But Aasha Rani has a beautiful daughter who comes to be called Sasha. Indu has an extra marital relationship with Naren, her cousin which is an outcome of her emotional as well as sexual suppression.

Aasha Rani has a lesbian relation with Linda and sexual relation with Aasha Rani come in contact with different kinds of males who used Aasha Rani to satisfy their own sexual urges, Akshay Arora, Kishanbhai etc. Indu earns but it is too little to make her the bread winner of the family she is career conscious and earns to secure her self-pride. Asha too earns but not good way.

Indu is educated and serves as a writer and journalist, Aasha Rani joins under world of blue films. She is the dream girl of the millions.

Indu is motherless and sole child from middle-class urban joint family while Aasha Rani belongs to a family which is totally disintegrated. She has parents. Both do not have playful childhood. Indu builds up personality of her own by overcoming the adversities. Aasha Rani also builds up personality of her own by blue films. Both face the bitter experiences right from their early childhood. Indu is rebellious in some aspects but unnaturally submissive to Jayant whom she loves extremely. Aasha Rani, too,
submissive but sometimes she is very bold and ambitious. S.P. Swain appropriately sums up Indu’s growth when he comments:

The meek, docile and humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as bold, challenging conscious and rebellious women. She resigns her job thus defying male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman’s masked existence. Her self-discovery is the frightening visions of the feminine self’s struggle for harmony and sanity… she is able to discover her roots as an independent woman a daughter woman, a daughter a mother and a commercial writer.141

Shobha De also comments on Aasha Rani’s growth.

Eventually every relationship is a power struggle either as overt or subliminal levels … Control over the situation has been a male prerogative over the centuries. Woman’s destinies have been determined largely In that context alone. .. It is time they were made aware of their own potential and power. Shakti needs to be harnessed, directed and exploited for the furtherance of overall human development. The very concept of the sexes locked in external battle is negative and destructive… When one talks of Shakti Unleashed, one also remembers the two connotations of Shakti The destructive avatar as potent as the creative one. It is in maintaining the state of equilibrium between these two opposing forces that can lead to creative and dynamic harmony… Men will hence to come to terms with women power.142

Shobha De hates marriage she thinks that marriage is a means of the perpetuation of the patriarchal order. A woman’s being is annihilated on the altar of marriage. Shashi Deshpande also thinks marriages are traditional
means to keep women under control. Indu chooses her career by her own wishes. But Aasha Rani pushed by her mother.

*Starry Nights* deals with women’s search for identity and independence not only in terms of their relationship with men but also economic and sexual in depends but *Roots and Shadows* deals with the discovery of self and discovery of others too.

Both Indu and Aasha Rani fail to establish emotional relationship with husband Indu wants to escape from this kind of unhappy way of life but Aasha Rani wants to keep relation with her husband. Both Indu and Aasha Rani accept the role of an ideal motherhood.

Indu goes back to her husband after brief stay at her parental home. She gets an opportunity to think upon her marriage from distance. She gets much help from Naren to understand it. She finally arrives at conclusion to secure her future with only her husband. It is her strong resolution that makes her take this step. She is not a traditional woman who thinks woman’s place is at her husband’s feet on the whole. The only thing that makes her to go back is her insecure feeling. In this sense, she proves herself to be a typical Indian woman who craves to be protected. Aasha Rani also wants to live with her family.

The novel gives the message that Indu is an intelligent and sensitive person and is very choosy in her affection to resolve her doubts and uncertainties; Shashi Deshpande tries to prove that women do not lack courage. *Starry Nights* is an optimistic suggestion for the woman kind through the protagonist that let us not lose hope, because it is a universal truth that, “Tine heart, tine all.”¹⁴³ Aasha Rani’s life is an account of the survival and success along with a consuming love which is passionate.
3) **That Long Silence and Sisters:**

“Marriage between a man and a woman is like the relationship between a shirt and tie – either a good contrast or matching.”

In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the irony of a woman writer who is also a young house wife. Being a writer she is supposed to present her views and ideas before the society but still she remains silent probing into her past, struggling with her present and trying to establish a rapport with her future. She is an intellectual who finds herself out of place in the society meant only for men. Shashi Deshpande writes her female protagonist in search of ‘self’ or to rediscover her identity. Self discovery is by all means an adult act. With the crisis developing in the novel culminates in reaching resolution farther. This ‘resolution’ means achievement of freedom to think and decide for oneself. The only goal of Jaya is liberation from her womanhood. Her womanly self is suffocating and struggling for freedom. The family becomes a cage where her ‘wild self’ is trapped and it is naturally with all security reared, Shashi Deshpande in all her novels raises her strong voice of protest against the male-dominated Indian society and against man-made rules and conventions. There are a numeral instances bringing home to the reader the cruelty of men perpetrated on women.

The novel is a first person narrative ‘one story is unfolded by Jaya symbolizing victory’ out in reality in actual life situation she has to lead on a traditional ‘passive’ obedient wife’s role, right from her childhood days, she has been told stories about Sita, Savitri and Draupadi, depicting the sharing of their husband’s travails and their silent sufferings, Jaya refuses these role models because they have lost all relevance in modern period Sita, Savitri and Draupadi, the legendary women followed their husbands willingly, but Jaya followed her husband ‘Mohan’ because of compulsion there is a franc brutal realization of this evil necessity in her conjugal life.
Jaya’s husband Mohan is an engineer who cares for money, status and material comforts. Working in the purchase section of his office, he prospers will, looks arrogant and brash. Unfortunately he is caught taking commission and an enquiry is on. He has to leave his Church gate bungalow to Jaya’s humble Dadar flat. He takes her so much for granted that she is not consulted about shifting. Yet she acquiesces to his decision and follows him. However, Jaya seems to have gained confidence as he begins to lose it being in trouble. When Mohan demands the key, Jaya refuses to hand it over. She opens the door herself symbolizing her refusal to be servile, she is aware that “It was not he who had relinquished his authority; it was I who no longer conceded any authority to him.”  

Adele King observes: “Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is.”

Emulating Mohan’s mother and sister, she tries to adjust and compromise with her lot though every compromise shatters her individuality. She surrenders herself so totally that she is afraid of expression of her likes and dislikes. Now she is a stereotyped housewife who is “nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support.”

A woman can never be angry she can only be neurotic, hysterical frustrated there is no room for despair, either. There is only order and routine, today, I have to change the sheets tomorrow scrub the bathrooms the day after clean the fridge….. Marriage subjugates and enslaves women and it leads her to aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose.

Outwardly, she is a satisfied housewife married to an apparently caring man with a comfortable home, with no dearth of material comfort. But on scrutiny it is revealed that to achieve this stage of fulfillment as a wife,
Jaya has systematically suppressed every aspect of her personality that refuses to fit in with her image as a wife and mother besides a failed writer. As Suman Ahuja observes:

Jaya caught in an emotional, eddy endeavors to come to terms with her protean roles, while trying, albeit in vain, to rediscover her true self, which is but an ephemera... an unfulfilled wife, a disappointed mother and failed writer.\(^{149}\)

Jaya realizes how she wasted away the most valuable time of her life in arranging and re-arranging things, dusting, polishing, washing, ironing, cleaning the fridge and changing the sheets. She is bewildered to find in her diaries that she had spent her life engrossed in such trivialities as what she bought. How much she paid for it, the dates the children’s schools had begun, the servant’s absence, the advance they had taken, etc. Jaya as a girl was taught by her father to have confidence in herself. He named her Jaya which stands for victory and has encouraged her to be resilient and courageous. He had very high opinion about her daughter and would try his best to inspire her with his conviction that Jaya was not like others and that Jaya must shine in life:

You are not like the others Jaya, Appa had said to me, pulling me out of the safe circle in which the other girls had stood, girls who had performed Puja and come to school with turmeric dyed threads round their wrists and necks, girls who it had seemed, asked for nothing more than the destiny of being wives and mothers, while I, Appa had said, and I had agreed would get the chat field prize, or the Ellis prize, go to Oxford after my graduation..... You are going to be different from others, Jaya.’ Appa had assured me.\(^{150}\)
However her father’s untimely death shatters her dreams and makes her to face the reality that she is after all like any other middle class girl destined to be a wife and a mother. As a child she was chided by her grandmother for asking too many questions and was told that no husband could be comfortable with a woman who asks question and retorts. Her relative taught her the importance of being with a husband:

A husband is like a sheltering tree. And it was as if she had said ‘Mau’ to me. I ignored her after so many years; the words came back to me. A sheltering tree. Without the tree you’re dangerously unprotected and vulnerable.¹⁵¹

And Jaya proceeds to keep the tree alive and flourishing even if you have to water it with deceit and lies. She marries Mohan not out of choice but out of convince. He is from same caste, decent good looking and has a good job. Jaya has no reason to reject him. She says: “And if there had been no reason why I should have married Mohan, there had been no reason. Not to marry him either.”¹⁵² Woman’s identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as a daughter, a wife and a mother. It means virtually a woman doesn’t have an identity of her own. In keeping with the ritual of re-naming the bride on the wedding day, Jaya is given the name ‘Suhasini’ by Mohan. Jaya silently accepts the new name but does not use it. She remains as Jaya and uses the name given to her by her father, which means victory. Suhasini the name thrust her by her husband means “a soft smiling placid motherly woman”¹⁵³ “She tried to cut off those bits of Jaya which did not fit into Suhasini image.”¹⁵⁴ Jaya wants to relation her own name given by her father meaning victory. Her refusal to adopt the name ‘Suhasini’ becomes manifestation of resistance to the stereotyping that is inflicted on every woman in the Indian society. However Jaya’s rejection of the name ‘Suhasini’ now remains as a token of victory as she cannot afford to insist on
for long as she has been taught to regard her husband as a tree of projection and so represses her anger and resentment. Vimala Rama Rao says Jaya becomes a good writer:

Jaya is one of the rare narrative voices in Indian English Fiction who poses and displays a literary sensibility commensurate with her fictional role as a writer telling her own story, one whose college education and reading habits are in evidence in her speaking voice. This indeed is an achievement.\textsuperscript{155}

Mohan has been encouraging her to write. In fact he introduces her to editors of various papers and magazines. On Mohan’s advice, she begins writing on middles, “Light humorous pieces about the travails of middle-class house wife.”\textsuperscript{156} These mere skimming’s over life do not give her any satisfaction. She is an intense thinking woman longing to comfort life through her fiction. She has made a good beginning with a story “about a man … Who could not reach out to his wife except through her body?”\textsuperscript{157} This Story has won a prize for its realistic portrayal of life. Yet Mohan assumes that the story portrays their own personal life. He is very oppressive that people of his acquaintance may assume that he is the kind of person portrayed in the story. But Jaya knows that there is no truth in his accusation still she does not try to reason with Mohan, as she does not like to risk her relation with him. Jaya suppressed at every stage of her life, compromises to conform to the role of an ideal Indian woman. In order to become an ideal wife, she has to snip off the bits of her that had refused to be Mohan’s wife. As a result she has been masquerading not only as the writer of ‘Seeta’ but also as ‘Subhasini’ discussing gender, Catherine Stimpson says:

Cultural laws of gender demand that feminine and masculine must play off against each other in the great drama of binary opposition. They must struggle against each other, or complement each
other, or collapse into each other in the momentary, illusory relief of the androgynous embrace. In patriarchal cultures, the struggle must end in the victor of the masculine, complementarily must arrange itself hierarchically: androgyny must be a mystification.\textsuperscript{158}

In the Indian context, marriage is absolutely a sacrosanct contract and the images of the devote of wife and husband conforming to the concept of ardnarishwara have been held up as the imminent reality of the relation between the sexes. Jaya proves that she is no different from her. Jaya’s resembles Indu and Saru in having subdued her independent spirit to the desire of her husband. Indu who obeys her husband’s wishes and fancies, and Saru, who thinks that a wife must be a few feel behind her husband’s, Jaya also bows to the male superiority, Sometimes Jaya appears to be not very different from other women. Nayana, who despises her drunkard husband but craves for a Soni Mukta, the widow who fasts Mohan’s mother, who suffers her husband’s humiliations silently and Jeeja who thinks that a woman without her kumkum on the forehead is nothing. When the choice of selection comes between her husband and family, unhesitant Jaya chooses to be with her husband however assertive and independent individual she may be. She holds on to her marriage and sees Mohan and herself as a pair of bullocks yoked together. In her own description, her married life is:

\begin{quote}
A pair of bullocks yoked together…A cleaver phrase, but can it substitutes for the reality, a man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat preserved 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.\textsuperscript{159}
\end{quote}
The image of the pair of bullocks yoked together suggests that yoked bullocks should share the burden between themselves, but no one knows whether they love each other or not. The loveless married life which causes the wife and the husband to drift away from each other results in total failure by implication the character of Jaya represents modern woman’s ambivalent attitude to married life. It is only by negating her own personality that a woman who is powerless in the patriarchal order, can survive. Jaya in order to maintain her marriage as a happy one, slowly transforms herself to this ideal of womanhood where she learns to repress her anger. Jaya always works up to please her husband. Jaya even transforms her appearance to suit his idea of a modern woman cuts her hair and wears dark glasses. Jaya desperately wings to her husband as if her life depends on him. Jaya’s story in the larger context is the story of generation of women she accepts the reality of the situation and her existence in relation to her family. Jaya has no necessity to look outside; she wants to be safe looking after her husband and children. The outside world has so far not, affected her life, though at times she feels dissatisfied with her life:

God how terrible it was to know a man so well. I could time it almost to the second, form the first devious wooing to the moment he turned away from me, offering me his hunched back.\textsuperscript{160}

Jaya in search of an individual identity turns back ruthlessly on Kusum, and she fails to show understanding and has not maintained any human relationship with Kamat in the hour of the need. Further, Jaya realizes that this reaching out beyond the self is not a deviation from womanliness but a means of fulfillment, to find her identity as an individual. Jaya learns to reorder the relationship with her parental family, her husband, children and dependents. The memories of the past modify her expectations about the present. As Bertrand Russe says:
The essence of a good marriage is respect for each other’s personality combined with that deep intimacy, physical, mental, and spiritual, which makes a serious love between man and woman the most fructifying of all human experiences. Such love, like everything that is great and precious, demands its own morality, and frequently entails a sacrifice of the less to be greater, but the sacrifice must be voluntary, for where it is not it will destroy the very basis of the love for the sake for which it is made.

Perhaps women like Jaya do not accept the difference between the less and the greater. The relationship between a wife and husband is expected to be not only cordial but intimate and enduring. But this relation between Jaya and Mohan is an epitome of failure and an emblem of disgust, disappointment and depression. This is so because there was no love between them. This disgust of living with a man who does not love the woman the way she expects him to is a burning problem the educated woman has to face in the contemporary society. Marriage in India means marrying the husband’s family traditions. The psychological and social realities in which women live have remained virtually unchanged. Like Saru, The Dark Holds No Terrors, who scorns the word ‘love’ and says there was no such thing between man and woman. Jaya too thinks that real emotional involvement is unlikely between a man and a woman. Like Saru, Jaya also is a romantic to begin with, but later she is so disenchanted that she gives up her efforts to please Mohan and look attractive for him. She is so disgusted with their mechanical relationship that describes it as a man and a woman married for seventeen years without mutual love or understanding.

For Indian women marriage and motherhood are considered mandatory for fulfillment and happiness. Jaya is the representative of this unequal status of women in our society, the introspective and inward
probing. Jaya represents girls brought up in middle-class families in the post Independent India. Parents in this class inculcate in their girls a certain duality, sometimes unconsciously: on the one hand and impulsive desire to be emancipated and liberated. Shakuntala Bhavani aptly comments thus:

> The woman of today therefore speaking in the language of psychology has a near schizophrenic personality, one side steadily ‘accepts’ while the other craves to speak, to think and express the life of the mind.

Jaya is caught in this dilemma, firstly trying to be a suitable wife to her husband and secondly, struggling to express the emotions of women’s experience, but seldom expressing them in a male-dominated chauvinistic society. Deshpande herself admits this kind of dilemma when she says … this kind of emotions we know women have but never come out. Jaya knows that their relationship is spoiled by incompatibility and lack of communication. If she suffers it is in silence if she revolts it is also in silence she suppresses her feelings they should spoil her relationship with her husband. One of the most structured patterns of Indian society is the roles assigned to man and to woman – woman is the follower, man the leader. Woman is the sufferer, man the Gardiner, woman is of the home, man of the world.

Jaya has her first and the only outburst with Mohan soon after her marriage. But then she was fresh from the ‘Jaya for victory’ past. As Jaya is a newly married bride, she is also new to the accepted mores of married life. Jaya learns to be silent, she keeps her grouses to herself, stays with drawn under the shell of silence, and Mohan steeped in the norms he had learnt in his own family says to Jaya, “My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her.” Jaya feels hurt and becomes angry at the accusations Mohan flings at her during a quarrel, but she is
struck dumb. She knows about Mohan’s involvement in a case of bribery and she fears of prosecution, loss of job and societal disgrace on Mohan’s part. In fact she does laugh at Mohan and finally lands herself in a more hopeless situation. “Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as I rocked helplessly. When finally, I recovered myself I wash alone in the room.”

Mohan leaves home without a word after she uncontrollably laughs at him. She bursts out into a hysterical laughter which upsets Mohan so much that he leaves the Dadar flat without a word. Jaya understands Mohan’s agony. He is agonized to see Jaya in place of Suhasini:

Mohan’s eyes as he spoke of her were agonized the eyes of a man who’d lost a dear one Suhasini was dead, yes, that was she it, she was one Mohan was mourning she’d walked into the sea at last to the fact was that I’d finally done it I’d killed her no, that was not right, either we had killed her between us, Mohan and I.

Disappointed and frustrated the way Mohan left her; she goes out of the house and walks aimlessly in the streets and alleys of Bombay because she cannot go on with the crushing burden of her marriage trust on hen. Hopelessness and despair thicken further with the disappearance of Rahul who has gone with Rupa and Ashok, their family friends on a holiday trip. The most trying moment comes to Jaya in her life when she finds two male accomplices fondling the breasts of a narcotic-smoking well to do girls at the bus stop. Extremely shocked by the behavior of the two men Jaya begins to doubt the credibility of her romantic ideas about the woman being the victim. All her revolutionary ideas say as to she fails to combat her first encounter with reality. She realizes that the fact of her own children being distanced from her together with her husband’s accusation of having let him down is sufficient to shake her revolutionary ideas. The narcotic smoking girls contemptuous attitude shears her at all herself assumed importance of a
‘glass house existence’ she realizes that she is secure only with Mohan. Jaya feels that she can have her identity only if she has Mohan with her she journeys a full circle, from searching for her identity in loneliness to her relationship with Mohan and her children but though it is a full circle, it is not the same point to which she returns. Having realized her position, now she rejects even the image of two bullocks yoked together signaling a loveless couple. Now she has belief in herself she can choose now. The intense Searching of the self has brought knowledge of life. Which cannot be lived in a vacuum Jaya does not look at her and Mohan as two bullocks yoked together in marriage. Instead she looks at herself and Mohan as two individuals with independent minds.

Two bullocks yoked together that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I now I reject that image. It’s wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves.¹⁶⁶

She realizes that the fault is her own. In the Bhagwad Geeta, Krishna imparts knowledge to Arjuna, by uttering ‘yathecchasi tatha kuru.’¹⁶⁷ It is for Arjuna to make the choice so also it is Jaya who has to give up the language Prakrit. For her it is not women are victims but women also can assent and change themselves. Further Jaya realizes that one cannot remain static throughout one’s life. One must change and hope for the men also to change. Jaya thinks that Mohan will return and their life will come to normal. Jaya resolves to live a free life. She does not want to lead the life according to Mohan’s desires. But she prefers to remain silent. However it is not possible for her. “But it is not longer for me if I have to plug that hole in the heart, I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase, the silence between us.”¹⁶⁸ Jaya’s resolution makes her confident and hopeful about her future with Mohan. The novel ends with Jaya’s hope to make Mohan
understand her and her feelings, she remembers Mukta’s words people don’t change but hopefully she rejects the thought and says “But we can always hope without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this life has always to be made possible.”

Thus Jaya decides to assert her womanhood. Herself realization brings her close to the last phase of self-discovery that is the female phase as explained by Elaine Showalter in her book the new feminist criticism. Essays on women, literature and theory. It is for this reason that she uses the flat at Dadar. According to Indira Nityanandam, Deshpande’s heroines:

… Attempt to resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal. They have as the models not traditional stereotyped women who were willing to sacrifice their individuality for the sake of upholding traditional norms. Instead ‘yathecchasi kuru’ or do as you desire becomes their guiding principle.

Jaya thus proves to be a typical Deshpande heroine. She in the search of ‘self’ knowingly or unknowingly follows the principle ‘do as you desire’ which is the reinterpretation of feminine urge.

Sisters is the third novel of Shobha De. It is the story of two sisters who are not only beautiful and wealthy but are also at war with each other. It deals with the psychic conflict in its liberated women protagonists who are caught between a personal self and a social self the novel deals with the theme of women’s struggle for identity in the male dominated society apart from this the novel records the suffering of a woman in the patriarchal set up where she is treated as an object. It is against the objectification of woman that the novelist raises her cry. In this novel De has painted new women as she has full knowledge about their life-within and without. As they have no
interest in the ancient culture of India they face the challenges of new society. L Sonia Ninghtoujan aptly remarks:

De has been able to throw significant light on the inner life of men and women belonging to the glittering world of affluent sections of Indian society based mainly in Mumbai and the new woman who now occupies the centre stage in this society. De’s intimate knowledge of this circle by virtue of her being perhaps a member of this section has made it viable for her to bring out every little secret of this new woman out of the close and present her as realistically as possible to the young educated urban reader De’s novels are a terrific combination of truthful, fearless and realistic writing and the most of alluring and entertaining studies of the high life of women and men belonging to the circle.\(^{171}\)

In the novel *Sisters* we encounter a woman who struggles against constraints of being woman and finally succeeds in asserting her identity. Mikki Hiralal is the central character in this novel. She has to return to India from America after the untimely death of her parents in an air crash. She comes to Bombay to take charge of her father’s industries known as the Hiralal Industries, which are on the verge of bankruptcy. The reasons for the virtual collapse of Hiralal Industries are still unknown to Mikki. Mikki decided not to busy herself with these conjectures. She wanted to take hold of the industries of her father, which required lot of attention. Revival of industries was the main target of Mikki and for this she was ready to undergo any trial and tribulations. Mikki is a representative modern woman of Shobha De. Who can shoulder any responsibility Mikki does not fear the social constraints that are imposed upon a woman who dared undertake any untraditional task. She is determined to save the industries from going bankrupt. And for this purpose, she requires to pool in a lot of finance. She is
advised by Shanay, her cousin to borrow money from her fiancée Navin. Mikki approaches Navin with request to help her retrieve the industries but it takes her no time to realize that Navin is putty in his mother’s hand. Navin lacks self-respect, which shocks Mikki, Navin is the first person who comes in the life of Mikki. He comes very close to Mikki and Mikki “allowed him to hold her in his arms and kiss her.” But Mikki does not allow him to go any farther. She cries, “Stop it.” And then Navin stopped it and feigned as if he did not intend to do anything. Navin tells her that it was just a test of her virginity and that she has passed that test, Navin tells her:

Don’t worry… I’m not going to rape you. I’ll wait. This was just a test. I’d heard you were quite a fast babe. I’m happy to see you like this. That’s what I’d expected from my wife I don’t like chalu women, so, Mikki you have passed with flying colors. Now, I can go home and tell my mother to announce our engagement.

Very soon their engagement is formalized. After the engagement Navin’s mother used to call on every morning to Mikki’s house irritated, Mikki made a complaint to Navin but Navin just laughed it away saying, “Mother–in-law problems already.” But Mikki was too tough to be appeased so dimply. She finds that Navin was a bit of brat and very juvenile in his tests and for Mikki his company for whole of the life is neither good nor healthy for the job, she was going to take up, Mikki began to dread her decision and thus she decided to break off the engagement. The engagement is broken. Mikki is not emotional subdued or weak, like traditional Indian woman. On the contrary, she is assertive, pragmatic and strong. Here, Mikki challenges the usual orthodox vision of the society. She is a tough woman who easily and without any sense of guilt breaks off her engagement with Navin who fails to respond to her wish. In fact, she’d always been such a difficult girl. Mikki was a difficult girl to be pleased or to be duped.
Ramanbhai had tried his level best to trick her into testing her but this could not be done. He even tried to black-mail her emotionally by addressing her as, “Beti I appreciate your method of trying to start at the bottom and I agree it is the best way to understand any business.” But Mikki was not moved. Ramanbhai discouraged her by saying that it would not be possible for her to undertake the revival of the industries because she was not a male. Ramanbhai says:

Had you been a son, your father might have taken you into his confidence from a young age and guided you properly from the beginning but as a daughter all he wanted for you was a good husband that is all.

But Mikki did not listen to him as she was very confident of taking up new challenges. Mikki is a representative new woman created by Shobha De. According to Shobha De perhaps the women have to assert their independence in order to claim their identity in the society. K.K. Sinha has rightly opined that Shobha De.

Stands for equal and normal treatment to the woman in this hurly-burly world of ours she is one of the leading writers portraying the man-woman relationship especially in urban metropolitan India. She stands for the new woman causal looking but ambitious, professional focused and in control. She has an agenda, and she will work towards it single mindedly and even alone if need be.

Ramanbhai represents the typical male of the patriarchal society who thinks that it is their bounden duty to teach and guide the woman. He very cunningly advises Mikki:

My advice is-leave these serious matters to me. I am there to handle them trust me. I will guard your interests like a father but you will make things difficult for yourself if you do things without consulting me.
But Mikki could not be influenced because she belongs to the kind of women who “Play for every high stakes and are driven by ambition lust, greed and hate.” The confidence, ambition, lust, greed and hate that are present in the character of Mikki make her an untraditional woman. It is on this ground that the novel has been called Indian in names and setting and American in inspiration. A critic called, Sarbani Sen has rightly commented that “Shobha De. is producing a desi version of an American best seller where the Indian ambience is merely an eroticizing on an unmistakably American cake.” Shobha De recommended a mature attitude to sex. Sex for Shobha De’s women is palpable, pulsating and compelling reality. They do not hesitate to accept it as an important part of life and do not remain subdued to let man take all the initiative, on the contrary, they think and take about it openly; participate in it actively turning upside-down the traditional image of woman for whom sex is shameful, hidden sin of her existence. In fact, Shobha De seems to herald the arrival of new woman who do not lament the existing subordination and passivity of woman and “project their own passions on to others as a female power play in order to deconstruct the male ego.” Thus De’s women seem to be a demolishing spree as they rip through the male complacency and articulate their erotic sexual fantasies unhesitant and unmistakably. It is noteworthy that Shobha De achieves a unity in her vision as she shows Taarini, a middle-class woman, too engaging in her extra-marital pursuits. De’s women, “Symbolize the over powering materialism and the lack of spirituality, that characterized modern age.”

In *Sisters* too, the moment we look at Mikki and Alisha we know that these girls won’t lead an existence the circumference of which the others especially males decide. Both Alisha and Mikki refuse to sulk and appear subdued in order to look sober and domesticated. Shobha De’s woman is
different sort, they have the power to resist, oppose and even hit back those who attempt to subdue them. Mikki is projected to be a girl possessing her own intellect, will and intention. She has her own ideas and firmly believes in action. She seems keen to assert her feminine, yet a strong individualistic identity in a habitually male dominated society. Through the intentions of a tough minded and levelheaded Mikki, we see the design of the author who wants her females to be not just the subordinated counterfoils of their male companions. She intends them to be free and completely self reliant ladies having an open and free existence. However, if Mikki expresses a notion that clearly is an aspect of her feministic views that are assertive, the ideas of Alisha are somewhat stunningly blatant and violent.

In selection of a life-partner, the husband, Mikki is very prudent and tactful. She is attracted to Binny and makes up her mind to marry this man like Aasha Rani in *Starry Nights*; Mikki also has a weakness of becoming emotional like Asha Rani who has got weakness for Akshay Arora. Though Akashy Arora abuses her and humiliates her yet Aasha Rani is unable to change her mind. Similarly Mikki develops a soft corner for Binny, though Binny humiliates her and beats her, yet Mikki does not forget him. Binny appears to be very straightforward initially he tells Mikki “you are a woman after my own heart. No wasting time, no wasting words to the point.” These words appeal to Mikki who consents to marry him even after Binny has put two strong conditions for marriage.

I’m prepared to take Hiralal Industries with all its current liabilities on two conditions. The first that you marry me, the second that you relinquish complete rights in all your father’s affairs to me and that includes properties and any of her asserts my law years will come up with.
Binny addresses her as princess which was enough to flatter Mikki and wins her heart. Mikki decides to marry him. She goes in for a middle aged. Binny despite being warned Mikki marries Binny. It is indeed surprising to note that unlike Shobha De’s other women heroes who generally tend to free themselves from the clutches of married life. In the beginning Binny appears to be all attentive towards Mikki who enjoyed his experienced approach and found herself discovering aspects of her own sexuality she hadn’t guessed existed. In his company, she not only gets an insight into her real ‘self’ but also feels a sense of security. Thus she prides herself on being his wife. The narrator tells:

She felt liberated uninhibited and aroused to the point of primitive abandon if this was what her man wanted. If this was what made him happy should give it to him. She would give him happy should give it to him she would give him every bit of herself her body. Her mind and she sold. She was in love with him. And he was finally hers.¹⁸⁶

It is this total submission a characteristic of a traditional woman, which adds to the superiority of man and consequent exploitation of woman. However, her honeymoon with Binny is to end in a fiasco. Binny a womanizer has already got a family and his marriage with Mikki is only to keep up his image in the society. Strongly enough Mikki, having learnt this, remains silent, for she does not care for his past life. But she cannot tolerate Binny’s indifference to her, except for a few moments when he poured falcon of joy and her limbs. her life with him becomes a veritable hell. The process of dehumanization of Mikki begins when all her property is transferred to Binny, besides; she is denied motherhood for she has to keep always fit for him. Being a representative of the oppressive system, Binny does not like Mikki’s desire to be an active partner both in life and business. He characteristically outspoken when he tells her that he needs a wife:
Listen very carefully, princess, this is no longer your father’s home and you are no longer the pampered child. You are Binny Malhotra’s wife. And you’d better start behaving like her. In our family women are trained to obey their husbands. Thanks your stars you don’t have a mother-in-law to please. You have nothing to complain about got that your life is perfect. You have everything ….Everything. Where I go, what I do, when and with whom, is my business. I will spend as much time with you as I choose to, there are social duties and obligations which you will fulfill if I feel it’s necessary for you to travel with me for some purpose it shall happen that way. If I have to attend parties on my own, it shall happen that way. Your job is to like beautiful. I told you that when I married you. Buy clothes, buy jeweler, go to the beauty parlor. Play bridge, learn golf. Attend cooking classes. That’s all but no questions you don’t have the right. And none of this cheeky business. I will not tolerate it.  

Tennyson’s words put the situation more clearly: “Man for the field and woman for the hearth, man for the sword and for the needle her, man to command and woman to obey all else confusion.”  This is exactly what puts Mikki off but, as she is conscious of her precarious condition, she pleads with him “I can look after you and look after at least a part of the business. We would work together I won’t have to wait hours to see you.” But with strong manly pride Binny, her husband, rejected her proposal and said, “Be my slave” this is how women are treated after they are bound together with men into marriage knot.

They are denied what is known as freedom and choice. They have to act like slave to their husbands. Mikk’s situation in the novel throws light on the harsh realities of the patriarchal society. It also hints at the growing awareness among the woman who begins to rise from the eternal slumber.
Mikki’s continual protest with Binny results from her innate desires for freedom. This kind of objectification of woman and her subjugation to men angers Shobha De that is why she detests the institution of marriage. Before marriage all the males behave like slaves to their prospective wives. Binny addresses Mikki as ‘My princess’ But after marriage, he orders her “be my slave” And Binny justifies this position of woman on the ground that the real position of woman is in the home and not outside. Before marriage Binny behaves like a very old slave of Mikki and he embraces her in office, during office hours saying. “This like a dream comes true.”

_Sisters_ show how women are victims of male passions. Seth Hiralal a married man had raped his watchman’s wife who died in forced abortion. He made Sapna pregnant and her inside was damaged in abortion. Alisha is his daughter from kept Leelaben. Binny Malhotra has a mistress and children but he marries Mikki and forces her to go for abortion otherwise he will divorce her instead of giving independence and individuality; he wants to reduce her to a beautiful rubber-woman. Mikki disagrees to her husband’s concept of marriage.

No, it isn’t, Mikki said, her voice rising, at least it is not the sort of marriage I am looking for. I thought we’d be doing things together enjoying life, now a day I get to see you only at parties. Is not that funny?  

Mikki is too helpless to assert her position and fight male aggressiveness. Her marriage is a failure she says “I wanted someone with whom I could share my life is that such an impossible expectation.” Shobha De also exposes urban educated woman who takes man as play things. Alisha has sexual meeting with Navin, knowing him to be engaged with Mikki once. Her action is an act of revenge towards her sister rather than any love. Her relationship for Dr. Kurien who attends on her in the hospital is purely physical as the doctor has his wife and children. The
doctor’s observations to Alisha speak of Shobha De’s critical concept of urban woman: “For woman like you-men are playing things today you want to breaking up my marriage. Tomorrow you will get bored and move onto some other man, where will that leave me.”

Shobha De exposes male aggressiveness but her women are weak and subservient. Really it is surprising why she a woman novelists, has not created bold and assertive woman like Shashi Deshpande’s Jaya in That Long Silence, fighting for individuality and equality, all the women: Mikki, Alisha, Leelaben, Urmila and Sapan, belong to the urban world but they are unable to fight against being play things or sex images, when Amy provokes Mikki to assert herself-respect the latter is unwilling to cross the boundary of a typical traditional Indian woman. She exposes her pathetic helplessness when she says. “He (her husband) is like a god to me I do not care who he sleeps with. All I care is that I am his wife and that he comes home to me.”

Shashi Deshpande’s Jaya represents the image of a wife yoked to the husband. Shobha De fails to articulate woman’s anger against men, which gives a disappointing message in the novel written after forty-five years of independence. Ironically, Mikki never thinks of a life beyond marital bounds. It is her dream to be both an ideal wife and responsible social being that gives a novel moral dimension. For Mikki materialistic pleasures without freedom of the ‘self’ mean nothing. In fact Shobha De’s women have been liberated from the economic constrains. What they search for is the personal freedom, and when they are denied this, they turn rebellious. They express their anger by resorting to what might termed as unethical acts. That is breaking the marriage oaths or indulging in extra-marital relations.

Mikki is constantly at war with herself as a woman and as a human being. Although she fails to find in Binny a man with whom she could share
her life, Mikki is “willing to compromise her own life if it meant he’d notice her, acknowledge her existence.”

Mikki faces a lot of tense situations. She does not get any positive response from her half-sister, Alisha. Her aunt does not agree with her. She does not accept the advice of Shaney. Navin’s mother does not extend the co-operation she needs. She herself is annoyed with Binny’s two conditions for co-operation. Even her servants refuse to stay with her these days due to personal problems. So, the artist describes the various conflicts that the modern people have to face. S.K. Mangal remarks:

The term conflict is variously used. There may be conflicts between the ideologies of two sects, religions and organizations. Conflicts may arise between husband and wife; father and his son, and teacher and the taught. They may also show their presence among brothers and sisters, members of an organization or community, states of a country and countries of the world at large. Apart from these external or outer conflicts there are inner or internal conflicts within the man, which are more dangerous for his wellbeing. These conflicts are called psychological conflicts.

Her dream to enjoy the fruit of marital life is shattered when Binny suspecting her chastity, turns her out of his home, she pleads innocence and tells him, “Binny…. I love you. Only you… I can’t live without you.” Mikki is turned out of house by her husband on a false charge of adultery. The reason, she has taken a cooking course from a male French cook Lucio in her husband’s absence. Even at this stage she is shy of fighting for her right and is afraid of any type of scandal. In fact, her disillusionment with Binny is total when he goes in for divorce. All her efforts to live with him fail. Mikki is determined to retain her industries with which she identifies
herself however long before. She does anything she again finds herself in the saddle, when Binny along with his legitimate family meets his death. Mikki is a changed woman now her experience with Binny gives her an insight into her ‘being’ as a woman and an individual. The transformation of Mikki from a mere social butterfly to a mature woman and to a kindly mother figure is apparent when she turns her attention towards her estranged sister.

Alisha appears as an angry young woman. Her reaction to the news of Seth Hiralal’s death survived by his only daughter, Mikki shakes her terribly, her own identity as another daughter of Seth Hiralal seems to be lost in this news, her question “And what about me? What am I? A Puppy? A kitten? A pet?” Speaking of her search for individual identity, she cannot tolerate being lost. She resolves to fight for her-self and her share in her father’s business and regards Mikki as her enemy number one. The contrast between these two sisters gives a dramatic touch to the narrative. Of Alisha, money gives identity and is important than any human relations. To Mikki blood relations are more valuable than wealth she is apologetic and reconciliatory in her approach to her stepsister. Alisha is rough, abusive and at war with Mikki who begs for her help as she feels lonely and helpless and wants to help the financially. Alisha distrusts her, hates her ‘fucking charity’ and calls her ‘bitch’ contrast between these two important aspects of the growth of the plot of the novel. Mikki wins over her step sister Alisha by her sincere love and service. When the latter is hospitalized and needs blood. Blood-relationship triumphs over hatred, trust wins over mistrust. The two sisters held each other close and cried the lost years away.
E. Satyanarayan aptly remarks:

Ironically, Mikki and Alisha are united only after the death of the latter’s mother with her motherly affection. Mikki attempts to soothe the wounded-self of her sister. She helps her get over the emotional hurdles in life. The novel comes to an end with both the sisters realizing the need to live together.\(^{200}\)

The central event of the novel is the quest of Mikki to win her sister Alisha and Alisha’s to be a rich lady. After many vicissitudes, the novel ends with a happy note and the two sisters finally reconciled to each other:

The sunlight came pouring into the room through enormous bay windows of Mikki’s and Alisha’s beautiful home, bathing the two sisters in its golden glow. Mikki surrendered to its warm embrace as her fingers played tenderly with the silken tresses of the sister’s hair, and she drifted off into a light sleep full of dreams the future shimmered tantalizingly before her half closed eyes... and Mikki reached out her hand to touch it.\(^{201}\)

It is Mikki who initiates the move to reconcile with her sister, Alisha, and after a lot of effort Alisha is won over Mikki is a realist. She is not the kind of woman who contents to live a selfish and egotistic life. It is this nature of Mikki; which inspires her to go to attend the funeral of Binny Malhotra. Binny Malhotra along with his mistress Urmi and children dies in a car accident. Suspense grows dense with telephone calls to Mikki disclosing her husband’s death, a case of conspiracy and sabotage and that her life too is in danger. Raman Bhai confuses her by suspecting Shanay’s hands in her husband’s death. Mikki still relies upon him and begs for his help in her confused state. But to her utter shock, she discovers Raman Bhai to be the real villain. Finding her lonely and helpless, sure of her death in the hands of watchman, Bahadur Singh, he discloses how he has been
instrumental in the death of her parents and husband. Bhahadur Singh, employed to kill Mikki and take revenge for his wife’s death demands ‘daru’ from Raman Bhai, loses his patience and strikes him with a Crowder, meanwhile, Shanay comes with police and Ramanbhai is arrested, while Mikki is in the hospital for the treatment of her shock and bruises, Alisha serves her with love and care. Once more the two sisters are united in love. The images of violence and death are replaced by those of beauty, union and life.

The novel ends with an epilogue, which marks the poetic ending of *Sisters*, leaving certain chards ringing in the readers; hearts and guessing, while in the hospital Mikki is diagnosed to be suffering from T.B. Alisha has been a drug addict. Both decide to depart to London. Their departure is a kind of salvation from the evils of corrupt business world. It is for a complete cure and change and acceptance of life.

**Jaya** in Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* and **Mikki** in De’s *Sisters* are educated young and modern women. Both the novelists present domestic experiences and marital problems of their protagonists. Marital dissonance is definitely a reality, a painful disturbing fact of conjugal life, but its causes are rooted in the rigidity of male behavior and consequently in the seemingly abnormal relations of women. Both the writers deserve admiration for such a far reaching insight into the nature of male-female behavior, marriage being the medium to verbalize them.

Jaya is suffering from marital problems but Mikki is suffering from business, her sister and other people’s problems, and also marriage. In the novel *Sisters* we encounter a woman who struggles against constraints of being woman and finally succeeds in asserting her identity. But in *That Long Silence* Jaya is caught in this dilemma, firstly trying to be a suitable wife to her husband and secondly struggling to express the emotions of women’s experience, but rarely expressing them in a male-dominated, narrow minded...
society. Both Jaya and Mikki present a new image of Indian womanhood. Both Jaya and Mikki are fatherless children. Mikki’s father left her lot of property but Jaya’s father left her nothing. Jaya marries Mohan not out of choice but out of convenience. He is from same caste, decent good looking and has a good job. Jaya has no reason to reject him. Mikki chose Navin but he was a bit of brat and very juvenile in his tests and for Mikki his company for whole of the life is neither good nor healthy for the job she decided to break off the engagement. The nature and character of Mikki can be compared to those of Elizabeth Bennett of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. Elizabeth acts so prudently that without knowing the nature and the real character of men she does not being him closer to her. It takes for her a long time to befriend Darcy only for this reason. But in *That Long Silence* Jaya has to give up her creativity in order to appease her husband. Jaya reluctantly undertakes all the traditional roles that are assigned to a woman after marriage. As a wife Jaya is forbidden to laugh. Her unconscious laughter once antagonized Mohan, her husband, who went out of the house without informing her as a gesture of punishment to her. Jaya had, to finally compromise, with her situation because without a husband a woman has no recognition. Shashi Deshpande has shown how Jaya has acted as her father’s daughter as Mohan’s wife, and as her children’s mother without realizing that she has a personality and independent existence of her own. At last she firmly resolves to break the silence which has plagued her family since long. In De’s *Sisters* too the moment we look at Mikki and Alisha we know that these girls want to lead an existence the circumference of which the others, especially males, decide. Both Alisha and Mikki refuse to sulk and appear subdued in order to look sober and domesticated.

In selection of a life-partner i.e. the husband Mikki is very prudent and tactful Mikki is attracted to Binny and makes up her mind to marry this
man. Despite being warned Mikki marries Binny. It is indeed surprising to note that unlike Shobha De’s other women heroes who generally tend to free themselves from the clutches of married life. Both Mikki’s and Jaya’s husbands not support in their career.

Shobha De exposes male aggressiveness but her women are weak and subservient. Really it is surprising why she, a woman novelist, has not created bold and assertive woman like Shashi Deshpande’s Jaya in That Long Silence, fighting for individuality and equality. All her women Mikki, Alisha, Leelaben, Urmila and Sapana belong to the urban world but they are able to fight against being plaything or sex images. When Amy provokes Mikki to assert her self-respect the latter is unwilling to cross the boundary of a typical traditional Indian woman. Shashi Deshpande’s Jaya represents the image of a wife yoked to her husband. Shobha De fails to articulate woman’s anger against men, which gives a disappointing message in the novel written after forty-five years of independence

Ironically, Mikki never thinks of a life beyond marital bounds. It is her dream to be both an ideal wife and responsible social being that gives a novel moral dimension. For Mikki, materialistic pleasures without freedom of the self mean nothing. In fact Shobha De’s women have been liberated from the economic constraints. What they search for is the personal freedom, and when they are denied this they turn rebellious. Jaya’s husband, Mohan, is an engineer who cares for money status and material comforts but does not think about her emotions or feelings.

Mikki also fails to find in Binny a man with whom she could share her life, Mikki is “Willing to compromise her own life if it meant he’d notice her acknowledge her existence.” Jaya faces only marital life problem but Mikki faces marital life as well as her step sisters mentality. For Alisha money gives identity and is important than any human relations. To Mikki blood relations are more valuable than wealth.
Jaya’s husband’s Mohan’s, male pride is extreme which demands a total submissive wife Jaya becomes aware of her situation due to his remaining busy outside and a total negligence of home. He is too much career oriented man. The same happens with Mikki he addresses Mikki as ‘My princess’ but after marriage he orders her ‘be my slave.’ The central event of the novel is the quest of Mikki to win her sister Alisha. But in That Long Silence Jaya’s quest to win her husband.

Jaya is a realist, she is not the kind of woman who contents to live a selfish and egotistic life, Mikki’s nature also same and matches with Jaya.

Both the heroines’ husbands neglect the emotional side of their female counter parts, which results in the disharmony. It is evocative of suppressed Indian womanhood.

Jaya, a convent going girl, learns seriously and wishes to make her career, her father is a constant source of inspiration to her Mikki also worried about to save her father’s industry. Jaya becomes aware of the stark reality of her father’s untimely death, a bitter experiences she faces very early in her life. Mikki, too, hardly seems to have been shocked by the tragic death of her parents in a plane crash. Jaya faces a lot of problems as she has dominating husband. Jaya is a creative writer; Mikki also faces lot of problems she too interested in career.

Both Jaya and Mikki welcome their womanhood naturally and abnormally. Jaya has extra-marital relationship Jaya leaves Kamat when he crosses the limits of his friendship, it shows her wavering personality but Jaya is confident and monogamous. Jaya shrewdly uses her relationship with Kamat to acquire self-assertion. But Mikki does not keep any relation with other.
Jaya having a core of Indian traditional womanhood goes back to Mohan with realization. Her arrival at Dadar withdraws her from her subordination and makes her think upon her plight in her home. Jaya goes back to Mohan and for her it is not a failure. Jaya is a representative of those Indian women who are traditional as well as modern. To her, it is less important that she is going back to her husband. Her self-realization is important.

Jaya’s predicament is caused by lack of communication between the couple. The moment she decides to over ride the false sense of pride in her as the heroine Elizabeth does in austere novel, *Pride and Prejudice* and to communicate with Mohan a change in their behavior is observed and the silence between them is broken, But when Mikki’s disillusionment with Binny is total when he goes in for divorce and lastly. After many vicissitudes, the novel ends on a happy note with the two *Sisters* finally reconciled to each other.

Both the women represent Indian womanhood of new era: one represents woman as a victim of gender discrimination while other as a victim of cultural shock as well as male chauvinism.
4) The Binding Vine and Strange Obsession:

“The fragrance of the night-queen crosses the hedge of thorns touch the pinnacle of the shrine and is no longer mine.” Is the long silence that had become the hallmark of woman’s existence is broken by Urmila. The Binding Vine like the earlier novels portrays her middle-class female protagonist’s predicament in a male dominated society. It also enshrines her search for love, meaning and happiness in life, a search for something to cling to in the strange world she has perforce to live. Shashi Deshpande conjures up a woman’s vision of life which is expressed in the novel partly through the consciousness of Urmila, the female protagonist, and partly through the consciousness of other female characters like Vanna, Urmila’s friend Mira, her mother-in-law and Shakutai. The Binding Vine is also shown the perennial truth of how all the human being in life. Parents and children, relatives and strangers, men and women are bound by the vine of emotional attachment and struggle to enjoy the beauty of life and overcome the ugliness in various ways. Novel is written in the third person singular mode, the novel is centered on the life of Urmila, a sharp tongued and self-willed woman. Urmila, though not very poor, has been leading a contented married life. She is educated and teaches in a college. But the happiness of her domestic life is marred by the unexpected death of her daughter Anu. She remembers the child time and again and sorrows over it. In her despair she bangs her head against the wall. Commenting on Urmila’s attitude, S. Indira Writes:

Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow she holds, onto it as she believes that to let go of that pain to let it become a thing of the past would be a betray at and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of loss.
The experience of frustrated motherhood keeps a gnawing at her soul. She feels the emptiness of life very intensely and suffers from utter helplessness about it. Her psychic problem is aggravated further by her physical problem i.e. asthma. Though relatives try to console her, she continues to feel the blankness of life, haunted as she is by the memory of her dead daughter both in reality as in dream. Although she has other children like Kartik, she finds it extremely difficult to forget the dead baby. The emotional vine that binds her to her daughter cannot be severed even after the death of the baby. In fact it becomes stronger and stronger as days go by.

Frustrated motherhood of a different kind is depicted through the picture of another woman Shakutai. She also struggle for her daughter’s existence. Although Urmila is neither a friend nor a relative of Shakutai, she develops a concern for her and her daughter Kalpana, again because of The Binding Vine of humanitarianism, Shakutai, who is choked to learn that her daughter has been a victim of rape by some body, has been spending her days in the hospital attending upon Kalpana, when Urmila happens to meet Shakutai and understands her plight, she tries to give her moral support. Dr. Jain has examined the patient, Kalpana and gives the report. Urmila to her surprise realizes how the imperative of physical protection, economic support and social approval undermine the instinctive sympathy of the mother for her daughter. While over hearing a conversation between Vanaa and Dr. Bhaskar, the doctor-in-charge, Shakutai recoils in fear against the word ‘report’ and she cries, “… don’t tell anyone, I will never be able to hold up my head again. Who will marry the girl, we are decent people doctor.”

He certifies that Kalpana has been raped and wounded badly and is duty bound to report it to the police. Shakutai’s helplessness and sorrow are
unlimited. Uneducated poor and abandoned by her husband, she has to suffer from the disgrace and dishonor brought about by her daughters freedom recklessness and lack of practical wisdom Shakutai is frustrated in her life both as a wife and as a mother. Since Kalpana stay in the hospital has been almost interminable the authorities of the hospital are planning to discharge her from there. But Shakutai does not know what to do next and where to go, especially when she has no money to support her.

Like Shakutai, Sulu also helpless and has a libidinous husband who had an eye on Kalpana from the beginning. Sulu is shocked to know that it is her husband Prabhakar who has raped Kalpana and been trying to escape the police. Shocked by the terrific news of her husband’s heinous act, Sulu commits suicide by burning herself. Sulu who was the only person who offered some kind of emotional security and moral support to Shakutai is no more now. Shakutai, thus, becomes an embodiment of suffering in the patriarchal society of India. Indian English novelist Mulk Raj Anand feels:

No man in our land is beyond the threat of rape, because of the suppressed energies of the male, through the taboos of patriarchy which deny sex before marriage and make male into wanton animals who assault any possible victim when possessed by last.206

Shakutai’s sorrow is aggravated by the factors like illiteracy, Kalpana’s tragedy is caused by adamancy, and self will, recklessness, exhibitionism and limitless freedom. Shakutai tries to find meaning in her life by giving her daughter all the facilities which were denied to her like good education, a good job and a respectable marriage. But all her dreams are, frustrated by her daughter’s reckless and brainless behavior like painting her lips, dressing herself up and moving about with strangers, without knowing her own biologically determined limitations. Thus the mother and
the daughter exemplify two contrastive patterns of behavior ‘but ironically enough, both of them suffer in their own ways. The solution to their problems is not easy to achieve, both of them are identical in the quality of their frustration through different in their mode of frustration. Urmila tries to share of their sorrow purely on the ground of humanitarian sympathy.

Whereas Urmila is bound by the vine of sympathy with Shakutai and her unlucky daughter, Kalpana in the present, she is also bound by the same vine with her own mother-in-law who lived in the past. When she accidentally discovers the Kannada writings of Mira safely kept in a trunk on the loft, she reads them vividly and discovers the sad story of Mira. She is sad to learn that Mira, being sensitive girl, did not love her husband who could not understand her heart or mind. Mira’s husband possessed her physically, but could not comprehend her psychic and artistic dimension, Mira was thus subjected to rape in marriage and being a lady of super sensitive temperament had a great repulsion for the so called ‘love’ or sexual act. There was only a physical marriage and never a marriage of minds or hearts. Thus frustrated with the physicality of marital life Mira tried to achieve her true identity by writing beautiful lyrical poetry.

That was the only way to escape from the sense of isolation and emptiness of her humdrum life. Urmila, who reads through the pages of Mira’s poems is deeply touched by the tenderness of feelings expressed in them and can easily guess her sufferings through her own feminine imagination she shed tears of sympathy for Mira’s miserable condition in the past. She wants to translate and publish Mira’s poems in order to immortalize her in the world. That is the way of paying her homage to her dead mother-in-law.

Mira becomes a symbol of female oppression. While reading Mira’s poems in her diaries which are none but her school note books, Urmila
senses a message being deciphered like a message tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the next call. Urmila understands that Mira was a favorite daughter of her father who was obviously proud of her intelligence and talent which made him present Mira a book of poetry. Urmila also understands that Mira had a deep desire of being recognized as a good creative writer and a poet but for her fear of being laughed at, if she expressed it aloud. Her questioning anxiety and uncertainty are all felt in her heart, and her poems are the true reflections of her latent feelings. “Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm will I emerge beauteous bring? Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist?”

Mira’s writing reflects the extent of forced sexual activity Mira was subjected to rape in her marriage. Perhaps her situation reflects the mute suffering of many such unfortunate women. Rape has always been a horrible indignity heaped on women folk by the male species, merely on the strength of brute force. In the words of Adrienne Rich, “it is not rape of the body alone but, rape of the mind as well.” Mira dies in child birth after four years of loveless marriage, every day and every moment that she spends there is a cry of rape and anguish. These feelings runs all through her writing a strong clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married. “To her sex becomes the sting of scorpion to be borne by women.”

In one of her poems, Mira Lament says: “But tell me friend did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels round her fingers and tremble fearing the coming of the dark clouded. Engulfing night?” Urmila understands that Mira’s marriage is only a ‘black clouded’, haunted night she awaits with dread. She begins to hate the word ‘Love’ as it is uttered always by her husband. To her love becomes a hateful thing and all that she desires is to be left alone. As Urmila narrates a passage from the papers found in Mira’s old trunk. They
speak about the relationship she shared with her husband and her feelings
towards her husband are almost void. “I don’t mind his anger, it makes him
leave me to myself, and it is bliss when he does that… Why can’t he leave
me alone?” Like Jaya, Mira too resents the new name given to her at the
time of marriage; her protest is vehement when she bursts out. “Nirmala they
call, I stand statue still do you build the new without raising the old? A tablet
of rice, a pencil of gold can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira.”

Urmila is confident that she understands Mira, her plight, her suffering and every
flicker of her emotion she confesses:

I’ve worked hard at knowing Mira, I’ve read her
diaries, gone through her papers absorbed her poems
painfully, laboriously translated them into English
and now, I tell myself, I know Mira.

Urmila understands that even as a child Mira has hated the way her
mother has been surrendering herself to her husband. She opposes every inch
of her mother’s advice, who says: “never alter a no; submit and your life will
be a paradise.” Urmila knows that the life which seems terrible to Mira is
normal to most women of her time. But Mira is not an ordinary woman.
Urmila wonders how Mira could survive a life denied of choices and
freedom and living with a man whom she could not love and other people
with whom she had nothing in common to share with she thinks that perhaps
it was her writing that kept her going, that kept her alive.

Seeing Mira through her poems, Urmila learns that Mira even felt the
burden of her femininity. She realizes that she too, was trapped like her
mother with no further escape. “Whose face is this I see in the mirror,
unsmiling grave, bedewed with fear? The daughter? No, mother, I am now
your shadow.” Pain, joy and fear are inextricably intertwined. The pain of
childbirth results in the joy of seeing one’s own child and no one, not even

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Mira is spared of this anticipatory joy of giving birth to a child her creation all the way. Even in the midst of vulnerable pain and fear of being trapped forever, Mira is aware of the new found love for her unborn child. But Mira is unfortunate even in this she dies in childbirth “... having bled to death within an hour after her child was born.”

Urmila is also struggle in her own married life like Shakutai and Mira but in a slightly different way although she is educated and employed as a lecture in a college and has married a man of her choice after falling in love with at first sight on the day of her grandfather’s death by suicide she is not totally happy. She wants to be a good house wife and fine pleasure in her home, husband and children. Commenting on Urmila’s relationship with her husband J.P. Tripathi says.

> Urmila the sailors wife and college teacher is more self reliant and has an identity different from that of her husband; she is self-respecting and does not want to live on Kishore’s money. She is however, a sensitive vine and need Kishore as an oak to entwine herself around.

Urmila at every turn of the novel emerges fully aware of the unequal treatment meted out to women Her encouragement to Vanaa to be more assertive in life and not be just a door mat, her sympathies with Shakutai, her effort to take up the task of translating the poems written by her dead mother-in-law from Kannada to English and her strong intension of publishing them are praiseworthy. She takes up cudgels on behalf of the rape victim Kalpana and becomes instrumental in publicizing the case which in normal course of Indian hypocritical societal situation could not be possible to the lower class. No other character in Shashi Deshpande’s earlier novels is no rebellious like Urmila. Till now all her characters may be independent to some extent but are firmly bound by the shackles of tradition.
Urmila is able to see the contrast between her life and the terrible life that these women have been forced to lead. There is Mira’s mother who going by Mira’s account of her, could not think of a life of her own separated from the destinies of her children. Even though Mira lived a generation ahead of Urmila, she comes across as a person aware of her identity and as one who is aware of her assigned roles of mother and wife. Urmila realizes the difference between her life and lives of the others and think: “I’ve managed, but I’ve been lucky, that’s all. While these women… they never had a chance.” while Kalpana’s mother says: “why does God give us daughters…?” To Urmila who is mourning the recent death of her infant daughter Anu, the thought is: “We dream so much more for our daughters than we do for our sons, we want to give them the world we dreamt of for ourselves.” Urmila’s grandparents who brought her up believe in giving freedom to girls. Anu has gone but she still has her son Kartik. Urmila realizes that, however burdensome our ties is however painful our experiences are one can never give up. In the words of Urmila, “We struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in only when we love do we find this anchor.”

Urmila understands that the relationship between her Papa and Inni, Baiajji and Anu, Vanna and Harish, Vanna and her daughter, Shakutai and Kalpana are all filled with love and compassion but it does not prevent them from being cruel to each other, ignited by clashes of egos, desires and self centered interest. Urmila realizes that the great divide in us is the hardest to bridge and the most difficult one is to accept and live with. When the fates of Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu are considered, Urmila regains her courage, she learns that accepting freedom and advantages of her life as a gift she now decides to be content with her life with a hope that her husband
Kishore will remove his armor of withdrawal one day and thus he could facilitate her to reach him.

Urmila finds consolation and relief in the predicaments of two companions Mira and Kalpana one is already dead and another is going through a death-in-life existence. In Shashi Deshpande’s novels the past always influences the present. *The Binding Vine*, with its assortment of women who seem to be victimized one way or the other has prompted viewers to present vastly contrasting opinions. In the words of Dermot Clinch: “*That Long Silence* was a gloomy novel but *The Binding vine* is gloomier still.”

The various women characters Deshpande shows that they seek fulfillment only within the orbit of family and relationship. *The Binding Vine* explores important problems of our time without offering any facile solutions. Deshpande’s characters may be independent to some extent but are firmly bound by the shackles for tradition. Urmila perhaps, is the most rebellious of Deshpande’s women characters unlike the protagonists in the other novels written by her. Who are aware of the inequalities in society but do not attempt to set right anything, the main characters Urmi Vanna, Mira and Kalpana, there are a few minor characters that merit our attention from the feminist point of view. There is Mira’s mother who, going by Mira’s account of her, could not think off a life of her own separated from the destinies of her children. Though Mira lived a generation before Urmi, she comes across as a person aware of her identity and one who is aware that her potential goes beyond her assigned roles of mother and wife. *The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from the earlier novels of Deshpande. Indira Nityanandham says:
The step forward achieved in this novel is the introduction of female bonding. The desire of one woman to help another less fortunate one, Urmila draws society’s attention. To the plight of the rape victim and is determined to get Mira’s poems published. This is a positive development in the protagonist. For Sarita, Jaya and Indu were involved in fighting only their own battles.  

The last type of love as a social instinct has also been presented in *The Binding Vine*. Man, being a social animal, comes across many people in his life and *The Binding Vine* amongst them is the instinct of social love. It binds different human relations, keeps them intact and carries forward the life of human being. In the end of the novel Urmila remembers:

> And yet I think of Vanna, heavily pregnant, sitting by me, holding my hand during the pains before Kartik was born, I remember Kishore’s face when he first saw Anu, I think of Akka crying for Mira, of Inn is grief when Papa told her about his illness, of Papa’s anguished face watching her, of the touch of grace there was in Shakutai’ hand when she covered me gently at night while I slept of the love with which she speaks of her sister, of Sandhya…In this it, ‘the spring of life’ Mira was looking for?

Throughout the novel Urmila does not exhibits male heartedness. She never desires to seek a world, a life without men. She has likeminded male friend Dr. Bhaskar, to whom Urmila is not just somebody’s wife but also an individual with an identity of her own. He loves her for her passion for truth and justice. Malcolm and Dr. Jain are also essentially humane and have great respect for Urmila.
Urmila thinks a lot, about how difficult relationships are with many chasms to bridge. The relationship between her Papa and Inni, Baiji and Anu, Vanna and Harish, Vanna and her daughter, Shakutai and Kalpana they are cruel to each other for they are ignited by clashes of egos. Desires and self centered interest. She feels, relationship can be wholesome only when people themselves are whole when she studies the fates of Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu, Urmila regains her courage. She learns to accept freedom and advantages of her life as a gift, and decides to be content with her life with a hope that her husband Kishore will a remove his armor of withdrawal one day and thus he could pave her a way to reach him Urmila, still has her son Kartik, she realizes that, however burdensome our ties are, painful our experience are one can never give up.

The main urge for everybody is always to survive, to get on with the business of living, even if it comprises a daily routine that takes care of a hundred trifling matters, bringing an older and rhythm to it, she agrees with Mira, who says: “Just as the utter futility of living. Over whelms me, I am terrified by the thought of dying of ceasing to be.”

The novel is quite notable as it introduces the concept of female bonding the desire of one woman for female bonding and helps another who is less fortunate. This is a positive development in Urmila, unlike the other protagonists of Roots Shadows, The Dark Holds No Terrors and That Long Silence, who are busy in solving their own battles and have strong feelings and strive for the want of sisterhood. According to Urmila women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society fearlessly. She is indigent at their uncomplaining attitude in the name of family honor. Love prevents one from being cruel, and this love makes one to accept its coming and its detachment. Love is the only adhesives that
binds people and prevent them from falling and in turn refills and nurtures the sapling of life with all compassion and tolerance.

The need to express one’s feeling and to be heard by the society is the urge for the present day women; Urmila draws society’s attention to her protest and sees less pain in attempting to changes the societal roles and attitudes. At the end of the novel Urmila is seen recollecting the bonds of love she provide the “spring of life.” For human survival. She believes that the things in the system are gradually improving not at a high speed, but at a slow pace, hence Urmila is rebel against the existing system.

*Strange Obsession* is a masterpiece by Shobha De. It deals with women’s struggle to assert her identity in the man dominated society. The society is patriarchal society that undervalues woman. A woman is taught to underestimate herself and to follow the dictates of man. Her desire is considered secondary and her needs are considered insignificants. Women’s are depicted in the novels of Shobha De don’t depend upon men and they are able to fend for themselves. In the present novel, *Strange Obsession*, however, a psycho-analytical approach has been made by the author to understand the place of women in the male dominated society.

De’s women are totally different; they represent a small but significant section of Indian society which is gradually changing its outlook with the changing times. They are woman who seek equal rights with men, they don’t want to be placed second to men. They seek friendship with men who can give them unending supply of luxury, money and comfort. These women marry for convenience and their living singly does not worry them. They engage themselves in glamorous and challenging careers like modeling, acting, journalism, designing, advertising and even big business, to the common conservation middle-class Indian, this sort for highflying lifestyle is very unwelcome and not in keeping with womanly behavior and life-
style. Women belonging to this class are considered too modern and sophisticated, westernized and above all characterless. The protagonists of De’s novels exhibit this trait in their character. Woman struggle with exploitative man to establish her in the exploitative male society in this process the woman ultimately is transformed into an exploiter herself and a self sufficient personality emerges. Nevertheless De’s satire is based on social realism.

Shobha De has given vent to her ire against the patriarchal system of the society. She is not willing to accept male hegemony. Raising her voice against exploitation of women in the hands of men De does not spare even the close male relatives from her attack. In the Strange Obsession Minx is allegedly raped by her father because the mother failed to give him sexual satisfaction. Minx or Minakshee is the protagonist of this novel whose chastity is outraged by her own father without any impunity. The father holds a key position in the police service and wants minx his daughter, not to disclose the monstrous outfit of her father. Minx discloses the most horrible and spine chilling tale to her friend, Amrita.

I only have you now, he told me and I felt I had to make him happy. He looked so miserable I felt guilty of course, I did. He made me feel it was my duty. You understand my duty, if your mother doesn’t you have to, he told me, I believed him. I thought that’s how it was in other people’s horns too, he told me to swear I wouldn’t tell anybody. It is our secret, he said. I was too scared anyway. Minx is asked by her father not to disclose this to anybody but minx can’t help telling it to her friends, particularly to a hawaldar’s wife five months later, I confessed to the hawaldar’s wife. Minx is punished for this betrayal My father never forgave me for betraying him. 227
Basically, there are different reasons for the outrageous treatment to Minx by her father. Minx fails to get motherly love and care. All love and care that she gets is from her father. She loves him so much that her love changes to obsession. She gets badly spoiled because of her father’s love, affection and pampering. Her whole personality changes to achieve, what she wants she becomes shy, clever and strong headed girl.

Her transformation into a lesbian is due to an Electra complex. Minx is attracted towards her father when she is hardly thirteen years old. She deludes herself to be the belief that it is not she who wants physical relationship but her father. Since sex with her father is incest so she imagines that he rapes her and colludes her to have sex. She rather pities her father for his sexless life and believes it to be her duty to fulfill his needs. This creates a psychological rift and leads to a pathetic condition. She is able to get what she wants but her she fails. She thus becomes a sexual competitor of her own mother. She also experiences a kind of patriarchy and also associates it with her childhood beatings which she had got from her father. This also makes her counter revolutionary to the existent culture and society, she withdraws from society. In childhood itself she becomes friendless; the isolation makes her psychologically sick. This failure in life makes her associate with bad company. She falls out of school and becomes friendly with local dada. She develops hatred for her father and every man. She becomes a lesbian and forcefully falls on an upcoming model Amrita. Minx deviation to lesbianism is not normal, it is quite abnormal. It is simply because of her degenerative change of mind which is a result of her experiences of neglect and rejection. In aryl, the peacock, Maya is over loved, where as in where we go this summer? Sita is under loved. And in Strange Obsession Minx is loved but love is incestuous and illicit. It is this kind of illicit affairs that makes her behave abnormally. Factually after betraying her father she losses the
protective attitude of her father. Mother is present in the novel but her presence is over-shadowed by her father. As a result mother is unable to exercise any influence on her daughter. Once discarded by her father, Minx does not find anyone in the family with whom she could share her feelings. Minx has a home but she is homeless, truly speaking, she has no feeling of belonging, a sense of below.

Once discarded by her father, Minx does not find anyone in the family with whom she could share her feelings. Minx has a home but she is homeless. Truly speaking, she has no feelings of belonging. A sense of belongingness is a conditional pre-requisite for the healthy growth of a person. This sense of belongingness, Minx is unable to realize. In this context, S.S. Anant has opinion that “Belongingness….means a subjective feeling of personal involvement to the extent that one feels himself to be an integral and indispensable part of the system.”

As a result of the absence of the sense of belongingness Minx becomes abnormal. In fact, the novelist shows that for the negative image of woman land the man is the only responsible fellow. The image of man that emerges from Shobha De’s novels is generally negative; a male character is invariably portrayed as seducer, exploiter, wife-beater, and rapist, torturer or a cruel husband. In the present novel, the father is depicted as a rapist and other male figures are depicted as great sensualists. She voices against the malist culture and strongly detests the marginalization of women. Shobha De tries to undo the distorted image of woman who cries for freedom and equality. Which still goes unheard in the patriarchal word? From this perspective the women in her works are more powerful than men. Women are essentially represented sexually liberated and free thinking and have become known as the “New women” in later twentieth century fiction. But even more remarkable is the strength of her character in the very culture that
has judged her female characters, especially only after they have gone through their own experiences, come to their real life. Shobha De ridicules and lashes at the institution of marriage. Marriage she thinks is a contrivance to subjugate a woman. Meenakshi’s father in *Strange Obsession* treats her mother as merely an object and non-entity.

In *Strange Obsession*, Meenakshi instead of delivering children turns out to be a neurotic character. Meenakshi’s deviates from normal pattern of behavior it is a deviation from normal behavior that turns her on to be a lesbian. In the first part of the novel her behavior is depicted as quite disgusting horrible and mind blowing. She approaches Amrita and addresses her as her sweet heart. She wants to befriend Amrita but Amrita is terrified by the abnormal behavior of Meenakshi. Meenakshi’s visits her house during her absence and puts slaughtered animal in the kitchen sink and when Amrita comes. She is horrified at the sight. “She strolled into the kitchen and nearly screamed. They’re lying in the sink was a dead piglet, covered with blood, its eyes still open.”

Minx did not do it to scare Amrita away from her, rather the act symbolizes that she desired an abnormal relationship with her. Here it could be said that lesbianism is a kind of abnormality according to Shobha De. But this view cannot be taken for grantees because in *Starry Nights*, Aasha Rani succumbs to the pleasures of lesbian massage which she was offered in Dubai and which she could not forget lifelong. Shobha De’s explosive novel *Strange Obsession* revolves around the life and lustful relationship of two young women, Amrita and Meenakshi fundamentally is seems to be a psychological documentation of sexual obsession of mysterious woman, Meenakshi, also known as Minx, and her calamitous end. Amrita who comes from a noble and educated family, decided to search her lot in modeling. In order to execute her long cherished desire, she settles down in Bombay. In Bombay she encounters Minx a modern high flown lady, free from all taboos.
and values. Being a daughter of inspector general she is always conscious of exploiting the power and position for her gimmicks. She is much pervert and polluted in her thoughts and plan. Even in the initial meeting with Amrita, “Meenakshi started into the most beautiful eyes she had ever seen and forgot what she wanted to say.” Amrita finds her unable to conceive the unusual and crazy feeling of Minx and utters. “But let alone a woman, no man had ever looked at her the way Minx just had. And no previous compliment had off exited her in the same manner.”

Both of them represent the different kinds of typology of modern urban set up. They seem to be hardly better than school girls playing adult games. It is through their behavior and conversation that Shobha De throws significant light on the predicament of these two young women.

Strange Obsession does not deal with the struggle for power and feminism; Minx is a lesbian, an eccentric who behaves like a male. She is thoroughly deprived of womanliness. On the thematic plane there does not seem to be a question of power but on the theoretical plane, it is difficult to disagree with the basic questions of power pleasure as Foucault under-lines. In her theoretical perspective. Psychologically, Minx is a case in study. In psychoanalytical frame work, Minx is a fix case to be treated as pervert, obsessed and crazy who manipulates Amrita, a young lady full of love, warmth and innocence. Even in fictive terms, Amrita proves to be nectar for Minx as her name connotes. Amrita once rebukes Minx by saying weird and abnormal Minx through her strewed efforts tries to allure her:

What are you talking about? You think I am a bloody lesbian, don’t you? Well guess what? You are wrong. And so are all of them who have been telling you that. I’m not a dyke. I am not kinky. And I’m certainly not crazy…. but I’m in love with you. I love you.
Minx knows what she is consciously or subconsciously identifies herself in negation. She is extremely passionate for Amrita and sometimes becomes violent and out of her intense sexual feeling. Minx utters: “Sweet sweet Amrita, you have become a part of me. You live right here in my body. I can feel your presence inside me all the time.” In case of relationship between Amrita and Minx, the socio psychological situation is altogether different. This kind relationship cannot be termed as adultery, incest or illegitimate, rather it is something unnatural, unexpected or a part of abnormal psychology. Amrita has natural inclination for heterosexuality but Minx has almost developed abhorrence for it. She is not ready to allow Amrita to get or select a boy friend for her. Minx out of her utter possessiveness says: “I love you. I have to protect you. It’s my duty.”

Minx does not have any emotional feeling for Amrita. She compels Amrita to search her love and lot in her. To Minx, same sex does not create any hurdle. Minx says: “Why does it make you sick? Why should it? Because I belong to the same sex is that my only sin?” She says that, “There is nothing abnormal about my feeling for you.” Shobha De recommends a mature attitude to sex. It is not like baby food. “I love sex, like love food. It’s same sort of her hunger.” This view is endorsed by many critics, but it is very clear that De has suggested that lesbianism can be the only substitute for heterosexual. In *Starry Nights*, Aasha Rani is administered a ‘Thai’ massage, the pleasure of which is an unforgettable experience to her. This tantalizing massage induces her to forget her obsession for Akshay Arora. If the pleasures of lesbianism are not celebrated by the characters of the novelist then why at all it is mentioned and emphasized? Perhaps Shobha De is of the opinion that lesbianism is one of the many ways to achieve independence for women in male-dominated society.
But nowhere in the novel has she pleaded woman to woman sexuality. Minx enjoyed sexual encounter with Amrita. But just after this experience, Amrita became conscious of her guilt. She is conscious of her sexual identity and so she raises a question to Minx when she argues for the satisfaction of Amrita: “you want to prick to enter you. I'll go out and get one.” The woman in Amrita replies: “You may be able to get some quack to stitch on a plastic dusk. But will that make me pregnant? Will you be able to fill my womb with a child?” Lesbianism is a psychological perversion, an obsession and something like eccentricity. It should not be a part of feminism. Feminism as such has to attempt a new definition of women’s role in the wider social frame. In the name of women’s lib Minx and Minx like cannot be justified. Shobha De herself makes her stand clear when Minx’s mother says:

My daughter is the severely disturbed child of a disturbed Mother. She suffers from delusions, she tells lies, she makes up stories, and the number of schools she has been expelled from has their own tales to tell.

Her husband saves Amrita at last Minx dies and Amrita feels liberated. According to the feminist theory Sex does not mean sexuality or sexual preference, which stands for a person’s pattern of erotic attraction. Similarly gender does not apparently correspond to sexuality Robyn R. Warhol analyzes this complexity:

A person of the female sex who is erotically attracted primarily to persons of her own sex who may or may not prefer to herself as lesbian, another term whose definition is under debate within feminism might be either strongly feminine or strongly masculine in her gendered self presentation, or most likely her gender identity would like most home sexual persons be made up of a complicated combination of gender differences within.
Minx’s love for Amrita is strongly passionate and irreversible. She likes her beyond limit. In an encounter with Amrita confesses how deeply in live she is with her. She says she can kill and destroy any thing that comes in the way of their love:

Why? What more do I have to do prove myself? Kill? I’ll do that too. Just tell me-who? You want me to kill someone? Anyone? I’ll do it. I’ll kill for you. I will Amrita… may be then you’ll love me.

But Amrita feels more disgusted than pleased with such a confessional mode of Minx, Amrita says: “Kill, murder, and destroy does it. I’ll hate you more.” Minx passions for Amrita is so intense and profound that she proposes to kill herself if that makes Amrita happy. “Will that make you happy? I’ll kill myself.” Minx could not tolerate anything or anyone that posed threat to Amrita’s development and prosperity. Amrita’s modeling career was at stake with the emergence of a new model called Lola. All the modeling assignments began to be given to her. This was intolerable for Minx. Minx takes revenge and kills Lola. The way she kills Lola is quite shocking and inhuman:

Because the person who attacked her was a professional, may be a hired hand. It was not just an acid attack. The poor girl was carried up nicely. Her insides were ruined with a switchblade shored through her vagina. Only a sadist would mutilate an inject girl like that. Who will marry her now? Her chances are permanently destroyed.

Karan the friend of Lola thinks that Amrita is responsible for the mutilation of Lola. He says to Amrita in a very angry tone:
You have ruined a beautiful woman’s life you have killed her. She may not be dead. But I wish to good if that was what you would intend, you’d finished the job. Lola went be able to stand the shock when she finds out just what is that the two of you have done to her.246

But Amrita does not reveal to anybody that killed Lola. There may be two possible reasons for this one; Amrita may have hidden love for Minx and too Amrita may not like to be involved in all this ‘lafdas’ Minx obsession is nothing less than Amrita. She is so head strong to win her love that she even under goes surgery to remove her breasts. She somehow wants to please Amrita:

No sweet heart. Nobody hurt me. May be I hurt myself. I thought it would make you happy… It’s a tits job. Well most women go to this surgeon for cosmetic surgery to enhance their breasts boy. I could give you a few names but I actually asked him to reduce mine. You know silence them off.247

The use of the word slice them off shows how much she hated men. She is unable to bear what men like. “Don’t ask me why, but I get the feeling you didn’t like them that their huge size put you off. I didn’t like them either.”248 It is kind of counter-revolution against her father and society. She very potentially challenges this society and its existent norms. Amrita feels close to Minx since she fulfils most of her needs, so love is from within and not without she also helps her in developing her career. Amrita has everything, a good house, somebody taking care of her finances she is taken care of very well. The only thing she lacks is a child. If that need could be fulfilled, she would prefer this relationship to a heterosexist. It is divided into two types to accept relationship that goes against the norms of society and the relationship that makes her safe and secure but cannot fill her womb. She always feels love and pity for Minx she cries for help when Minx is caught
in fire. She shudders when she reads her obituary. Her captivity was self-imposed.

For Minx lesbianism was a result of hatred and fear of deception from men. It was a revolt against society and norms laid down to under women. By belonging to Amrita, protecting and helping her, she posed a great threat to male dominance and disrupted patriarchal oppression. Amrita is so much scared of Minx that she seeks the help of Partha for protecting her. Partha is a journalist by profession. Partha agrees to protect her but Minx feels bad about Amrita going to Partha for help. Minx tries to win the favor of the family members of Amrita, she goes at her home. She creates a good impression on Mrs. Agrawal the mother of Amrita. The parents of Amrita feel secured because, Meenakshi has promised to take care of Amrita at Bombay. Very surprisingly Meenakshi behaves very normally with the members of Amrita’s family, Minx touches the feel of Mrs. Agrawal, “give me a blessing; after all you are like my mother. What is the difference between Amrita and me?”

Finally Minx succeeds in winning the favor of Amrita’s parents but Amrita reacts sharply, “How dare you deceive my poor mother.” Minx takes Amrita to Bombay and provides her all kinds of comforts but Amrita is not happy. Amrita says “I hate it here. I feel suffocated and spied on. I feel like prisoner I can’t breathe. I need my independence is that so difficult to understand?” Minx does not react to it what she wants is that Amrita should not do anything behind the back, Minx says: “All I’m saying is don’t do thing behind me back that hurts, it really hurts.” Minx wanted to exercise a total control over Amrita and this is quite abnormal.

In turn learn to reclaim that what they are told is bad, wrong, dirty and taboo, namely their bodies and freedom to express themselves in them. Too often a woman internalizes the homophobia and sexism is in of the larger
society, as well as that of their own culture, which attempts to keep her from loving herself. A woman must learn to love herself, both as a woman and sexual being, before she can love another. Loving another woman not only validates one’s own sexuality, but also that of the other woman, by the very act of loving. This means that she has to learn to love not only her vagina but some other else’s too. It is only then that the subsequent experiences of love and commitment, passion and remorse can also became their dilemmas, much like those of everyone else. The effort to remain consciously reclaim her sexual selves forces a lesbian to either confront her own sexuality, or in refusing, castigate lesbians as blasphemers of God and atrocious to nature.

Amrita like any other modern girl of Shobha De is ambitious, conscious and aware of her strength. She does not hesitate to capitalize on her blessings and believes in downing the world if possible. In an alien city, Bombay, she handles her affairs well, clinching some stunningly lucrative modeling assignments and unsettling the already established models with her winning performance. Bombay however proves a bit clumsy. She runs into Meenakshi Iyengar right in the beginning of her stay in Bombay and starts facing fearful turmoil in her hitherto balanced life. Minx, the lesbian sex monger, chases her and causes her deep anxieties.

Shobha De, however, depicts Amrita to be level headed and self-reliant. It is interesting to note how she gets into physical relationship with Rover. It all starts with a forced kiss that he implants on her but in that he wins her completely and despite the fact people warn her about Rover who is a ‘narcissistic bore’, she knows that she has to make relation with him. Such is the spell of his physical charm that she can’t resist him. In other words, Amrita’s sexual urge for Rover is so much that she decides to forget about its consequences and freely mates with him. It is quite obvious that knowing Rover’s nature, there is no dream in Amrita about a permanent relation with
him based on love. She has not even once been shown to experience anything tender like love for Rover. All she feels is an irresistible passion, which overwhelms her and drifts whenever she gets caught in a physical urge for him. She chooses to neglect an established social convention in order to bed with her lover who she knows treats him woman like dirt. She has already been told that he’ll use you and discard you.

Yet she goes for Rover, goes for having sex without any proper promise for stability in their relationship. This quite easily demonstrates to us the self-willed liberal girl, Amrita. She treats disdainfully the orthodox conventionality going by which she would certainly have reached for a stable if not permanent relation with Rover. But knowing full well that her affair with Rover is just a transitory phase in her life, she actively participates in her sexual escapades with him. This attitude of Amrita reminds us of a typical scorn which all of Shobha De’s heroine’s manifest. They seem prepared to dump the usual fascination for woman viz. dignity, morality and chastity Shobha De’s women usually take up a revolutionary role and are keen to cherish their passion rather than observing the familial or social decorum usually expected of a woman. Needless to mention that Alisha’s move bears the support of the author who advocates her free play of passions. To show the negative and unacceptable side of female sexuality, she portrays Minx, the crazy lesbian. Minx chases Amrita everywhere in Bombay, acts as the protector, promoter and lover, destroys Amrita’s business rivals and finally drags her into a lesbian relation with her. She is a wild woman of irresponsible emotions she is deceptive and dodgy and is prepared to play all the tricks of her sleeve to have Amrita in love with her. She disdains males and to justify her hatred for men she narrates the story how her own father raped her at the age of thirteen.
Though Minx’s father terms her as an extremely clever and manipulative liar and declines to have raped her, the reader is made to harbor the impression that her claims might be true. In fact throughout the novel, the reader vaguely sympathizes with Minx despite her weird obsession to possess Amrita and her bizarre fantasy to own her overwhelming though the character of Minx has apparently been created to highlight a negative side of feminism as she seems to have run to extremes to destroy the patriarchal maliast culture and its age old taboos, she too has her moments of glory. Minx, the psychic and obsessed lesbian of Shobha De, attempts to destabilize the continuing complacency in our views about sex and morality as she makes a speech that sound rationalistic and probing as she blurts out a sarcastic enquiry.

Considering this speech by Minx, it appears that the entire character portrayal of Minx is a humbug, as Shobha De seems to advocate clandestine lesbianism and goes out to prove it normal and perfectly acceptable. But she fails to summon up enough courage to put across her ideas boldly. That is why she paints Minx in darker colors as a girl. Who is just crazy and psychic? The sympathy and advocacy of the author is unmistakable in Minx’s action, behavior and speech. She appears to be one of her wandering women who would “prefer to identify themselves as radical lesbian feminist separatist.” Thus Shobha De’s women refuse to align themselves with the prevailing, partial male ideology. They essentially are the assertive women who, like Amrita and Minx often take up revolutionary roles and want to destroy the existing maliast social culture. In order to prove a point, these women resort to radical lesbianism or an unlimited sexual play with different males. The author corroborates the feelings of these women by depicting their sexual union with males in detail in her works. In fact the author is so overtly defiant that she does not hesitate in describing the copulation of even those women who are moderate feminists in her novels. The sexual
escapades of Amrita and Mikki in *Strange Obsession* and *Sisters* respectively substantiate such assumption.

Given an open defiance of women, the men in Shobha De’s works are usually submissive and timid. Their positions are usually marginalized and it is hardly any male who dominates the proceedings for a long time. It is true that Rover in *Strange Obsession* and Binny in *Sisters* fascinate and overpower Amrita and Mikki respectively for a while but it is never too late before the assertive women of Shobha De bounce back. Triumphantely Moreover, the author herself deprives the males from playing a significant part in her novels. Consequently we see the men whose authority has been defied and deflated by the women in Shobha De’s novel. The males in her novels are either lovable or ineffectual like Rakesh whom Amrita loves and marries but goes out to save him from the clutches of Minx rather than his saving her, or the disgustingly hollow and hypocritical like Binny Malhotra, Rover and Ram Kaka. These however are certain levelheaded males like, Shanay in *Sisters* and Karan in *Strange Obsession* who is virtuous but fail to control reality at any stage of the novels.

It is thus the world essentially carved and shaped by women in Shobha De’s novels. They debunk and defy the male hypocrisy and their supposed authority. Casting aside their submissiveness, they run to the extremes of being violently radical, defiantly uncompromising, overly promiscuous and even openly malicious. They revel in an uninhibited universe where the male is pushed into a corner a forced to live a secluded and subdued existence.

Urmila like Indu in *Roots and Shadows* and Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Jaya in *That Long Silence* goes through a journey from ignorance to knowledge through suffering, going through a process of introspection, self analysis and self-realization. Urmila emerges as a confident individual, fully in control of herself, significantly more hopeful and able to accept life just as they do. If Indu is a journalist, Saru a doctor
and Jaya is a successful writer and an aspiring novelist and Urmila a college teacher. In Shobha De’s novels Meenakshi (Minx) like Karuna in Socialite Evenings, Aasha Rani in Starry Nights and Mikki in Sisters goes through women’s struggle to assert her identity in the male dominated society. Strange obsession however a psycho-analytical approach has been made by the author understands the place of women in the male dominated society. If Karuna is interested in film, Asha Rani is a working in blue films and Mikki is interested in her father industries and Minx is interested in business

This novel The Binding Vine shows how the educated earning women there by inculcate the spirit of solidarity among women. The novel depicts the agony of a wife. Who is the victim of marital rape? In the novel Starry Nights her uncle sexually assaults Aasha Rani. A small girl Aasha Rani is met to hold his crotch in her hands till ejaculation. In Strange Obsession also Meenakshi’s can no longer stay away from the devilish intension of her father. She is raped and treated as wife’s substitute. At this point we are reminded of Alice Walker’s the color purple, where the father continued to exploited her only on the flimsy ground that her mother is unable to satisfy the sexual urges of her father but whereas the protagonist in the color purple gives birth to babies.

The Binding Vine is a normal analysis of several tragedies in the life of different women in the context of woman’s solidarity, Bell Hooks writes:

When woman actively struggle in a truly supportive way, to understand our differences to change misguided. Distorted perspective we lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity. Solidarity is not the same as support to experience solidarity. We must have a community of interests shared beliefs and goals around which to unite to build sisterhood.254
The Binding Vine is a work that should be read as a projection of such ideas as women solidarity, female bonding and value of sisterhood in a male dominated culture the basis for their bonding, however, being shared oppression and victimization.

Strange Obsession revolves around the life and lustful relationship of two young women, Amrita and Meenakshi. It seems to be a psychological documentation of sexual obsession of mysterious women.

In The Binding Vine there are five pairs of mother-daughter namely Inni-Urmi, Mira’s mother- Mira, Shakutai- Kalpana, Akka- Vanna and Vanna, Mandira and their relationship between them is based on some sort of misapprehension or dissention. They are suffering in different problems. But in Strange Obsession, Meenakshi and her friend Amrita only two characters are suffering from their own problems.

Urmi’s father was a dominant patriarch and a domineering husband he was the decision-Maker and instrumental in her displacement but Inni, Urmi’s mother had to bear the brunt and blame. She had to survive the rest of her life to make up for the loss of love for her daughter by being the over caring mother, bestowing too much affection over her, indifferent daughter.

But Meenakshi fails to get motherly love and care. All love and care that she gets from her father. She loves him so much that her love changes to obsession. She gets badly spoilt because of her father’s love, affection and pampering. Urmi is married woman but Meenakshi is lesbian her relation with her friend Amrita.

In The Binding Vine Shashi Deshpande shows every woman characters are struggle and suffer but the way’s are different. Protagonist of this play Urmi has recently lost her one year old baby daughter, Anu and has become highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. Another
woman of this novel Shakutai, whose daughter Kalpana lays in helpless state in a hospital after being brutally raped. Shakutai is deserted by her husband for another woman, though she is stunned from the marital bliss, though she is burdened to look after her children alone though she has suffered a lot, yet she is extremely anxious is get her daughter, Kalpana married and will settled. Somehow the unfortunate silent suffering mothers like Mira and Shakutai stand by their unfortunate daughters as they dare not defy the norms of the society. Bearing the burden of such a worthless husband and struggling all alone to provide good life for her children. She finds herself always pin pointed out as if something in the family goes wrong, she is made responsible

Mira’s mother remained distant on looker of her daughter drab existence and did nothing about Mira’s life she tells Urmila.

Sulu’s husband Prabhakar who had always lusted after Kalpana, this bitter truth shatters Sulu who immolates herself in guilty despair leaving behind her, her grief-stricken sister, Shakutai.

Mira’s married life was only a black clouded haunted night which she waited with dread. Mira dies in childbirth after four years of loveless marriage. Every day and every moment that she spends, there is cry of rape and anguish.

Vanna is a social worker Mandira her daughter fails to understand her mother compulsion problem in negotiating between family and profession and at same time. Vanna too, is unable to diagnose the tantrums of her daughter who really needs her mother’s presence affection attention and love of the world. Mandira never complain about her father Harish absence.

As same happens in Strange Obsession. Like Kalpana Minx was raped by her father she longs for physical relationship with her father. Her
father was denied sex because her mother was institutionalized. She feels it to be her moral duty to satisfy him, and after that her lesbian relation with Amrita. She approaches amrita and addresses her as sweet heart.

No other character in Shashi Deshpande earlier novels is so rebellious like Urmila. All her character, though independent to some extent are firmly bound by the shackles of tradition. The protagonists in the earlier novels though are aware of the inequalities in the society. They do not attempt to set them right. Urmila rejects Dr. Bhasker’s love and overtures for the longs to have the marital bliss. This strong decision was not be taken firmly by Shashi Deshpande’s other protagonists like Jaya, Saru and Indu. Indira Nityanandham observes:

*The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from the first three novels of Deshpande. Protest comes easily to her protagonists here and there is less agony in attempting to change social roles and attitudes. The hope for Indian women lies in the happy fact, that though here are Mira’s, Kalpana’s and Shakutai’s we also have our Urmila’s.  

And about *Strange Obsession* Shobha De has her own opinion regarding the novel. It is different from all her previous novels she writes:

For the past twenty-five years, I have been at the receiving end of a woman’s obsessive attention, while This person is not he psychotic Minx of the book, she is equally cunning and complex. I tried to get under the skin of such an individual whose each breath revolves around the existence of another in a manner so compulsive its terrifying. The book developed into a thriller at some point, with Minx meeting a fiery, end in real life, the woman who inspired Minx is still around. Still slaking, still obsessed… she no longer affects me, the old anger has disappeared. I received her dally blank calls with
far more equanimity than I used to ten years ago, when *Strange Obsession* was announced. She wrote me a long letter, fearing exposure and threatening suicide. The secret is safe, and will remain so till one of us dies and even after.256

Thus this novel too is based on the realities of life. Mikki struggles against her adverse circumstances trying to fulfill her needs and grow her personality according to hierarchy of needs she fails to achieve self actualization. She tries her best to overcome her insecurity but the intensity of her anxiety is so great that her balance collapses under it which leads to the complete disorientation of her personality.
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243. Ibid.,

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245. Ibid., p.68

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247. Ibid., p.93.

248. Ibid.,

249. Ibid., p.117.

250. Ibid.,

251. Ibid., p.122.

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