CHAPTER FOUR

SILENCE AND VOICE IN SHASHI DESHPANDE

No act is to be done according to (her) own will by a young girl, a young woman or even by an old woman, though in (their) homes. In her childhood (a girl) should be under the will of her father; in (her) youth, of (her) husband; her husband being dead, of her sons; a woman should never enjoy her own will.

Manu.

The above edicts of Manu have thus sealed the fate of women down the ages. Though there has been progressive development in various fields over the years, the social system in India is yet to see drastic changes with regard to the status of women. Inspite of enjoying the ever-increasing privileges, women still continue to be largely dominated by their husbands. They cannot aspire for anything more than what is allotted in life; that is, they continue to be insignificant, "the Other." The epigraph in The Dark Holds No Terrors (DHNT henceforth)-

You are your own refuge;
There is no other refuge.
This refuge is hard to achieve.

Taken from "The Dhammapada," this passage explicitly shows "the culmination of the drift of thought and growing perception of Shashi Deshpande's central women characters" (Dinesh 196) not only in DHNT but also in That Long Silence (TLS) and The Binding Vine (BV) taken for analysis in this chapter.

Though Saritha (called Saru in DHNT), Jaya (TLS) and Mira (BV) constitute different worlds- yet through them, Shashi Deshpande charts in a fictionalised version the unacknowledged private world of women.
To begin with, Saru (DHNT) is a respected medical practitioner having her own source of income. As a result, she is assured of a comfortable life for herself and her family. Her life with Manohar (Manu in the novel) has an unpropitious beginning. Having always had her say right from joining medical college in Bombay, Saru leaves home in a huff to marry a man of her own choice. Marrying the low caste Manu is an act of defiance and signifies a permanent break in her relationship with her mother. But in order to prove her mother wrong, "I know all these 'love marriages.' It's love for a few days, then quarrels all the time. Don't come crying to us then" (DHNT 69), Saru takes a vow never to return to her parents, inspite of her failed marriage. She refuses to admit her miscalculations and accept her defeat, because her mother had warned her- "Don't come crying to us then" (69). She tells herself: "That's the one thing I'll never do. Never" (69). But when she decides to visit her father after hearing the news of her mother's passing away, Saru acknowledges the truth of what her mother had predicted, which signifies her defeat.

Saru becomes bitter towards her mother because she feels her mother has stifled her growth. Whatever opportunities her middle class background provided for happiness and personal expansion, was spiked, Saru feels, by the oppressive dominance of her mother. As a result, when her mother objects to her marrying Manu, Saru defies her authority.

What caste is he?
I don't know.
A Brahmin?
Of course not.
Then, cruelly...his father keeps a cycle shop.
Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they? (96)

P.Ramamoorthi opines: "The departure of the heroine from the mother is the first step towards autonomy; for the mother is the first pedagogue of
the do's and the don'ts on the woman. Marriage the first promised end in a traditional society, in feminist fiction becomes the only other enclosure that restricts the movement towards autonomy and self-realization" ("A Study of Shashi Deshpande's women" 41). But when her marriage with Manu fails, she blames her mother. "If you hadn't fought me so bitterly, if you hadn't been so against him, perhaps I would never have married him" (DHNT 96).

Although it may not be wholly true that Saru's mother was responsible for her marriage with the mediocre Manu, there is certainly an element of truth in what Saru feels. In the Indian scenario, the little girl learns early that she is different from her male sibling. Saru in the novel is no exception. She grows up as a victim of her mother's sexist and gender-based bias. Even as a child, she is aware of her mother's preference for her brother Dhruva. He gets the preferential treatment because he is the propagator of his parent's lineage and also their means of salvation, unlike the daughter whose destiny is to get married and leave home.

Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can't.

And Dhruva?

He's different. He's a boy. (45)

Leela Dube observes in Socialization, Education and Women: Explorations in Gender Identity: "Gender roles are conceived, enacted and learnt with a complex of relationships" (qtd. in "The Girl Child in the Fiction of Shashi Deshpande" 247).
So, when Dhruva dies in an accident, her mother's first reaction is: "...why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead?" (DHNT 34-35). Hearing this time and again, Saru "alienates herself from her parents and identifies herself with the loveless, the unhappy and the forsaken" (Singh 104). In a confused state of mind she leaves home not wanting to associate herself with people who hold her responsible for her brother's accidental death. She declares-"I had come away from my parents in a fever of excitement after the last battle. The die was cast, the decision taken, my boats burnt. There could be no turning back" (DHNT 37).

Had Saru's mother cared for her son Dhruva, Saru's condition would have been certainly better. Even if she had decided to marry Manu at all costs, she could have been spared the trauma of sexual abuse every night. "...I would not have been here, cringing from the sight of letters, fighting with terror at the sight of his handwriting, hating him yet pitying him too" (96).

When her friend Manda and her husband Vasant come to her clinic for consultation, Saru feels envious of Manda. Having consented to marry a man of her parent's choice, Manda is a contented woman. She had everything that a woman looks forward to in a marriage, unlike Saru who had not experienced anything in her life. The text is a case in point.

The mother, stuffing one more dirty nappy into her capacious bag, was indifferent. But Manda, her anxiety about the child temporarily allayed, was taking it all in eagerly. Drama. Something her own life lacked, perhaps. A husband chosen by her parents. A wedding in the midst of approving relations. Bowing down dutifully to all of them. Receiving their blessings. A child at the first lawful moment. In laws and parents, proud and approving. Grandparents, uncles and aunts for the child who slept in her arms. (25)
The saddest part of it all is that Saru cannot complain to anybody of the unhappiness she experiences in her married life.

As long as she remains with her parents, Saru constantly has to fight the battle of supremacy, because of the special treatment meted out to her brother Dhruba. Marriage therefore becomes the only means to get away from her mother and her home. P. Ramamoorthi notes that in order to achieve freedom, women seek "marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. She resents the role of a daughter and looks forward to the role of a wife with the hope that her new role will help her in winning the freedom" (43). But Saru's condition is indeed pathetic. Her marriage with Manu holds her no promises either, except for a brief spell of conjugal benevolence. The words, "battle," "die cast," "decisions taken" and "boats burnt," indicate that the heroine has taken a significant step, which proves to be an anticlimax, like Caliban becoming the slave of Stephano and Trinquilo. So in a way, Saru's second home becomes another prison she had escaped (43). Her remark best describes her situation- "Then, this ridiculous anticlimax. To defy your parents and family, to resolve to get married in spite of them, and then to be obstructed by the lack of a home!"(DHNT 37).

Saru chooses to marry Manu because Manohar had "an aura of distinction" about him in college as a promising poet and as the effective Secretary of the Literary Association, Debating Union and Dramatic society. He leaves a strong impression on the young Saru who's awestruck seeing him directing a play with ease. Her admiration of Manu gives him the necessary confidence and his unreserved response in turn pleases her ego. She feels ecstatic winning Manu because she sees it as a victory over the glamorous Padmini, her college mate. But the life that they begin together "eventually becomes a power race of two egoistic people in which she overtakes him effortlessly" (Paul 63). All the romantic notions
disappear after marriage. In a short while, Saru realises that Manu is no "Shelley" after all and that he is "totally burnt out" (63). She sums up her situation very clearly in mathematical terms: "a+b they told us in mathematics is equal to b+a. But here a+b was not, definitely not, equal to b+a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible" (DHNT 42). Her respect for him wanes and she recognizes him to be a failure. The more she realises that Manu has absolutely no reservations about considering his wife as an equal, she begins working hard. She becomes more alert about her career and even more intense about her work.

When Saru successfully treats patients who are injured in a factory explosion, neighbours who had till then not paid attention to her, begin to cast appreciative glances whenever she passes by them. Slowly, she becomes a respectable person in the neighbourhood. Patients begin to queue outside her house and as days go by, Manu realises that the knock at the door is for Saru and not for him any longer.

The next evening, I had scarcely got home when there was a knock at the door. Manu opened it. I heard him ask, 'Yes?' A woman's voice replied, 'Is the doctor at home?' There was a pause, and Manu called out, 'Saru, someone wants you'.... The next day it happened again. 'Is the doctor at home?' And the day after. And the day after that.

And there came a day when, hearing a knock at the door, Manu said, 'Open it, Saru, it must be for you.' (41)

This brings about the first rift in Saru's marriage. Although there are indicators, Saru overlooks them in a fever of excitement. The urge to succeed blinds her eyes. She fails to perceive the changes in Manu's behaviour.
I could not see his face, I was washing up the tea things then, but his tone was certainly odd. An affected indifference... yes, now I know that is what was in his tone then. But I did not stop at that time to ponder over his tone. I was too busy, I was too tired, I was too exhilarated with the dignity and importance that my status as a doctor seemed to have given me. I was young and callow, and so unused to my profession still, that to have real patients come to me gave me a thrill I could scarcely hide. (41-42)

Premila Paul notes:

Saru is highly self-willed and her problems ensue because of her outsized ego and innate love for power over others.... As a child Saru had seen the predicament of the grandmother separated from her cruel husband and considered 'an unwanted burden' by her own people. From then on, economic independence becomes a goal in life, which Saru took to be an insurance against subordination or suppression. Every move in life is towards the realization of that goal. (61)

The more successful she becomes in her profession; Saru's marriage begins to crumble under the burden of success. Apart from making Manu smaller in stature, she never finds time for herself and her family (husband and children). This upsets the family life. The acknowledgements and greetings that she receives infuriate him. He cannot openly express it but says out of irritation: "I'm sick of this place. Let's get out of here soon" (DHNT 42).

Manu is dependent on Saru for the basic luxuries in life. He knows for certain that with his meagre income, their children cannot be educated in the best schools. But the "financial ascendance" of Saru, at the same time renders Manu impotent (Sandhu 85). On the other hand, even though
Saru earns more than Manu, she still feels stripped off her independence by virtue of being assigned the job of a housewife, that is taking care of the children and serving the husband. Tired of constantly working, she wants to give up her professional life. She tells Manu: "'Manu, I want to stop working. I want to give it all up...my practice, the hospital, everything'" (DHNT 79).

Manu's reaction to Saru's proposal is that of shock. He shuddered at her suggestion of giving up her job because he knows for sure that the family cannot be run with his salary. Moreover, having been used to comforts ever since she begins her practice, Manu does not want to go back to their earlier lifestyle.

'You what?'

....

'I said I want to stop working.'

'You're joking.'

....

'And how will we live?'

....

'Why, on....'

....

'On my salary? Come on, Saru, don't be silly. You know how much I earn. You think we can live this way on that?

....

...We did without all this once, didn't we?

'Yes, we did. But now? Can you bear to send the children to a third-rate school? To buy them the cheapest clothes, the cheapest of everything? To save and scrape and still have nothing after the first few days of the month? No, Saru, there can be no going back. We have to go on.' (79-81)
Although Saru's condition seems genuine, we doubt the credibility of her confession. She proposes to stop working only to appease Manu and thereby save her marriage. "I saw that the glaze that had come over his eyes had lifted infinitesimally. Was this the right method of appeasement then? If only I knew the right way..." (79).

The burden of double duties makes her married life a dull and a drab affair. Gradually the love and attachment, which Saru experienced earlier, disappears. But on the night Saru proposes to quit working, Manu becomes considerate. They decide to go on a vacation so that a change of place would do Saru a world of good. However, an insignificant incident sparks off tension in their lives.

While shopping for their vacation, they meet a colleague of Manu. He and his wife have been dreaming of going to Matheran for years but never could, because of financial constraints. Upon hearing Manu and Saru's plan for a vacation, the colleague's wife passes a caustic remark: "If you had married a doctor,'...you'd have gone to Ooty too' " (111). Upon hearing this, Manu's colleague says: "'Ooty? I'd go further...London, Paris, Rome, Geneva' "(111). Though at that moment Manu appears undisturbed and drives back in silence, he begins to degenerate from then on. It's a great blow to him and his pride is hurt. She "was the lady doctor" and he, her husband (42). He finds it very difficult to play a second fiddle to his wife.

The second incident which shatters their marriage completely is when a girl interviews Saru for a special issue on career women. When Manu walks into the room during the course of the interview, the interviewer asks him: "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the bread but most of the bread as well?" (200). This question undermines Manu's confidence greatly. It has far-reaching results. Though the three of them laugh at that moment, Manu becomes a beast in bed. Her trauma
becomes explicit from her confession to her father- "He attacked me'..."He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this. This man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body' " (201).

The lover in Manu dies when the neighbours wake up to the fact that Saru is an important doctor and not just a housewife. But with the interview, the tension between husband and wife reaches the point of culmination. Unable to come to terms with the fact that he is a failure, Manu expresses himself in the most disgusting way: Rape. Bed is the only place where he can assert his animal power over her. As a result, Saru suffers in silence her husband's sexual abuse.

I woke up to darkness and an awareness of fear. Panic. Then pain. There it was, for the second time, what I had just lulled myself into believing was just a nightmare. The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body. And above me, a face I could not recognise. Total non-comprehension, complete bewilderment, paralyzed me for a while. Then I began to struggle. But my body, hurt and painful, could do nothing against the fearful strength, which overwhelmed me. My mind, fluttering, threw itself despairingly on the walls of unbelief and came back staggering, bruised and spent. (111-112)

Since Manu appears very normal during the day, Saru wonders if she had a dream. The first time it had happened, Saru woke up in the morning, feeling different. "The same face smiling at me the next morning, saying, 'Morning, Saru. Slept well?' "(112). But the bruises in her body clearly indicate that she had been assaulted the previous night.

It was part of the same pattern that had mystified her from the day it began...his cheerfulness the next morning, his air of
being as usual. The complete, total normality. She had almost
given up trying to put the two men together, the fearful
stranger of the night, and the rather pathetic Manu of other
times. But it never ceased to frighten her, this dichotomy. (96)
She is terrified of what would happen to her in the darkness of the night,
and is certain it would be better to court death rather than endure this
torture every day.

Thinking of how she could do nothing against his maniac
strength. Of the children in the next room who pinioned her to
a terrified silence. And when it was over, thinking, ...I can't, I
won't endure this any more. I'd rather die. I can't go on. (99)

It terrifies and humiliates Saru so much that she cannot speak about
it to anyone, even to Manu. She should have confronted him the very first
day, but she fails to do so. "I should have spoken about it the very first day.
But I didn't. And each time it happens and I don't speak, I put another brick
on the wall of silence between us. Maybe one day I will be walled alive
within it and die a slow, painful death" (96). Although there is a drive to
confide in someone, Saru never ventilates herself. She patiently endures
the pain she is subjected to, though she contemplates exposing Manu,
either to Professor Kulkarni, or to a lawyer.

She had thought of saying it to a lawyer, any lawyer, chosen
at random, when once, in a moment of desperation, she had
walked up and down on a road, reading the names of lawyers
on ancient boards. Nerving herself to enter, to say...

Can I divorce my husband?

Any reasons?

He's cruel.

How? Will you be specific. Please give details.
At that point the dialogue...unreal maybe, in any case, for surely no lawyer talked like that...came to an end. (96-97)

Saru is one who watches in disgust women schooled into silence. She is sickened by women who are "bound by tradition and myth" to keep their silence intact and appear pleasant always (Dinesh 198). But when she reaches a point when she cannot tolerate the pain any further, Saru remains silent like the women whom she despises. Saru does not accept the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a woman's existence is her husband, and expects her friends to take over the reins at some point, but when the option of divorce or exposing her sadist husband is available to her, Saru remains quiet.

Saru remains silent, as she wants to give her children all that she herself lacked in her childhood. The sexual assaults of her husband lead Saru to think of divorce a number of times. But the thought of a broken home for her growing children pains her. She reconsiders her decision, and is cautious not to let her children know of her problem with Manu. Moreover the vow she takes while leaving home (never to return), forbids her to accept defeat.

In a while, Saru begins to foretell the days she's likely to be subjected to rape. She interprets the events that eventually lead Manu to behave in the manner he does. Not only does she begin to understand the signs; her children too notice the change in the atmosphere. But Saru is relieved to know that the children do not perceive a change in their parent's relationship.

Recently, as if she had become psychic, she knew, hours earlier, that it would be one of those days. Nights, rather. Psychic? No, perhaps it was something infinitely more prosaic. Signs and portents she had become clever at
understanding. His silence. A heavy, dull, brooding silence, following immediately after a spurt of gaiety. (DHNT 99)

Over a period of time, Saru starts hating the man-woman relationship, which is based on attraction and need, and not love.

Love...how she scorned the world now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against, futilely, the very futility turning into the thing they called 'love': It's only a word, she thought. Take away the word, the idea, and the concept will wither away.

(72)

What is surprising to note is that it is the word "Love" which binds Saru and Manu in holy matrimony. It was because of the lack of love at home that Saru was drawn to Manu. She confesses: "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" (40). But from a blindly adoring female, Saru slowly becomes a woman who begins to despise her husband for his mannerisms.

When she meets her dignified and self-reliant friend Nalu, Saru desperately wants to take her into confidence. Nalu was a friend from college who preferred to remain single rather than getting entangled in meaningless relationships like marriage. Fully dedicated to work, Nalu is confident, overbearing and a dogmatic woman. Saru is however scared to confide because she thinks that Nalu might place her in the category of one among the many housewives she knows of.

I could talk to Nalu about my problems and maybe she would understand better than most people would. But her, I would be a woman, my problems a part of women's problems. But this is mine, Saru's, and has as much to do with what I am, apart
from my being a woman. It's not only I, it's Manu and I, and how we react against each other.

And so once again, silence was the only answer. (121)

In other words, sharing the most intimate details about her life with an outsider like Nalu does not appeal to Saru.

At this critical juncture of her life, Saru learns about her mother's death. Taking this as an excuse, she goes home to see her father. She feels out of place initially, but quickly adjusts herself to the rhythm of the house in a couple of days. She comes home with a firm resolve to talk to her father about her failing marriage but finds it impossible. She is desperate for help but she finds declaration of her personal life, indecent. To Saru, it's like disrobing in public. She also has the fear that by sharing she would be unlocking the door of a room wherein someone is murdered.

That by opening that door, she would be revealing to the world the pathetic, lifeless body of the victim, grotesque in an enforced death. And, her greatest fear was that they would all know the dead body to be his, her husband's. They would know too what she herself did...that it was she who was the murderer. (44)

Dhruva's birth anniversary offers her an occasion to express herself. After pondering over the accidental nature of Dhruva's death, Saru triumphantly tells her father: "'I've forgotten him...' Completely. I don't ever think of him' " (180). Though her father wishes to brush the ugly episode from their lives, Saru insists that her father listen to what happened on the day of the accident.

'No, I never took him out anywhere. It was he who pestered me, followed me. He fell in himself. And both of you found me guilty without really knowing what had happened. Did you ask me once, just once...What happened, Saru? Did you
say just once...Don't think of it. It wasn't your fault. Don't blame yourself. And it wasn't. Really and truly it wasn't. Look, I'll swear it to you. Will you believe me then? I didn't take him out with me that day.' (182-183)

At the end of her narration, she convinces herself by saying "I didn't do it" (183), although she herself is not certain if she made any attempts to save her drowning brother.

The day after she discloses the incident, Saru's father confronts her saying: "'You're quite wrong in imagining that we blamed you for his death' "(193). On hearing this, Saru is eager to know if her mother felt the same. But she is disheartened when she learns that her mother died silently without mentioning her name even once.

'But she did?'

'Maybe. That was her weakness. Call it her fault. Can't you forgive her for that now?'

'Did she say anything about me when...before dying?'

'Nothing. She died silently.' (193)

Saru is filled with remorse when she hears that her mother died without forgiving her. She cannot accept the fact that her mother had successfully erased Saru from her household except for a photograph. She feels her mother must have retained the photograph because it had Dhruva in it too. Premila Paul points out: "The refusal to see the doctor daughter even while dying of cancer reiterates the idea of total rejection. Saru's obsessive remembrance of the mother is indicative of both her sense of guilt and her sense of defeat. Death seals off all possibilities of straightening things" (66). It is at this point, Saru bursts out crying. She holds her mother responsible for her unhappy marriage. She believes that her mother's curse has ruined her life completely. She reveals to her father what Prof. Kulkarni tells her...how her mother reacted when he visited her.
'She said..."Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless.'

....

...I will pray for your unhappiness. Let her know more sorrow than she has given me.' *(DHNT 196,197)*

What Kulkarni reveals in a casual, unconcerned manner clearly suggests that Saru's mother had totally rejected her. She equates her mother's silence at the time of her death, to a curse. "She cursed me, Baba'...'Even her silence at the end was a curse. And you say she died peacefully'...Can't you understand, Baba, that it's because she cursed me that I am like this?' " *(197).* Hearing her accusing his dead wife, Saru's father is annoyed. It's only when he repeatedly questions Sam, does she break her silence. She simply blurts out: "My husband is a sadist' " *(199).*

Belonging to the older generation, Saru's father finds it difficult to comprehend the problem. When she prepares to leave for Bombay upon receiving a letter from her son Abhi, informing her about Manu's arrival, Baba asks her not to run away. He urges her to confront reality. He does not see running away from Manu as a solution. He asks Saru to face Manu, talk to him her problem and weigh her options then.

'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.'

....

'I can't, Baba. I can't.

'Saru,'...don't do it again.'

....

'But now I'm appealing to you. Don't go without meeting your husband. Talk to him. Tell him what's wrong.'

'And then?
'And then? It's up to you, isn't it? (216-217)

Prabhat K. Singh points out: "It is here that the real purgation of the inner darkness takes place. And the most needed wisdom that finally enlightens Saru and injects a life-blood into her otherwise dying veins also comes from the father" (108). He requests Saru not to commit the mistake he made while her mother was alive. "Do you know, Saru, I often feel sorry that we left so many things unsaid, your mother and I. When she lay dying I wanted to ask her...Would you like to meet Saru? Sometimes I think she might have said, "Yes." But I never did. Silence had become a habit for us" (DHNT 199). He tells Saru: "...you can't go on like this..." (204). He emphasizes the need to talk, express one's ideas rather than simply be mute. Talking to one another puts a lot of things in perspective, according to Saru's father.

Hence he puts all the responsibility on Saru's shoulders and distances himself from her family affairs. Saru feels desolate and terrified at the thought of her father's withdrawal- "I'm tired, so very tired. I really don't know how I can go on. If only I could end it all..." (217). But then the reality slowly dawns on her- "Perhaps the only truth is that man is born to be cold and lonely and alone" (219).

It is ironic that the father whom Saru had always thought of as indifferent and who "avoided things. The truth. Facts. Life. Confrontation" (198), is the one who ultimately urges her to confront Manu. He urges her to confide in him rather than withholding things within her. "What is it, Saru? Why don't you tell me what it is?" (198). Saru is surprised by what she hears and repeatedly confirms if he would like to hear what she's undergoing. "I know you're my father and I'm your daughter and there's nearly thirty years between us, but still... you're a man and I'm a woman. Can we talk of such things?" (199).
She realises that she alone can fashion her life. She touches the core of the problem when she says: "My life is my own...If I have been a puppet it is because I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since distinguished because I have been afraid of proving my mother right" (220). Moreover, the nightmarish afternoon of Dhruva's death is atoned for when Madhav becomes seriously ill. Saru takes complete charge of him, as a doctor. And Madhav though a boy, shows her the way. He makes his choice without any hesitation: "I can't spoil my life because of that boy. It's my life, after all" (208).

Kamini Dinesh notes:

Saru reaches this stage after progressions and regressions-thinking of the failure of communication of her father and mother barricaded by walls of silence, angered by what she felt were the devious ways of Manu to approach her through Abhi's letter-till finally there is a reaching out of the self to those who need her, compassion for Baba, concern for the sick child and the need to communicate with her husband who has waited in the wings. This is a movement in the direction of a revitalised relationship. (204)

Throughout her life Saru has avoided confrontations. "By avoiding open discussion she attempts a black out of an experience that lies between reality and unreality. Her reluctance to switch on the light in the early morning signifies her lingering in the dubious state awaiting solution to dawn on it's own" (Paul 75). But the permission to let Manu into the house indicates that Saru is ready to face challenges in life. She realises that escapism is no permanent solution and that the answer to her problem lies in talking things out. It is here that the significance of the epigraph becomes evident.
Just as Saru learns to make the choice towards the end, Jaya in That Long Silence (TLS, for short), also realises that she has no one to blame for her failure in life except herself. "Yes, I have been scared, scared of breaking through that thin veneer of a happy family" (TLS 191). Reading Lord Krishna's advice to Arjuna in her father's diary, Jaya realises the importance of choice in life. "I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire" (192).

But realisation dawns on Jaya only after seventeen years of her married life. Her predicament in TLS is similar to Saru's (DHNT), but the heroines inhabit different worlds. Unlike Saru (who is a popular doctor), Jaya is an ordinary housewife contented with the income her husband brings home every month. In her anxiety to fulfil her roles of a wife and a mother, as in the advertisements ("Those cosy, smiling, happy fingers in their gleaming homes spelt sheer poetry to me. For me, they were the fairy tales in which people 'live happily ever after'"), Jaya submits herself to the whims of her husband and in no time, becomes the "trodden worm" (6). Life with Mohan and her two children, Rahul and Rati, becomes monstrous, with hardly any spice in their existence. Although she appears a contented woman, Jaya secretly wishes for a "catastrophe" in their lives, so that this "unending monotony" (4) which is driving her crazy would finally come to a stop.

...I had sighed for a catastrophe, a disaster, no, not a personal one, but anything to shake us out of our dull grooves. (The eight-planet configuration, which they had said presaged a disaster, had roused my hopes once). Why was it, I had often wondered, that wars always took place in other countries, tidal waves and earthquakes occurred in far-off, unknown places in other people's lives, never in ours? (4)
As if her prayers were answered, the disaster she hopes for comes in the form of an inquiry commission in Mohan's office. Caught in a shady deal, Mohan stands in the threshold of losing his job. In order to avoid being questioned, Mohan moves to Dadar with Jaya leaving behind their comfortable Churchgate apartment. Jaya is in no mood to leave their house, but being a "pair of bullocks yoked together" in holy matrimony; Jaya relocates to the flat left behind by her brother. Within a short period, Jaya's life is thrown out of gear. Her daily routine becomes largely altered and she finds ample time to introspect her life with Mohan. As Adele King opines: "Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who really is" (qtd. in "The Image of Woman in That Long Silence" 138).

Jaya, unlike Saru in DHNT, has everything that a woman needs to live comfortably in life. But to achieve all that she has so far, she has systematically suppressed every aspect of her personality that refused to fit into the groove- of wife and mother. Raised and given in marriage to a traditional household with strong moral bindings, Jaya finds it difficult to voice her grievances against Mohan.

'The one who finds the coin first rules the other at home,' the women of Mohan's family had told us, laughing, before initiating us into one more of these inane post-wedding ceremonial games. As we had begun, a mound of rice in a plate between us, I had deliberately dawdled, my fingers scarcely moving, while his had scrabbled frantically through the grains, groping for the coin. But it was I who had found the silver rupee first. Which means nothing really, for he has been no worm either. (TLS 6-7)

As a result, when Mohan stands the possibility of losing his well-paid job, Jaya is at once reminded of the army wives, Mohan had pointed
out to her. The wives become destitute because their husbands are arrested for improper conduct, while on duty. M. Rajeshwari points out Sudhir Kakar's views on the subject.

In the Indian context it is instructive to understand why Mohan has resorted to corrupt means of making money... Super-ego, the moral agency, is weakly differentiated and insufficiently idealised in Indians. Whereas in the West, individual's behaviour is constantly regulated by what he calls "communal conscience." He explains that communal Conscience, which comprises family and jati norms "is a social rather than an individual formation: it is not 'inside' the psyche. In other words, instead of having one internal sentinel an Indian relies on many external 'watchmen' to patrol his activities and especially his relationships in all the social hierarchies." This creates a situation in which clandestine infringement of moral and social norms is a thing not to be much worried about. In this light "dishonesty, nepotism and corruption as they are understood in the West are merely abstract concepts" for an Indian. It is the primacy of relationships that pervades through the life of an average Indian rather than primacy of healthy social values. (47)

Jaya is in a similar predicament like that of the army wives, unsure of the outcome of the enquiry commission. When Mohan passes disparaging remarks on the officers for letting down their families, Jaya is urged to retaliate but remains silent. Silence becomes her "natural condition" (Swain 98).

Those words of Mohan...perhaps I should have reminded him of them the day he told me what he had done and what was likely to happen to us. I should have thrown his own words
back at him, paid him back for years of submission- the trodden worm turning. (TLS 6)

So when Mohan puts forth the proposal of moving to their Dadar flat, Jaya follows him, without complaining. Schooled into thinking that a husband is all knowing, she follows her aunt's advice religiously: "'Remember, Jaya,'...a husband is like a sheltering tree'" (32). Her married life has been lived almost on the same lines as the sparrows. She has built an edifice of security around herself and her family so that no harm comes to her. She believes it to be a burrow, which could offer her shelter anytime. Like a worm that crawls into its hole for safety, Jaya hides behind a mask: "Even a worm has a hole it can crawl into. I had mine-as Mohan's wife, as Rahul and Rati's mother" (148). Attending to the needs of her husband and children becomes her full-time occupation. As a result, she finds she has obliterated that self in her, which as a child, was "heady with excitement of finding unexpected resources within herself". In fact, she claims to Mohan that she knows him much better than what he knows of himself." 'I know you better than you know yourself,' I had once told Mohan. And I had meant it; wasn't he my profession, my career, my means of livelihood?" (75). For over seventeen years she follows the 'Sita-ideal' without rhyme or reason not wishing to strain her relationship with Mohan.

I remember now that he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails...

No, what have I to do with these mythical women? I can't fool myself. The truth is simpler. Two bullocks yoked together...it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction.
To go in different directions would be painful; and what animal would voluntarily choose pain? (11-12)

Swain in "The Unruffled Stream: Jaya in That Long Silence" notes: "She (referring to Jaya) knows there is pain in hostility and anguish and agony and in rebellions hence she adopts a subaltern and subservient altitude" (99-100). Inspite of being aware of the pain, Jaya wishes to break free because she never feels safe when yoked. "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you're safe. That poor idiotic woman Suhasini believed in this. I know better now. I know that safety is always unattainable. You're never safe" (TLS 17).

Saru's marriage with Manu in DHNT and her status in society as a doctor fail to secure her the freedom she hankers for. It is for independence that she defies her mother and leaves home. Similarly Jaya is also an educated woman who is constantly reminded of her father that she is extraordinary and unique. As a result, she is a misfit in Mohan's tradition-bound family. She feels suffocated and trapped in the traditional Sita-role defined in patriarchal society. She refuses to surrender her name Jaya (meaning victory), tor Suhasini, given to her by her husband Mohan at the time of her marriage. Adesh Pal points out: "Her rejection of the name Suhasini shows her resistance to the stereotyping that is inflicted on women in India" (77). Commenting on this aspect of assigning a different name during the time of marriage, Subhash Chandra notes: "A common Indian practice is to give a new name to the girl on the day of the wedding. This social practice seeks to supersede or supplant the identity of the woman. This is in sharp contrast to the continuity, nay, reinforcing of the same, familiar identity of the male- an identity which is the product of the patriarchal ethos" (149-150).

However Jaya's victory is only temporary. Having been tutored that a husband is a tree of protection, a security, she gives in. She shuts her
door firmly from outside darkness and disaster and confines herself to the straightjacket role of a traditional wife, repressing her resentment. "...I was Jaya. But I had been Suhasini as well. I can see her now, the Suhasini who was distinct from Jaya, a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped" (TLS 15-16).

In Jaya's case, expression of anger is not a direct outburst as it is with Saru. The first and only time she bursts out is soon after her marriage. Full of nausea during her first pregnancy, Jaya asks Mohan to cook. Mohan is highly amused by her suggestion, because he thinks that it is not his job. Jaya sarcastically remarks: "I'm sure you cook well. After all, your mother was a cook" (81). This quarrel like "A first love, a first affair, a first baby" (81) takes a heavy toll on Mohan. He withdraws into a shell shortly after this. Jaya argues with him, flinging "accusations wildly" because Mohan rages wildly: "My mother a cook? Who told you that?" (81). He makes clear in equivocal terms, Jaya's place in the family."My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her" (83).

Used to throwing tantrums for the simplest of things Jaya slowly learns to control her anger. At home, her tantrums were simply a matter of amusement. But with Mohan it was different. He keeps repeatedly telling her what she told him: "How could you? I never thought my wife could say such things to me. You're my wife..." (82). She realises what her anger had done to him. "It had shattered him" (82). From this moment on, Jaya adopts the strategy of silence, and withdraws under it. She turns the direction of anger on herself and her anger eventually becomes self-destructive. Subhash Chandra notes: "Should this be a potent enough reason or argument for Jaya to follow suit? But Jaya does follow suit" ("Silent No More: A Study of That Long Silence" 153).
Unlike her parental home, the roles in her husband’s home are clearly defined. When Prema, Mohan’s sister, finds a button missing in her brother’s shirt, she remarks,” ‘Mohan, you have a button missing’ ”(TLS 83). Used to her mother’s "slapdash ways," Jaya is in a position where she cannot even hem properly. It takes a while for her to understand that Prema’s and Sudha’s conversation with her husband was meant to be "a reproach"...for not discharging her duties as a wife (84).

To me it had seemed a conversation between Prema and Mohan, nothing to do with me at all. And so I had been silent even when Sudha, a spoilt and pert girl, had added, 'Poor Monnanna, looks like he'll have to fix his own button.'

'Certainly not!' Prema had retorted. 'Here, Mohan, give it to me.'

It had not occurred to me that this too had been intended as a reproach, even though Prema had made it explicit by raking me from head to toe...

....

These women of Mohan’s family were right, I had decided. I would pattern myself after them. (83-84)

Apart from learning the "womanly" things, Jaya learns the ways to please her husband. She dresses according to Mohan’s preferences; in fact she cuts her hair like the way he asks her to. Seeing her tresses chopped off, her mother cries out in disbelief. But what Jaya tells her, silences her.

And so, in a few days, I had cut my hair, up to here, like Mehra’s wife (and Gupta’s wife, and Yadhav’s wife, and Ramana’s wife). And Ai had cried and said, 'Have you gone mad? All your lovely hair!'

'Mohan wanted me to cut it.'

'Mohan!' (96)
Mohan's position demands socialising but his tastes are beyond his means. Jaya reminds him that they cannot afford such a lifestyle. But her arguments are met with caustic remarks that ultimately silence her.

...Why don't you make yourself a nice housecoat—you know, like the one the M.D's daughter wears. I've seen her in the garden with it, it looks very nice.'

'Like the M.D's daughter! My God, do you know how much that would cost? She can afford it on her daddy's pay, I certainly can't!'

Was it then that Mohan had cried out, 'It's not fair!'? (61)

One other incident, which shows Jaya suppressing her desire, is her love for light music. In the very beginning of the novel, Jaya tries to reason out with her father as to why she should not listen to the songs of Rafi and Lata broadcast on the radio. But when she marries Mohan, she does not object to what he dismisses as worthless. Jaya enjoys watching "the snug, maternal and affection-laden" advertisements preceding the movies, but does not let her husband know because he considers watching them a waste of time (Chandra 148). Sarabjit Sandhu points out— "Social conformity has always been more obligatory for a woman than for a man. Generally, a woman's identity tends to be defined by others. Due to her sensitive nature, Jaya is very particular about moulding her tastes in order to suit those of the rest even if her superior intellect is not satisfied" (141).

What surprises the readers is how Jaya is totally transformed from a "fiercely independent girl" to that of one who is "nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support" (TLS 76). This is probably why there is hardly any communication between Jaya and Mohan, be it verbal or emotional. Mohan wanted an well-educated and cultured wife, not a reciprocating and loving one. So he resolved to marry Jaya when he saw her speaking English fluently. "You know, Jaya, the first day I met you at
your Ramukaka's house, you were talking to your brother Dinkar, and somehow you sounded so much like that girl, I think it was at that moment that I decided I would marry you' " (90). On hearing what Mohan says, Jaya is amazed at these "precise ideas" that men have about marriage. This revelation only proves that education is reduced to an added 'virtue' in winning the groom's approval.

Coming to the physical relationship between husband and wife, it is again the case of a dominating husband and a suffering wife. Like Saru in DHNT who gives herself up "unconditionally, unreservedly", Jaya also enters matrimony with certain preconceived ideas. An incurable romantic that she is, she thinks her relationship with Mohan would be either 'Raj Kapoor and Nargis' kind or 'Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr' variety. She depends on her husband's approval for every single action. In the early days of marriage, it is an "agony" for Jaya " to be without him."She muses: "...his desires, his approval, his love, had seemed to be the most important thing in my life?"(95). To Saru and Jaya, to love their husbands and be loved by them is real happiness. But Mohan's treatment of Jaya is far from what she gives him. Even when he hurts her while making love, Jaya does not say so. She simply endures the pain. The dialogue that transpires between them only goes to show that their's not "a natural and harmonious relationship" (Sandhu 140) because none seem to be comfortable expressing their feelings for each other.

... we had never spoken of sex at all. It had been as if the experience was erased each time after it happened; it never existed in words. The only words between us had been his question, 'Did I hurt you?' and my answer, 'No.' Each time after it was over, the same question; and my reply too, invariably the same-'No.' (TLS 95)
What is tragic to note is that Jaya, like Saru, begins her married life with the idea that mutual love and trust would lead to individual growth. But she is proved wrong. The concept of love becomes a topic of debate. In **DHNT**, Saru's experience compels her to deny the existence of "love." "Love...There was no such thing.... Only a need which both [man and woman] fought against futilely, the very futility turning into the thing they called 'love' "(65). In **TLS**, Jaya analyses the "illusory" nature of love. She confesses:

Often I had told myself: love is a myth, without which sex with the same person for a lifetime would be unendurable. Sometimes, like the time I read an American poet's confession of her guilt because she just couldn't get along without her husband, it had seemed hopeless- I would never be able to shake off this monstrous burden. (97)

Ujwala Patil's comment on love in **Roots and Shadows** holds true for the heroines Saru and Jaya. These women despise love because love lacks the humanizing influence in the context of marriage in a masculine civilization, a civilization that perpetuates myths created by male-oriented societies and makes marriage for the female partner, both physically and spiritually dissatisfying ("**Marriage and Selfhood in Roots and Shadows**" 132). R.Mala in "Sexual Predicament in Shashi Deshpande's women" points out that "'Love' in Deshpande is not a 'metaphysical concept' or a 'canonization of emotion' as in Raja Rao; it is only a substitute for 'sex' "(55). Jaya's musings testify to this idea.

...there was a curious (and cruel) comfort in thinking that perhaps he had learnt at last what I found out along ago, the fact that it is the act of sex that really affirms your aloneness. I remembered the day this knowledge had come to me. I had
been eager as he had been, I had responded passionately to him and then it was over.

....

Man and woman—it was then that I realised the deep chasm between the two. They are separated forever, never more than at the moment of total physical togetherness. *(TLS 97-98)*

Ironically, while the sexual act is supposed to bring the couple closest to each other, Jaya realises that "the act of sex really affirms your aloneness" (97).

Marriage too, like love, ceases to be an honest relationship. To quote Mala- "Marriage too is viewed critically and condemned as an euphemism for lust" (55). Unlike *Roots and Shadows* where marriage brings together two people after "cold-blooded bargaining" *(Mala 55)*, marriage in *TLS* "is likened to a children's game of playing 'timker, tailor, soldier, sailor' which have now been substituted by labels like 'doctor, engineer, government officer, college lecturer' " *(TLS 91)*. Mala observes "Jaya also sees stagnation and hopelessness in marital life in her contention that marriage makes a woman 'circumspect' and that' marriages never end, they cannot—they are a state of being" " (127). It becomes very evident that love and marriage are meaningless and have lost their status "as props of life" (56).

Sex alone seems to sustain a man-woman relationship as pointed out earlier. But what is startling is that women who seek recourse to extra-marital sex or affair are the ones who silently endure the physical assaults of their husbands. So how far are they sexually emancipated, is the question.

In the Indian context, once a girl gets married, whether it is a love marriage or an arranged one, the husband takes complete control over her. Jaya is a classic example. Seventeen years of discontent rears its ugly head
when Jaya finds herself idle and lonely in their Dadar flat. Deprived of their routine, Mohan and Jaya become restless.

We had drunk our tea, had our baths, and then the day rushed at us with all the savagery of a dog unleashed after too long. We looked at each other and found the same question in the other's eyes: what are we going to do with ourselves? It was not the larger conundrum of what we were to do with our lives that confronted us; it was a simpler puzzle- what are we to do with this moment, this day, the next moment, the next day... (TLS 24)

Waiting to hear from his colleagues, life at Dadar does not offer any solace to Mohan. He becomes agitated. He is a "traditionalist," having "clear-cut ideas" about his role in life (Bhatt 156). So when the rhythm is broken, Mohan becomes thoroughly confused and knows not what to do. Waiting "taxes" him and "unnerves" him (157).

Deprived of his routine, his files, his telephone, his appointments, he seemed to be no one at all; certainly not that man, my husband, around whose needs and desires my own life revolved. There was nothing he needed, so there was nothing for me to do, nothing I had to do. My own career as a wife was in jeopardy. The woman, who had shopped and cooked, cleaned, organised and cared for her home and her family with such passion...where had she gone? We seemed to be left with nothing but our bodies, and after we had dealt with them we faced blankness. The nothingness of what seemed a busy and full life was frightening." (TLS 24-25)

He expects Jaya to not only share his anxiety, his unhappiness, his doubts but to positively speak out and help him face the crisis. But Jaya remains silent, because it has become a way of life for her. "In fact, we had stopped
speaking, except for the essentials of daily living. The fact of what he had
done, of what lay before us, came between us, an awkward, silent third,
making comfortable conversation impossible" (55).

When Jaya returns after meeting her brother Ravi, she mentions that
he has smelt some trouble in Mohan's office. This jolts him. He begins to
press Jaya for more information, hoping to weigh the magnitude of the
problem. But her answers are very evasive. This infuriates Mohan. He
accuses her of being obdurate and unfeeling ever since disaster struck
them.

'I've been going through hell, I've been worried to death since
Agarwal warned me about what was likely to happen, but
you...you've been so unconcerned...'

'You said, "Let's go to Dadar," and I came here with you!'

'Here with me!' It was not Mohan's laughter; I'd never heard
this laugh before. 'You've never been here. Servants,
neighbours-you've grabbed at anyone, at any excuse to avoid
me. This like all Mohan's occasional flashes of perspicacity,
startled me. 'Since the day I told you what Agarwal had said
to me, you've been totally indifferent.' (116)

He says whatever he has done so far has been for the welfare of the family.
He refuses to admit the fact that he favoured the C.E. in order to realise his
ambition (a respectable position in the office).

'...I know that I've never mattered to you, not really. You
married me only because Dinkar told you to...'

....

'If ever I'd been irresponsible and callous,' Mohan was saying
and I knew he was thinking of his father, 'but I've never been
that. I've always put you and the children first, I've been
patient with all your whims, I've grudged you nothing. But the
truth is that you despise me because I've failed. As long as I had my job and position, it was all right; as long as I could give you all the comforts, it was all right. But now, because I'm likely to lose it all....' (118,121)

Indira Bhatt in "That Long Silence: A Study" points out: "He (referring to Mohan) wishes to use his wife as buffer, an opiate to soften the impact of the forces he has set into motion against himself. In fact he is seeking emotional gratification for his insecurity created by his own deeds. He wants to hold hard to Jaya in whom he seeks an anchor in this tempest" (157).

Hearing Mohan's virulent charges, Jaya becomes frigid. She wants to retort but becomes dumbfounded at the crucial moment. "I was full of a sense of angry confusion. What was he charging me with? And, oh God, why couldn't I speak? Why couldn't I say something? I felt foolishly inadequate, having nothing to offer him in exchange for all these charges he was pouring on to me" (TLS 119). Adesh Pal notes: "Her silence and surrender is a move towards reconciliation. Although her other self feels hurt at Mohan's accusation during a quarrel yet she fails to come out of the shell of silence" (77).

But when Mohan avers that he has given her all the freedom ever since they got married, Jaya negates his claim. She says: "'My writing,'...I gave it up because of you' " (TLS 119). Jaya's brusque reply confounds Mohan. He asks her in disbelief. "Your writing?"...What do you mean? Why even here, when I've been so...so upset, I've been careful, I've tried not to disturb you when you were writing. From the very beginning, I've allowed you to write, I've encouraged you, I was proud of you...' "(119).

It is true that Mohan had suggested that Jaya should write light, humourous pieces in the newspapers. The "Seetha" column won the approval of the readers, the editor, and above all, of her husband. In a way,
Jaya's success enhances Mohan's status. Her recognition pleases him enormously because it gives him a chance to introduce her as his wife. Therefore she becomes his prized object which he takes great pride in showing off. But he is very cautious about the stories she writes. He disapproves those, which resemble real life. He wants to make Jaya think like him and induces her not to deliberate on themes that would endanger their marriage. So when one of her stories wins a prize in a contest, Mohan's response is "disheartening" (Bhatt 167). He looks agitated when he comes home with the magazine...he asks the reason why she reveals their personal life to the outside world. Little does Mohan realise that the story has no bearings in real life. He is apprehensive of what his colleagues will construe of his relationship with his wife after reading the story. This incident aborts Jaya's career as a writer.

'How could you reveal us; how can you reveal our lives to the world in this way?'

I had known then that it hadn't mattered to Mohan that I had written a good story, a story about a couple, a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body. For Mohan it had mattered that people might think the couple was us, that the man was him. To Mohan, I had been no writer, only an exhibitionist. (TLS 144)

Jaya holds a grudge that she abandoned the "Seetha" column for the sake of Mohan. She wants to retaliate but Mohan's outburst silences her: "I was full of a sense of angry confusion. What was he charging me with? And, oh God, why couldn't I speak? Why couldn't I say something? I felt foolishly inadequate having nothing to offer him in exchange for all the charges he was pouring on to me...I could say nothing. I was in my place, pinned to it by his anger, a monstrously huge spear that went through me, excruciatingly painful, yet leaving me cruelly conscious" (120-121). Adesh
Pal observes- "Expression of anger in silence is best evident" when Mohan reigns false allegations on her. Although Jaya wants to burst out in anger, "she fails to break her silence" (123). But her outburst takes the form of a hysterical laughter, which rocks Mohan to the core. He leaves home in a huff not wishing to confront the real Jaya. "Suhasini was dead, yes, that was it, she was the one Mohan was mourning, she'd walked into the sea at last. No, the fact was that I'd finally done it-I'd finally killed her" (TLS 121). Subhash Chandra notes: "Her (Jaya's) hysterical laughter had also been a gesture of protest, besides being a shield from Mohan's anger (155).

When Mohan walks out of the house, Jaya feels wretched. The stigma of being a discarded wife scares her. She becomes disoriented, begins to "vegetate" in his absence (Chandra 154). She tells her neighbour Mukta, the reason why Mohan left. Kamini Dinesh states- "This is a greater calamity than that which brought them to the old flat musty with the smell of the past. If it were not for the tension of uncertainty and waiting for Mohan, life would have gone at the same pace, with Jaya relapsing into the emptiness of a seemingly calm and serene life, living and not life" (202). But Mohan's absence from the house for two days makes her realise that the disaster in her life is of her own making. "The real disaster" for Jaya. "is the discovery of her relationship, her marriage, 'this whole absurd exercise we can call life' "(159). Kamini Dinesh adds: "...turning her gaze inwards now, Jaya finds that she and Mohan have been skating on thin ice, while the cracks in the floor reveal deep rifts and dangerous whirlpools. If Jaya is to break the long silence and establish a revitalised relationship she has to come to terms with herself" (202).

It slowly dawns on Jaya that Mohan has done nothing to affect her career as a writer. Palkar points out that although Jaya could easily make Mohan "a scapegoat for her failure" in becoming a well-known writer, "she refuses to have this easy way out," given her "self-critical" mood (167).
While going through the sheaf of papers piled in the cupboard with Mohan about the prize-winning story, she continued to write under a pseudonym.

Now only this file was left. My rejected stories. My failures. Of course, Mohan had nothing to do with these. He didn't even know I'd written them. Kamat has been the only one I'd talked to about them. I'd had to tell him because I had needed him. And yet I had regretted my impulse when, not referring to my request, he had asked me instead, 'You want to write under a false name?,' in a voice that had somehow offended me. As if he'd realised my feelings, he'd gone on, 'You want to use my address for your mail? Sure, go ahead. You can use my typewriter too if you want to.' He'd then suggested a name I could use. (TLS 146)

In spite of her renewed efforts, her stories have been rejected by all the magazines. Her failure in finding a publisher upsets her. Disappointed she approaches Kamat. She bursts out in frustration, not knowing why none accepted her stories.

Listening patiently to Jaya, Kamat points out that 'anger,' an important ingredient in her stories has been censored. He urges Jaya to spew anger in her writing, so as to make them more appealing to the readers.

'All this anger...' Kamat had grinned at me. 'Why didn't you use it here?'...Why didn't you use that anger in your story? There's none of it here. There isn't even a personal vision. I'll tell you what's really wrong with your story. It's too restrained. Spew out your anger in your writing, woman, spew it out. Why are you holding it in?' (147)

Jaya is amused to hear what Kamat tells her. She tries to remind him what she had learnt from her husband, the first time they had an argument-
that a woman cannot be angry because it makes a woman unwomanly. She also gives him the familiar excuse that most defeated women give that she has no time for serious work because of her everyday routine. But Kamat is not a man who would sympathise with her. He simply reproves this tendency in Jaya. He makes her realise that as long as she is scared of failure, she can never be a winner. "He awakens her anger which she has to bring out from the long suppression and face wonder to articulate her predicament as a writer" (Pal 123). A severe critic that he is, he leaves no escape route for Jaya.

'Spare me your complexes. And you're a fool if you think I was joking. I'm warning you-beware of this "women are the victims" theory of yours. It'll drag you down into a soft-squishy bog of self-pity. Take yourself seriously woman. Don't skulk behind a false name. And work-work if you want others to take you seriously. This scribbling now and then...' 'I don't have the time.'

'Yes, that's an easy way out. It's so much easier to be the martyr who'd have done so much if only...', he had twisted his magnificent voice into a feminine falsetto, doing a much better job of mimicking than I had done, "if only I had the time. But I'm a wife and mother first, my home and children come first to me...blah blah blah." The fact is you're scared.' 'Scared?' 'Scared of writing. Scared of failing.' (TLS 148)

It is therefore under the tutelage of Kamat, that Jaya realises that she has to exorcise the fears that have made her very dependent on "male support and help" (76). She chooses to confide in Kamat because unlike other men, Kamat treats her an equal, capable of reasoning. She feels free to reveal her thoughts before him and he is a "Zarathustra who urges her to
be fearless, to vent her anger—to be herself" (Biswal 42). She sheds her inhibitions. She begins to see "the underlying hollowness and deceit in her relationship" with Mohan (42). She realises the meaningless exercise of living together. She admits: "We lived together but there had been only emptiness between us" (TLS 185).

Mohan and Jaya drift apart since Mohan, unlike Kamat, is rooted in tradition; and she is a woman with a modern taste. Not wishing to jeopardize her marriage in any way, she retreats into silence. "It was so much simpler to say nothing. So much less complicated," she admits (99). She is convinced that communication between Mohan and herself, as man and woman, as two individual entities, was impossible. Her situation reminds her of the "stillness, the silence "of sitting in a stationary train. The illusion of movement is created when the train next to hers moves. Arati Biswal observes: "Deshpande uses the image effectively to indicate that activity and meaning in a woman's life are directly related to the needs of the man in her life" (41).

However, after two days the situation changes. Jaya receives a telegram from Mohan informing her that all is well. Moreover her son Rahul who had left home also comes back. As Adesh Pal observes, Jaya is in danger of being "encased in her married life" but she successfully learns to "articulate her predicament" (79). She rejects the image of Mohan and herself as "a pair of bullocks yoked together." "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" (TLS 191). Arati Biswal notes: "Her (Jaya) awareness of an unjust system that coerces a woman to play a second fiddle; to accept the position as an inferior being brings in her a sense of outrage that ruefully reminds her of the rigid rules of Sanskrit drama that forced women to speak Prakrit, while reserving the classical Sanskrit for the superior male characters" (43). Jaya refuses to give Mohan
an upper hand and relinquish her position. She realises that should she concede the authority to Mohan once again, the situation in the future would be no different from what is in the present. She confesses: "I have looked at his face for clues and then given him the answer I know he wants. I have only to do it now and authority will seep into Mohan once more" (TLS 192).

In order to face life bravely from this point on, Jaya understands the importance of speech. "...I will have to speak, to listen, I have to erase the silence between us" muses Jaya (192). Given the limited time in one's life, she realises the need to make the right choice in life and make life wonderful. "I've always thought- there's only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices" (192).

It is important to note that it is not only Jaya's silence that Deshpande has highlighted but also the silence of very many women who figure in between the main framework. Jeeja, Jaya's maid, is the living epitome of the oppressed Indian woman. Inspite of being regularly beaten up by her drunken and wastrel husband, she endures life silently. What surprises Jaya is that inspite of parting her hard-earned money to her husband, she continues to cater to her husband's needs ungrudgingly. She even looks after her stepchildren willingly. Talking to Jeeja, Jaya says: "There had been days when she had come back to work bruised and hurt, rare days when she had not come at all. But I had never heard her complain. What had surprised me then, what still surprised me, was that there seemed to be no anger behind the silences" (51).

Vimala, Mohan's sister, also silently suffers the injustice of male oppression. Like Jeeja, she also never complains not even when she is suffering from tumour. It is only when she is admitted in the hospital, does it become clear that she had been suffering from "ovarian tumour and
metastases in the lungs" (39). But she keeps her silence intact till she dies, even though Mohan repeatedly presses her for an answer.

Mohan's mother is a forceful example of how definite the role of a wife in India is. Mohan admires his mother's "sore tolerance of deprivation as a source of strength" (Kotwal 42). "'God,'...she was tough. Women in those days were tough" (36). But being a woman Jaya can understand that "the silence in which her mother-in-law had encased herself was a sign of helplessness" (Kotwal 42), a despair so great that it did not find ventilation. "He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender" (TLS 36).

Mohan's mother is a woman of the older generation who had had very little choice but to endure oppression silently. Mira in The Binding Vine is also one such woman who bears the sexual assaults of her husband silently. Kalpana, the second heroine of the novel, undergoes the trauma of rape, but due to poverty, her mother wishes to conceal the whole episode. What is therefore to be noted is the fact that whether it is Saru, Jaya, Mira, or Kalpana, "the traditional roles of women still have primacy over all the newly-acquired professional roles" (Sandhu 45). Is BV any different from the novels discussed above, as claimed by Indira Nithyanandam, needs to be examined.

Unlike the earlier women who were busy resolving their own conflicts, Urmila's journey (she is called Urmi in the novel) is not an excursion into her own past, but the buried life and thoughts of her mother-in-law Mira and Kalpana, a poor domestic servant's daughter. To put it in Indira Nithyanandam's words-" D'Sh pande's earlier women had already begun to question their roles, functions, attitudes and even behaviour. They realised that they had to unshackle themselves from centuries of bondage
to societal norms and pre-ordained roles. Yet they succeeded in doing it only within the limited purview of their own lives. They showed no inclination of rising as feminists with the capacity to purge society of its evils and blaze forth in a trail of glory" (60). In this way, BV is different from its predecessors.

The novel begins with Urmì grieving over her dead daughter Anu and Vanaa her sister-in-law, urging her to ventilate her feelings. Known to be the strongest in the family, Vanaa and Amrut find it difficult to see Urmì crumbling under the weight of her sorrow. Reminded by Vanaa of the need to express herself, Urmì finally breaks out-

'Talk! Say something! Why don't you say something?'
'What?'
'Anything. Just speak. Don't keep it bottled within you.
'Why don't you cry, Urmì? It's unnatural not to cry.'
'Really, Vanaa, you're getting hysterical.
....
'Please Vanaa, stop this nonsense.'
....
'Urmì...'
'Vanaa, please leave me alone.'
'Urmì, I can't bear to see your pain.'
'Don't see it then. Go away and leave me alone. Do you think it helps to have you watching me all the time?'
'Urmì...'
'Go away, Vanaa, just go away.' (BV 13,14)

This incident sets the tone of the novel. It goes to show how important it is to express oneself rather than succumbing to "tremendous familial and cultural pressures" which succeed in making women both silent and invisible (Palkar 167).
Urmila's journey in understanding her and others begins with her mother-in-law's legacy, which has been stored in a trunk. Reading Mira's poems, Urmi understands why Akka, who had never been moved on any occasion, breaks down after talking about Mira—"Akka, who hadn't cried when her husband died, who had been stoical while Vanaa sobbed like a child when she went to Bombay to study, who had been calm even when Vanaa gets married and went away—why had she broken down now?" (BV 48). The "shocking abruptness" of a small poem about a newly married couple brings to her mind, "the woman who wrote those poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, who died giving birth to her son at twenty-two" (48).

Trapped in an unhappy marriage at the age of eighteen by her husband who became "single minded" in his pursuit after seeing her in a wedding, Mira finds solace in her "careless crawl" (50), because, to her, writing was "a link with the happier, lighthearted times..." (51). While trying to decipher the message laced within the poetic lines, Urmila learns that her mother-in-law was subjected to rape by her husband everyday. This anguish finds expression in a number of poems written by her. She disliked every form of physical intimacy because her marriage was only "a dark-clouded engulfing night" (66), which she awaited with dread. The torture of living with an obsessed man all her life made her recluse. The entry in her diary is a case in point.

He knows what I'm doing and he gets angry with me. I don't mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, it is bliss when he does that. But he comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, he holds me close, he begins to babble. And so it begins. 'Please,' he says, 'please, I love you.' And over and over again until he has done, 'I love you.' (67)
As a result, Mira began to loathe the word 'love' because it brought to mind, pain and suffering. She wrote—"Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say 'no' at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all. What is it he wants from me? I look at myself in the mirror and wonder, what is there in me? Why does it have to be me? Why can't he leave me alone?" (67). Loneliness, therefore became "a part of Mira's being" (100). Her poems suggest that her life amounted to nothing.

_Shall I surrender to this Maya-world_
_Dancing peacock, displaying its feathers?_
_Or shall I, defying the market world_  
_retreat into my shell tortoise-like?_

_They called me mad_
_they, who cocooned themselves_
_in bristly blankets_
_and thought themselves warm_
_when I spoke of my soul_
_that boiled and seethed._

_They called me mad_
_they, who were entranced_
_by a single white ray of light_
_when I spoke of the magic_
_Of the seven colours in a prism. (98, 99-100)_

Though schooled by her mother to "submit" herself in the new household, Mira unwillingly concedes to her mother's advice.

_Don't tread paths barred to you_
_obey, never utter a 'no';_
submit and your life will be
a paradise, she said and blessed me. (83)

Speaking about women, Sarla Palkar notes:

"Our traditional society, following the precepts of Manu, does not grant a woman a separate identity apart from that of a daughter, wife or mother. Marriage is the end-all and be-all for a woman. Though things have been changing for the better in the last few decades - especially for the educated middle-class women - we cannot forget the kind of life the women of our mother's and grandmother's generations led and the kind of life the majority of women from the other strata of our society still lead today" (167).

Mira meekly submitted to her husband's needs, despite the urge to defy him.

no, growing painfully within
like a monster child was born. (BV 83)

This age old cry of woman suppressed under the veneer of marriage has begun to find an outlet in the recent times, opines Nisha Trivedi (147). She quotes Indira Jaisingh, an eminent lawyer for women-

It is assumed that by marrying a man, a woman has given her consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at anytime. Thus, even if he forces himself on her, he is not committing an offence [of rape] as her consent is assumed. In this respect, the women's movement has consistently demanded that the law of rape be changed. A recent judgement of court in England indicated that rape within marriage could be an offence. Several states in the U.S have specially amended their original law to make it an offence. (qtd. in "Treatment of Love, Marriage and Sex" 65)
Mira "shrinks further" when she is renamed Nirmala after marriage (Indira 23), but at the same time she strongly asserted her individuality in her poems.

_A glittering ring gliding on the rice_  
carefully traced a name 'Nirmala'.

_Who is this? None but I,  
my name hence, bestowed upon me._

_Nirmala, they call, I stand statue-still._  
_Do you build the new without razing the old?_  
_A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold_  
_can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira._ (BV 101)

To Urmila, what distinguishes Mira from the others is her attitude. Unlike other women who found satisfaction in begetting children and looking after the family, Mira found satisfaction in copying scores of quotations from different writers, which she constantly devoured. She was forever "preparing herself, flexing her muscles, aspiring for eternity" (65). She continued to write her poems even though she had doubts about her success. She wondered if she could ever become as popular as her model Venu. Her poem is a testimony to her uncertainty.

_'Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm_  
_will I emerge a beauteous being?_  
_Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist?_' (65)

Her diary entry reads:

.... He read out two of her poems. I've written them down so I won't forget. Each time I read them, I am filled with awe. Will I ever be able to write like this? Today, after hearing him, I know this is what I want-to be able to write like this. But I can't believe I ever can. (65-66)
The fear of being laughed at, subdued Mira's desire to exhibit her talent- "They will laugh at me, I can imagine how they will, I can hear them laughing" (66). But on meeting the "grand old man of Indian literature" on one occasion, Mira joyfully gave him some of her poems to read hoping to get "a word of encouragement from him or at least an assurance that she possessed poetic talent" (Palkar 169). But Venu smothered her enthusiasm by saying- "Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men" (BY 127).

While referring to Venu, Palkar quotes Toril Moi- "What he said to Mira would substantiate the thesis of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar that the dominant patriarchal ideology presents artistic creativity as a fundamentally male quality" (qtd.in "Of Mothers and Daughters, Of the Great Divide: Shashi Deshpande's The Binding Vine" 169). While Venu received all kinds of honours "that there are" (BY 128), Mira faded without notice. Venu became "a cult figure" as a result of his popularity, whereas Mira's struggle against all odds failed. As a result, "she could never expect any recognition or acceptance of her poetry" (Nityanandam 65).

Just as she realises that each relationship survives on "hope" (Indira 23), Urmila becomes involved with another victim, Kalpana, a poor domestic servant's daughter. While waiting for sister-in-law Vanaa in the hospital, Urmila meets Shakutai whose daughter Kalpana is admitted in an unconscious state. She has been brutally raped the previous night. "Rape" as described by Adrienne Rich, "is not rape of the body alone but rape of the mind as well. The feeling of being victorious and gloating over the act makes the rapist even more detestable" (qtd. in Shashi Deshpande's The Binding Vine: Silent No More 61). What horrifies Urmila is the manner
in which everyone wants to hush up a case of rape thereby enabling the rapist to escape without proper punishment.

When Bhaskar and Urmila urge the police officer to take action against the rapist, the officer says-"Okay, ... she was raped. But publicising it isn't going to do anyone any good. It's going to mean trouble for everyone-the girl, her family..."(BV 88-89). It's the nonchalance of the police personnel that appeals to Urmila.

Let it remain an accident, the officer said.... Why make it a case of rape, he asked? She going to die anyway, so what difference does it make whether, on paper, she dies the victim of an accident or a rape? But if you ask me, the man said, she must have been out with a boyfriend -girls of that class always have boyfriends the families know nothing about. Maybe after they had a big of fun she was knocked down by a car...(88)

It is not only the enforcers of law who conceal facts but the mother of the victim as well.

When the doctor upon examining Kalpana confirms that she has been raped, Shakutai solicits the doctor to remain silent. She is oblivious of the fact that 'rape' is a criminal offence, which has to be registered in the court of law. Rather than ensuring justice for the "wronged" daughter, Shakutai is concerned about the other children.

'Listen, Bai, this is a police case. The doctor can't tell a lie. He says she must have got hurt when she was struggling against the man.' 'If a girl's honour is lost, what's left? The girl doesn't have to do anything wrong, people will always point a finger at her. 'Doctor,' she turns to him, 'even if it is true, keep it to yourself, don't let anyone know of it, I have another daughter, what will become of her...?" (58-59)
Talking of rape, Indira Nityanandam points out- "In society's attitude toward rape, the diving line between the crime and the victim, the attacker and the prey becomes blurred and almost non-existent. Instead of pointing a finger at the bestiality and violence perpetrated by the rapist, most people, including Kalpana's mother, find it easier to blame the girl"(61). Shakutai's conversation with Urmila is a case in point.

"Wipe off that lipstick," I told Kalpana, but she didn't even reply. Just walked off...' 'What's wrong with lipstick, Shakutai?' 'You don't understand, Urmila, it's not only the lipstick. Here boys are like...they're like dogs panting after bitches. And if you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they'll leave you alone? (BY 145-146)

A little later she blames her daughter for the misfortune: "She's shamed us, we can never wipe off this blot...You should have seen her walking out, head in the air, caring for nobody. It's all her fault, Urmila, all her fault"(147). It is Urmila "who rages at the indignity heaped on the wronged woman and the impunity with which such men are able to get away" (Nityanandam 62), but Shakutai is in no mood to listen to her. She believes that it is her daughter who ought to have been careful.

'Shakutai, for God's sake, stop this, stop blaming her. Why do you blame her, how is it her fault?' She looks at me in amazement. 'Who is it then? We're all disgraced because of her.' 'She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn't do anything wrong. Why can't you see that? Are you blind? It's not her fault, no, not her fault at all.' 'Whose fault is it then? Whom do I blame?
The man, the man who did this to her. Don't you see, can't you see he's the wrong doer?

..#.

The man.'...What use is it blaming him? ...We have to keep our places, we can never step out...I warned Kalpana, but she would never listen to me.... Women must know fear.'(BV 147-148)

Upon seeing Shakutai crying, Urmila decides to fight for Kalpana's justice. But when Shakutai curses herself for having given birth to daughters, Urmila retorts violently: "Don't say that" she tells Shakutai (60). So to compensate for the loss of her daughter Anu, Urmila becomes a surrogate mother for Kalpana, "when she takes up the poor girl's cause in a crusader's spirit" (Palkar 171).

What surprises the readers is the reason why Kalpana chooses to remain silent inspite of being aware of her uncle's advances. Though bold and economically independent, she conceals the fact that her uncle Prabhakar is obsessed about her. It's the secretive nature of Kalpana that finally traps her. It is through Shakutai that we understand Kalpana's nature: "And she's secretive, she never tells me anything," she tells Urmila (BV 92).

It is the day prior to the death of her sister Salu that Shakutai learns the truth. Having borne the brunt of her husband's anger all along and not wishing to continue any longer, Sulu finally breaks her silence about her husband's obsession for Kalpana. She immolates herself the following day to atone for her husband's misdeeds. Shakutai who had been blaming her daughter so long is left to cope with the bitter truth that it is "her own blindness and ignorance that have destroyed her daughter's life" (Palkar 172), and not Kalpana's "willfulness and stubbornness"(172).
'Sulu says he was always mad about Kalpana. Even then, when Kalpana went to live with them, he tried to...he wanted....' 'She was only a child then, she was fourteen and he thought he could...That's why she ran away and refused to go back. But she didn't tell me, why didn't she tell me? And where were my eyes? I should have known, I should have guessed. He used to look at her, he used to say things, he called her "My Beauty," he used to praise her looks. I thought, he's her uncle, he's being affectionate. But Kalpana-I can remember how she used to walk out. And I used to scold her for that. I've done wrong, Urmila. I've done great wrong, such great wrong. (RV 189-190)

A little later she laments-" She told me this only yesterday, she kept everything to herself, she never told me her troubles, even about Kalpana-she knew, that first time, that he'd tried to put his hands on Kalpana. But she warned Kalpana not to tell me, not to tell anyone...'Yes,','Yes, we were wrong, Sulu and I, we were both wrong" (193).

Had Sulu revealed Prabhakar's infatuation for Kalpana earlier, it would have been possible for Shakutai to avert the tragedy. Kalpana could have married the boy of her choice. As Palkar points out, this is another common link that connects Kalpana's story with Mira's. Apart from being wife or mother, Mira's mother had no voice or identity of her own. This is clearly evident from Mira's diary entry: "Why do you want me to repeat your history when you despair of your own?" (126). Those who therefore do not break their silence contribute to their oppression and to that of their own sex, says Palkar. She cites Rajeswari Sunder Rajan to substantiate her point- "For women to 'speak' rape is itself a measure of liberation, a shift from serving as object of voyeuristic discourse to the occupation of a subject-position as 'master' of narrative" (78).
Women long for love, understanding and appreciation from their husbands after marriage. But women like Sulu live their lives in fear. Talking about her sister after her death, Shakutai says: "After marriage she changed. She was frightened, always frightened. What if he doesn't like this, what if he wants that, what if he is angry with me, what if he throws me out...? Nobody should live like that, Urmila, so full of fears" (BV 195).

The reason why Sulu remained insecure, frightened and unloved throughout her life was because she was barren. Moreover the white patches which she developed as a result of some deficiency, added to her woes. She was unable to cater to her husband's needs. She constantly lived with the fear of being deserted by her husband for another woman. Hence the pressure on Kalpana to become his mistress.

Though Shakutai has had her own share of problems like her sister Sulu, she learns to cope. Her painful experiences during the initial years of her marriage give her the strength to live separately with her three children. While Sulu suffered till the end in silence, Shakutai breaks free from her good-for-nothing husband.

'I, a woman, had to sleep there, in public, with strange men walking up and down. And my husband,...' the voice drops low 'you know what men are, he wanted to...We're not animals, I told him. As if he cared. And I got pregnant. It was the worst thing that could happen to us then.... She looked after Kalpana, then Prakash, and then Sandhya while I went to work. I've done all kinds of work, Urmila.' She holds out her hands to me, as if in proof of her statement. (110-111)

Like Salu and Shakutai, Vanaa, Urmila's sister-in-law, also suffers in silence. In order to provide a conducive atmosphere for her growing children, Vanaa never voices her feelings. She does not question any of
Harish's views fearing his temper. Urmila is "irritated" seeing Vanaa's submissive attitude.

'You let him get away with too much,' I tell her.

'What do you want me to do?'

'Assert yourself. You don't have to crawl before him, do you?'

'I don't crawl, I do what I want.'

'No, you don't. You're scared of him, yes, you are. I've seen you. You don't even dare to call your daughters anything but Mandira and Pallavi, no, not even when you pet them, because Harish doesn't like baby talk....' (80-81)

Even in matters of utmost importance, Vanaa is never consulted. Soon after the birth of her second daughter Mandira, Vanaa wishes to have a son but her husband decides to have no more children. Vanaa meekly accepts whatever explanation he gives her. Urmila urges Vanaa to be more assertive in these matters, but it has no effect on her. She continues to be mute till the end.

And he said, one, surely I'm not the kind of woman who cares for sons, am I? And, two, what makes me think the next one will be a boy? He's right, only... I wouldn't have minded taking a chance....

'I burst out, 'You let him bulldozer you, you crawl before him....' (81)

When compared to these women, Urmila has memories of happy childhood in Ranidurg where her grandmother Bajajji and her friend Vanaa took her. Palkar notes that "this experience of love and trust has made her more sure of herself than most people, has made her feel privileged" (172-173). But after she marries Kishore, Urmila experiences a sense of loss. She muses:
But somewhere on the way I seem to have lost that confidence. Now there is fear- the fear of Kishore never returning home, lost in the seas somewhere as one of his friends was; the fear of Kishore turning away from me, a distant look on his face; the fear of his not wanting to come back to me. Yes, that's the thing, that's what I am afraid of.

(KV 82)

Kishore, like his mother Mira appears to be aloof- "a schizoid personality" (Palkar 173). One wonders if this is a trait that he has inherited from his mother Mira, who had detached herself from everyone in the family except for the child growing within her. It is this quality in her husband that Urmila is afraid of, because it gives her the feeling that "there is something in him" that she will never be able to understand. As a result, Urmila too wears the same "armour" (173). She too wants to submit as her mother Inni and Vanaa have done but she's aware of what the path of submission would result in. "...I know that if I walk the way of submission once, I will walk that way forever"(KV 82). She therefore conceals her vulnerability under the cover of seeming "indifference" and "assurance." What we are left to ponder at is the fact whether Kishore and Urmila would ever let down their defenses with regard to each other. But what is revealed explicitly is the manner in which Urmila lays down her armour before her mother, Inni. Inni breaks her long silence toward the end of the novel thereby making "the jig saw of the binding vine...clear and complete" (Indira 25). Urmila's "unvoiced accusation" against her parents as to why she had been left in the care of her grandparents at Ranidurg, gets an answer from her mother's tearful confession.

Then he decided he would take you to his mother. He didn't say anything to me, he just took you away. I never imagined he wouldn't bring you back, I thought this was just to teach
me a lesson, to punish me, but...I begged him, Urmi, I cried, I promised him I'd never leave you alone, but he wouldn't listen. Nothing could make him change his mind. You know your Papa...I didn't want you to be sent away to Ranidurg, believe me Urmi, I didn't want that, I wanted you with us, I never got used to the idea of your being in Ranidurg, I wanted you with me...' (BV 199-200)

On seeing her mother's supplicatory gesture, Urmila is moved. She assures her mother that all is well. But what surprises Urmila is her father's treatment of her mother. Having been under the impression that her father loved her mother immensely; Urmila finds it difficult to digest what she hears. It frightens Urmila to visualise her father as a tyrant. At the same time, Urmila who believes that her mother "never was the solicitous mother" assures herself that human beings can be kind as well as cruel and most often cruelty is born out of love (25).

No, it's true, he did love Inni. Why do I imagine that love absolves us from being cruel? There's Shakutai- she says she loves her daughter; but I know, she does too, that she was cruel to her.

Perhaps it is this, the divide in ourselves, that is the great divide. Perhaps it's this divide in ourselves that's the hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept, to live with. (201)

Considering the fates of Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu, Urmila regains confidence. Hence the determination in her to publish her mother-in-law's poems even in the face of Vanaa's opposition-

'After Anu died...I saw Kalpana, I met Shakutai, I read Mira's diary, her poems. And I've been lucky, that's all. While these women...You understand what I'm saying, Vanaa?
They never had a chance. It's not fair, it's not fair at all. And we can't go on pushing it- what happened to them- under the carpet forever because we're afraid of disgrace.' (174)

Urmila deems herself lucky for the plenty of choices available to her unlike her mother Inni and her sister-in-law, Vanaa. She acknowledges discontentment in her married life but hopes to resolve her differences with Kishore soon. Realizing the importance of survival and the need to cope, Urmila marches forward nourishing the idea that life is "worth-living" inspite of all the betrayals and cruelty.