The feminist movement would appear to have a limited length of life, for once it achieves its ends, the raison d'être disappears unless feminine experience becomes valuable per se. Sushila Singh pertinently writes, "The feminist goal of equality with men has undergone a significant change in recent years. The woman-centre perspective now locates specific virtues in the female experience,"¹ So feminist literature has come to stay. And Shashi Deshpande's novels will be read for a long time to come, not because they appear feminist but because they go beyond the narrow, limited ideals of feminism to posit before us the lasting values of existential-humanist philosophy.

It is in a sense appropriate that the French Revolution and the feminist movement were simultaneous occurrences. If the women of Paris marched on Versailles and forced King Louis XVI and his family to return to the city in October 1789, Mary

Wollstonecraft\(^2\) published *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* only three years later. If the first event symbolised the beginning of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity for the whole of mankind, the second stood for freedom from the trammels of tradition and for equality with men for the better half of mankind, namely, women. And neither of the movements has been entirely successful as yet, though both of them have made great strides towards their goals. In 1869 John Stuart Mill wrote *Subjection of Women*, a very persuasive and well-reasoned book which had great influence.

However, the movement developed rather slowly. Charlotte Bronte condemned extensively a social system which brought up girls to regard matrimony as their sole future. In a letter dated 1.4.1845 to her friend Ellen Nussey, she writes, "Not that it is a crime to marry -- or a crime to wish to be married -- but it is an imbecility which I reject with contempt -- for women who have neither fortune nor beauty -- to make marriage the principal object of their wishes and hopes and the aim of all their actions -- not to be able to

\(^2\)Mary Wollstonecraft was the wife of William Godwin, with whose daughter Mary, Shelley eloped. "Godwin and she did not at first marry because they thought it improper to mark the climax of what is most sacredly private with ceremony and noise". Harry Blamires : *A Short History of English Literature*, (London and New York : Methuen, 1984), p.267.
convince themselves that they are unattractive and that they
had better be quiet and think of other things than wedlock". 3
Anna Jameson, a friend of Elizabeth Barrett and a minor
writer, wrote, after the break-up of an unsatisfactory
marriage: "Surely it is dangerous, it is wicked in these
days, to follow the old saw, to bring up women to be 'happy
wives and mothers' ... as if for women there existed only one
destiny, one hope, one blessing, one object, one passion in
existence; some people say it ought to be so, but we know that
it is not so; we know that hundreds, that thousands of women
are not happy wives and mothers -- are never either wives or
mothers at all". 4 Mrs. Gaskell recognized that "womanly
individuality must be allowed to flourish". 5

Ibsen's A Doll's House (1879) is the classic drama of
women's emancipation. Bernard Shaw's Getting Married
(produced in 1910) depicts the legal responsibilities in
marriage; George Moore's Esther Waters (1894) is the story of
an unwed mother, though she gets married at the end; Barrie's
The Twelve-Pound Look (1910), an excellent comedy, depicts how

4 Quoted in, ibid., p.10.
5 Quoted in, ibid., p.140.
wives do not like to be treated as show-pieces; Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which is said to have influenced Shashi Dehpande, is a polemical tract which was the result of her resentment against men for their social and economic advantages which they enjoyed at the expense of women. Men considering women intellectually inferior was, according to her, a myth perpetrated by men in a male-dominated society. "The New Free Woman: An Individualist Review" (later renamed "The Egoist") founded by Miss Harriet Shaw Weaver and Miss Dora Marsden, was a periodical devoted to feminism (Later it came under the influence of Ezra Pound and became the mouthpiece for the Imagist poets.).

Feminism is today a more or less world-wide phenomenon. Though it began in England, the American women were probably the first to rage a hard and long-fought battle for equal rights and break into previously barred professions and win the right to equal education with men, to speak in public, to vote for and hold office and to own property. America has realised better than any other society the vision of Mary Wollstonecraft.
The first World War gave the movement a further push since women were required to serve as WACS and WAVES. "During the first quarter of the present century the American woman strove for equal rights with men: having achieved them, she spent the second quarter wondering about the result". If anything, she is bedevilled by more activities and roles than she can conveniently manage -- of mother, home-manager, hostess, nurse, cook, dishwasher, shopper, figure of glamour and sexual partner. Yet "the ultimate disaster for woman is to miss out on getting a husband". There was a kind of sexual revolution at the time of World War I. Initially its aim was to liberate woman from her status as her husband's chattel, but it spread until, as several studies have proved, "a substantial percentage of American women find fitful sexual adventure in extra-marital relations". The Naturalistic movement in literature accepted sex as a biological need like thirst and hunger for which he/she was not responsible.

7 Ibid., p.609.
8 Ibid., p.610.
It is psychologically interesting that though women in America have benefited so much from the feminist movement, most of them do not identify themselves as feminists.

Polls conducted over the past three years indicate strong majority support for feminist ideals. But the same polls suggest that a majority of women hesitate to associate themselves with the movement ... only a minority, a third at most, identify themselves as feminists.

Many feminists take comfort in these polls, inferring substantial public support for economic and political equality and dismissing women's wariness of the feminist label as a mere image problem (attributed to unfair media portrayals of feminists as a strident minority of frustrated women).

The French feminists are "very much concerned about the physical suppression of women. Therefore, according to the French models of feminism, it would imply the greater sexual expression". 10

It is surprising that in spite of its widening popularity in Europe and America and with the younger generation of the

10 Chaman Nahal "Feminism in English Fiction: Forms and Variations", in Sushila Singh (ed.) Feminism, p.15.
moneyed class in cosmopolitan cities in India, feminism has not been defined in precise terms, though most people have an idea of what it means. Feminism, it is apparent, wants emancipation in three fields: political, economical and social. Political emancipation means the power to vote as well as the right to hold office, which was won long ago. They have got, too, economic rights, that is, the right to hold property in their names and to claim an equal share in the father's property with the brothers. Social emancipation covers more than one thing. It includes freedom from out-moded traditions and meaningless customs which act as shackles against what they want to do. Today there are no restrictions on the studies they want to take up; they can leave their parental homes and live independently. The one problem about which there is some objection on the part of many people is emancipation from sexual taboos. In Scandinavian countries there is free sex before marriage. In other countries occasional extra-marital love-affairs by stealth after marriage may take place. A rational solution is yet to be found to the problem of determining what sexual morality would be best from the point of view of general happiness. This is no doubt a problem for sociologists, but since creative writers can show a way, poets being the
"unacknowledged legislators of the world", many novelists have dealt with this problem in their works in India.

"Most people would agree", says Bertrand Russell, "that a sex relation is better when it has a large psychical element than when it is purely physical.... Most moderns would agree that love should be an equal relation". If this is accepted, polygamy will have to be ruled out; at least it cannot be considered as an ideal system.

Besides, all modern societies are based on the system of the patriarchal family, and in this, the property goes from father to children. Naturally the father wants to be sure that it is his children to whom the property is going. The sentiment of paternity is directed towards his own children. In other words, he wants to be sure of the virtue of his wife. All attempts are therefore, made to secure the virtue of women.

The purity of woman was not important in ancient times, when it was not known that the husband was the father of the children. In some societies it was believed that the moon was the father of all children. At such times a woman's virtue

was of no importance. When it was learnt that a child was his "seed", the father's sentiments toward the child changed. A father's "sentiment toward the child is reinforced by two factors: the love of power and the desire to survive death. The achievements of a man's descendents are in a sense his achievements and their life is a continuation of his life".\textsuperscript{12} Jealousy became all powerful due to fear of falsification of descent. The result was the wife became a kind of slave instead of a companion.

This does not happen in a matrilineal society since the child inherits the property from his maternal uncle. Women have more freedom in such societies. In course of time women were persuaded that intercourse outside marriage was wicked. Women in a patriarchal society had little power, but when as an old woman she became the head of the family on the death of her husband, she could be a despot (Shashi Deshpande depicts such a one in \textit{Roots and Shadows}). "The patriarchal system... did much to enslave women, but a great deal of this was undone just before the rise of Christianity. After Constantine women's freedom was again curtailed under the pretence of protecting them from sin".\textsuperscript{13} Women were looked upon as

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p.16.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p.41.
temptresses by the Christian Fathers. But the decay of the idea of sin in modern times has begun to give women freedom again. The social emancipation of women is of primary importance as far as their morals and marriage are concerned.

The demand for social equality between men and women naturally concerned itself with sexual morality. They wanted to impose on men the moral fetters under which only women had chafed so long. The excitement of World War I and the greater opportunities they had to work with men under the exigencies of war conditions, particularly in England and America, only hastened the inevitable. "Modern feminists are no longer so anxious as the feminists of thirty years ago to curtail the 'vices' of men; they ask rather that what is permitted to men shall be permitted also to them. Their predecessors sought equality in moral slavery, whereas they seek equality in moral freedom".14

The modern Indian feminist movement may be said to have begun with Raja Ram Mohan Roy's success in making the East India Company government pass a bill making it illegal and punishable for a widow to burn herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. Later, the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj

14 Ibid., p.57.
worked for the upliftment of women. In Maharashtra, Ramabai Ranade did splendid work for them. Then into the political field stepped women like Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit and others who fought shoulder to shoulder with men for political freedom under Gandhi’s leadership.

There were feminist elements in novels written by men and women before, but after 1950 feminist novels started becoming more prominent. Venu Chitale’s *In Transit* (1950), Sarta Rama Rau’s *Remember the House* (1956), Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Nayantara Sahgal’s *The Day in Shadow* (1971), Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1973) and *Wife* (1978), Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* (1977), Mrinalini Sarabhai’s *This Alone Is True* (1977), Veena Paintal’s *Midnight Woman* (1979), and Anita Desai’s novels are the more prominent ones. They discuss freely the day-to-day problems such as marital disharmony, sex violence, divorce, extra-marital affairs, role conflict, problems of working women, spinsters, etc.

One of the later women writers (and a very talented one) is Shashi Deshpande. She is not a feminist writer essentially but she has certainly some feminist elements in her novels, a fact which has inclined some critics to think of her primarily
as a feminist. In fact, her attitude to feminism has been changing with time. Talking of her early views, P.Ramamoorthi writes, "Shashi Deshpande feels embarrassed to be called a woman writer and she is not very enthusiastic about the label feminist."

But within a few years Ms Deshpande came out with statements like: "I now have no doubt at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first, and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it." In an interview given to Stanley Carvalho in 1990, she said, "It is debatable whether my books are feministic or not," while she had told M.D.Riti in 1988, "I began reading feminist writing only recently, while my writing has reflected feminist ideas right from the start." The contradiction in the statements made to Carvalho

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17 The Sunday Observer, Feb.11, (Bombay) 1990.
and Riti is, however, only apparent and not real, for by
"feministic" she only means propagandist. The two feminist
writers she mentions as her having read are Simone de Beauvoir
and Germaine Greer, but she also says that she read them quite
late, much after she started writing, and that they stimulated
her. The other feminist writers she is known to have read are
Betty Friedan, Virginia Woolf, Margaret Drabble and Doris
Lessing. But she has repeatedly asserted that she has never
used literature for propagandist purposes. She told Dr. Vanamala
Vishwanatha, "I don't believe in having a propagandist or
sexist purpose to my writing. If it presents such a
perspective, it's only a coincidence."\(^{19}\) P. Ramamoorthi was so
right in asserting, "However much she may deny the influence
of feminism in her novels, it is the core of her novels .. it
becomes quite obvious that the women she has created are
feminists, if she is not one."\(^{20}\) (Apparently this was written
before Ms. Deshapnde came out with the statement that she was
personally a feminist.)

The ideas in her novels which incline critics to see
feminism are:

\(^{19}\) "A Woman's World .. All the Way .." in Literature Alive,
p.8-14.
\(^{20}\) "My Life Is My Own" in Sushila Singh (ed) Feminism, p.115.
The protagonists in her novels are all women, except in *If I Die Today*. The protagonists are depicted as more intelligent and capable than men. All the novels are first-person narratives, which naturally express the feminine point of view. They react to outmoded traditions and superstitions which tend to impinge upon their personality. They are against arranged marriages and are inclined towards sex freedom, but except in one novel, sex freedom is a minor matter. The protagonists are depicted as having the right education and exercising their right to have the education they want. They assert themselves in doing what is nearest their heart. They play a wider role in the social frame-work than the average woman as teacher, wife, novelist, journalist, doctor, social worker. They are depicted as having the capacity to lead independent lives and making a success of it. In the early stages of their lives, they feel cribbed, cabined and confined in the patriarchal scheme of things but break out to be in the open. They go out into the world but they feel a sense of nostalgia for home, which also proves to be a source of support for them in their difficulties. The home symbolises the ethos from which they cannot entirely cut themselves off, even if they desire to do so.
The only novel in which Shashi Deshpande deals at some length with the problem of sex and morality is *Roots and Shadows*, the first to be written and the second to be published by her. Since it was the first one to be written, we may justifiably assume that the problems dealt with there were nearest her heart or worried her most. The problem in the novel is the deadweight of tradition in a joint-family under the patriarchal system, retarding the natural development of a spirited but sensitive young woman. The system was some decades ago and in some places is even today a distinguishing characteristic of Indian life. This was an advantage in an agrarian community, but a rapidly developing commercial and industrial society broke up the old order and unitary families became more common. In the novel four generations live together under the hierarchical dictatorship of Akka, Indu's grand-father's widowed sister, since the grand-father is dead. A household like this cannot be without certain drawbacks. "Living too close, too entangled with one another. So that if you move, you're bound to hurt some one else. And if they move, they hurt you. So many diverse pulls, so many
conflicting feelings. Indu's uncle (Kaka) enlightens her about the women, "These women are so small-minded, they'll spoil the cooking to starve those they dislike. They don't care if they starve themselves in the bargain." (p.144) But it has some compensations. All receive equal treatment, and even a motherless child is taken care of. Indu, the protagonist, describes how happily she, a motherless baby, grew up in that joint family. Widowed sisters and daughters would find shelter there.

Naturally individualism cannot find much scope in such a place. Young people with independent attitudes cannot find the atmosphere here congenial. They want to strike out on their own. Indu, a grand-daughter of the family, leaves the house when she is eighteen for higher education and is determined never to come back. She gets married on her own. For ten years the family does not extend even a formal invitation to Indu and her husband to visit them. After ten years they ask her to come because Akka is on her death-bed and she has made a will leaving all the property to Indu. The lawyer tells them about the will after Akka's death. Indu goes

21 Roots and Shadows – a Novel (Ballard Estate Bombay: Orient Longmans Limited, 1983), p.145. The book will hereafter be referred to as Roots and page numbers will be mentioned immediately after the quotations.
and finds the family in the doldrums. A few of the men have jobs and of the younger generation few are doing well at school except Naren who has got a first class at the M.A. in economics. He is the grand-son of a distant cousin of Akka.

The members of the older generation still suffer from superstitions — the wife must not utter her husband's name; if she does, his life-span will be shortened; if she goes round the tulsi plant, it will be lengthened. Some of them eat food from the unwashed plates which their husbands have used. If you utter the name of Rama, the soul of the dead will go to heaven quickly. The wife's dying before her husband is to be considered good fortune. If a widow does not shave her head, she is a second class citizen. When Saroja (Naren's mother) wanted to learn music, "Akka put her foot down." (p.55) "Put one's foot down" is just an idiom in the English language, but in this context, the imagery is significant. "What — learn music from a strange man! Sit and sing in front of strangers! Like those women? Are we that kind of a family? Isn't it enough for you to sing one or two devotional songs, one or two aarti songs?" (p.55) The ideal woman is one who will sink her personality in her husband's.
The one custom against which Indu has a firmly rooted prejudice is arranged marriages. Speaking about the prospective bridegroom of Mini, Kaka declares, "'He has two legs, two arms, two eyes, two ears. So what if he's a little dark? So what if he's not too bright?'" (p.52) "'May be the boy is a little ugly, may be a little stupid ... but everything else is fine. The family is good, it's known to us, they have money, she'll be quite comfortable.'" (p.58) Mini herself realistically asks, "'What choice have I, Indu?'" (p.137)

Indu feels sorry for the helplessness of Mini and of thousands of other girls not only as a feminist but as a simple human being. But when she thinks of the disillusionment of her own love-marriage, there is much for her to ruminate over. She realises that Mini because of her realistic attitude will be contented all her life, while she herself had been ecstatically happy, but that was only for a short time. Her love-life has been a story of disillusion. "Jayant and I ... I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I cannot fantasise." (p.14) How ecstatically happy she had been in the beginning she tells Naren,
"You know the word 'deflowered' they use for girls, Naren? ... but I told myself my body had 'burgeoned into a flower of exquisite felicity.'" (pp.90-91)

There was a time when she had derided the traditional concept of an ideal woman -- one who loses her identity in her husband's. But that is exactly what had happened to her. She dresses to please him. "When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I undress I think of him. Always what he wants, what he would like ... isn't there anything I want at all? Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own? At that moment a savage truth had stared me in the face ... without wants there is no 'I'." (p.54)

But Jayant is just the opposite -- "He too expected me to submit. No. Not expected. He took it for granted that I would" (p.174) She submitted because she was afraid of failure. She had to show to others that her marriage was a success.

There was a certain amount of incompatibility of temperament between them. "It's more like ... like ... we're on different levels ... He chooses his level. And I ... I try to choose the one he would like me to be on. It humiliates me." (p.90)
So she has an affair with Naren with whom she can be herself. She has come to the conclusion that love is a lie while sexual instinct is true. (p.173) Then at the end she makes an edifying speech for her own benefit.

I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant. What kind of a life can you build on a foundation of dishonesty, I had asked myself once. What kind of a home have I built? Now I would go back and see if that home could stand the scorching touch of honesty.

Nevertheless I knew I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me. For that was not important. That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together. (p.205)

There is little doubt that there are several feministic elements in the novel — the right to have an education, the right to marry whom one likes, and the right to have extra-marital affairs. The last one appears to suggest that the feminists would like both sexes to have freedom to indulge in extra-marital affairs rather than that they be loyal to each other.

This accent on extra-marital sex would convey the impression that Shashi Deshpande is a feminist, an impression deepened by references to it in another three novels of hers. But her central concerns are something else altogether. Every
protagonist is concerned with the discovery of the self or search for self-identification or a quest for the self, all of which mean being honest with oneself. An individual is a conglomeration of traits mental and physical, of which a trait or two may dominate, which we call his personality. Personality refers to that trait of the individual which is most representative of that person. That is what he actually is. Into the forming of that personality have gone influences or reactions to various things, incidents, individuals, what he has learnt at school and college and unlearnt in life. Some of these influences will have been even unconscious. The deep delving into the self to find out what it is may prove to be -- and indeed is -- a tortuous course. He may discover likes and dislikes of which he was never aware. He may discover that the person he hated is the person he is most like. Or the thing that he has run away from is the thing he has been in love with. This slow unravelling itself is the essence of the process which will make one one with oneself.

Some critics, who are determined to prove Deshpande a feminist, interpret everything her protagonists do as feminist. For example, P.Ramamoorthy writes "The novel [Roots] gains its feminist stance in Indu's exploration into
herself ..." The critic goes too far in implying that self-exploration is a feminist activity. Cannot women who are not feminists undertake this activity? Are they not interested in it? Or is it a feminine monopoly from which men are excluded? Has this search for identity a gender? There is a well-known vachana (saying) of Jedara Dasimayya, a Veerashaiva saint: which translated would run—:

If a person gets breasts and long hair, we call her a woman; if a person gets beards and mustache, we call him a man. But know this, the soul within is neither feminine nor masculine.

During and at the end of the process of self-identity, the person will also arrive at certain values which, in the case of Deshpande's protagonists, happen to be existential—humanistic. These two aspects -- the process and the values -- will be considered in the chapters to follow.

In The Dark Holds No Terrors, Deshpande intelligently plays on the theme of extra-marital affairs without there being any actual affair. There is ordinarily perhaps no married woman who would not recoil from having sex with a man who is not her husband. The prejudice against extra-marital sex is almost a part of the collective unconscious of the Hindu ethos.

22 "My Life Is My Own", in Sushila Singh (ed) Feminism p.124.
Saru (Sarita) had once believed in love. That is why she had married Manu (Manohar), her adolescent romantic hero. After a few years she gets disillusioned and, like Indu, comes to believe that there is no such thing as love. "Love ... how she scorned the word 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."^{23}

The main reason for this disillusionment is Manu's sadistic sex-exploitation of Saru. In an interview given to Lakshmi Holmstrom, Sm. Deshpande has stated, "I believe this is one area where women really are exploited, when men do use their power, their sexual power in order to subjugate women. The horror of it is certainly part of my thinking."^{24} Manu has become a psychic case for several reasons: Saru is a successful doctor while he is an ordinary lecturer in an ordinary college; she is respected by the community while he is ignored; she is earning more; and he believes that Dr. Boozie is having an affair with Saru, which is incorrect.

^{24} Holmstrom, p.23.
When Saru went for her post-graduate studies, he selected her for work in a research scheme. He looked interested in her as a woman, though she did not realize it in the beginning. In all innocence she had believed that since she was married, she was out of bounds for all males. He taught her not only pediatrics. "It was he who taught me not only to dress with elegance and simplicity, he who taught me how to speak good English, he who improved my accent, he who taught me how to enjoy good food, how to read and what .. oh everything! All the small graces of living that so transform a person." (p.91)

Dr. Boozie was born in a lower middle class family but acted as though he was born rich. He behaved as though only the finest things (including girls) would do for him. He would select the prettiest girl to be his assistant and flirt outrageously with her in public. On the opening day of her consulting room, for which Boozie had lent the money, he is one of the guests. Boozie puts up a show as though Saru is his beloved. But it was all a pretence, a show for the benefit of the public. The critics who feel that Saru has an affair with Boozie have missed the significance of the passage:

"What is this, Saru? No time to greet your old teacher? Why are you avoiding me?"
"Perhaps I am worried about my reputation."
"Your reputation?"

And he laughed. The attractive laugh that came from deep within him. "Tell me, have I really harmed your reputation? Have I?"

He put his two hands on my shoulders and shook me gently, seemingly-affectionate. I could feel the stares.

... This man ... no, I could not hate him, knowing what I did about him. That behind the facade of aggressive, virile masculinity there was nothing at all." (pp.93-94) (Italics added.)

Later, the fact that there was nothing behind the facade is repeated and some more information that he was a homo-sexual added:

For some reasons she had thought of Boozie one day and on an impulse gone to him. When he opened the door, she smelt the drink on his breath. Boozie boozing ... she had stifled a school-girlish giggle at the thought. But he had swamped her with his welcome.

"Saru, by all that's wonderful! How long is it since you came to see me, girl? And I think of you everyday. Every singe day, Come in, come in."

He had pulled her in and given her a hug. As always, his masculinity over-whelmed her. And as always, the astonishment that behind it all was nothing.

His breath ... had he really begun drinking when alone? And that was not all of it. From the gentle insistence with which he ushered her into the tiny gallery outside the drawing room, she knew there was some one inside. The way he looked -- an uneasy face, an unwilling smile, a willing, strained joviality -- made it more obvious. He
wanted her to go away. The person, whoever it was, was annoyed at being left alone. How could she have hoped that he would provide her with the answers -- the man who was floundering himself? He looked as if he had lost grip over his personal life. He had always been so immensely discreet, never a look, never a glance at the male students. The drama of interest in pretty girls. The facade of an affair with one of them. Yes, she had been one of those pawns too. When had she realised that she, as a woman, left him cold? But she didn't care. Not by then. For if she was a pawn in his game, so was he in hers.

In a short while he went in and sounds of an altercation came to her. He came out, like a sheepish husband forced by his wife to do something he didn't really want to do, with a young ... young? not really, only comparatively ... man in tow. Nothing effiminate about him in the way he dressed, moved and spoke. It was something else ... a nebulous aura of femininity about him, faked, spurious and therefore, all the more assertive. (pp.97-98) (Italics added.)

While in the case of Boozie and Saru, they were exploiting each other, in the case of Padma (Dr. Padmakar), Saru was rather thoughtlessly playing with him, but he was very serious about it. She tells us:

I had met him, smiled at him, listened to him. And now I knew it had not been thoughtless on my part. I had done it deliberately, coolly, with calculation, because, foolishly perhaps, I had imagined it would give me an escape route, something that would lead me out of my loveless trap. Wasn't it always the solution for a woman who found no happiness with one man to try to find it with another?

But looking at Padma's face now, I knew I had miscalculated. He was like a child, able to see
no other point of view but his own. Like an adamant child, wanting a thing, refusing to think of consequences, angry when reminded of them.

And I? Now, I knew it was not just the consequences I feared and hated, but the thing itself. What had I imagined? Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfilment and happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. And for me sex was now a dirty word. (pp.132-133)

can be

It is seen that Saru has moved away from Indu. Indu had come to the conclusion that love was a lie and sex the truth. Saru has not lost her trust in love. No doubt, love alone is not enough and sex also is necessary for fulfilment. When they expressed these views, they were disillusioned persons for various reasons, but it is well to remember that both of them had married for love. Indu had been so much in love that she herself had proposed to Jayant; Saru had been in love with Manu from her first year in college. If they had not believed in love, they would not have got married to the persons they did. Romantic love, passionate and tender, is of inestimable value -- at least as long as it lasts.

Diametrically opposite to the idea that tender and affectionate love is of great value in the life of man and woman, Deshpande depicts the suffering that wives undergo where
love is lacking. Akka prefers being locked up in a room without food to being sent by her mother-in-law to the bed-room. Manu’s sadistic treatment of Saru at night is intolerable; the only excuse one can think of is that Manu has become a split personality and does not know during day what he does at night. In *Come Up and Be Dead*, Jyoti Raman has been given a divorce by her husband, because being unable to bear the sadistic treatment of her husband, she tried to commit suicide. She has become inhibited to such an extent that she does not want her daughter to mix even with girls lest they mislead her. This kind of sexual exploitation by men is what Deshpande appears to have felt most.

If the men who exploit wives sexually are the favourite objects of detestation and hatred of Shashi Deshpande, the gutless women who become completely faceless shadows of their husbands without a protest are her pet objects of derision and contempt. Saru refers to such a woman, a doctor’s wife to whose home they had been invited for tea. Justice cannot be done to the masterly description without quoting the passage in full:

But there is one family I do remember, one couple, one woman specifically. We had been invited to tea. The man sat and talked to us. The woman came in later with trays of food, cup of tea and glasses of water. She came in silently, unobtrusively, like a shadow and went out in the same way, her husband’s conversation not interrupted even by a fraction of a second by her presence. He did not introduce her to us, and so strong was the man’s disregard of her presence that we ignored her too. We ate our food, sipped the tea and gulped the water as if they had been brought to us by a nameless waiter in a hotel.

When going I went in to take my leave of her. I smiled at her. She did not respond. Her face was unchanged, expressionless, as if she had fallen in with her husband’s desires and successfully effaced the person that was her. At the door, I looked back for a moment. She stood under a light, a strong, unshaded bulb hanging low in the centre of the room. I looked down at her feet and saw that there was no shadow. For some reason, the words came to my mind ... if I cast no shadow, I do not exist. (pp.158-159)

The protagonists of Deshpande become less adventurous in their extra-marital love affairs. If Indu has the courage to have an affair with Naren in the name of integrity, Saru has even greater reason to give herself to Padmakar, but she does not. She leaves Manu to lead a life of her own. That Long Silence is about the life of resignation which a lower middle class house-wife leads. She is aware that her life is a sham. Like Saru of The Dark, Jaya becomes aware of the unimaginative

nature of her husband and his lack of professional integrity. Her intellectual superiority makes her husband uncomfortable. Mohan's predicament of being suspected of irregularities proves to be a blessing in disguise, for they are forced to go to their old flat at Dadar until the storm blows over. It is in that building that Kamat, a widower living alone, stays and it is through his encouragement and tutelage that she takes up serious writing. Her friendship with him reaches a stage of almost physical intimacy:

And then he had said "Jaya" once again, and this time he held my face lightly within his palms, so light a touch that I had scarcely felt his hands. "Your name is like your face," he had said to me once and passed his fingers lightly over my face. And the touch had meant nothing. But this time...

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

The body's response is so much simpler, so much more direct, is it possible that it is therefore more likely to be right? Even now I have no answer to that. At that moment, however, I had instantaneously rejected the body's response. I had moved away from him, from that scarcely touching grasp, I had left him without a word.

There had been no anger in me when I had done that, there had been no outrage, either. There had been nothing but an overwhelming urge to respond to him with my body, the equally overwhelming certainty of my mind that I could not do so. Later
there had been confusion. "Jaya" he had said and I had become only Jaya. It had annihilated Mohan entirely; it had frightened me the way it had annihilated Mohan entirely. (p.157)

After some days she goes to his flat to meet him and finds him dead.

In Deshpande’s latest novel The Binding Vine27 Urmi has married Kishore for love. He is a naval officer and hence he is at home for a few months and away for several. Urmi is passionately in love with him and is passionate herself. "Then he goes away and I’m left with that passion,... Pain lashed through me and I knew then how vulnerable I was. I tried after that to control the erotic fantasies that invaded me in the early hours of the morning, fantasies in which I wove, in great detail, different patterns of love-making; but I soon realised the only way I could come to terms with my sexuality was to recognize it." (p.105) When Dr. Bhaskar, an old friend of hers, makes advances to her, "I was perilously close to responding to Bhaskar, to giving him what he wants." (p.165) But she does not. "It’s so much easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue and chastity and being a good wife. I see the point of it now." (p.166)

All the novels of Shashi Deshpande are in a sense a breaking of that long silence that Indian women have kept about their sufferings and neglect, of the stifling of their personality and about their breaking out in protest. The Indian culture which the author depicts in her novels and of which she herself is a product, appears to hold the protagonists back in spite of their higher education from the kind of feministic sexual freedom advocated in the West by feminists. Even when they appear to have sufficient justification to let themselves go and are sorely tempted to do so, the Hindu ethos seems to cry out to them "Hold!"

Deshpande appears to feel that there is much more to life than mere physical pleasure even when physical pleasure is irresistible. The search for one's identity leads them to a discovery of themselves as well as of values which are existential-humanistic. Sm. Shashi Deshpande wants to rise above the feminist themes of the relationship between the sexes. In her interview given to Dr. Vanamala Vishwanatha, she declares, "I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women or men." 28 She has yet to write it. 28 Dr. Vanamala, p.14 ii.