Chapter – III

THE PORTRAYAL OF SUBJUGATED AND MARGINALIZED WOMAN

Yes, I did and I do write about woman. Most of my writing comes out of my own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, it comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing the different roles enjoyed on me by society, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and something different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All these make my writing very clearly, woman’s writing.

I have been put into the slot of woman writers, my writing has been categorised as ‘writing about woman’ of feminist writing. In this process, much in it has been missed.

Now, after 26 years of writing I am able to define myself as a novelist and short story writer. I don’t think any qualifying words are necessary—not Indian, not Indo-English, not woman, not feminist, not third world. [Deshpande: 1996:107,110,109]

Shashi Deshpande occupies a distinctive place in the post-colonial Indian women writers in English. Her feminist ideas are not as radical as those of the western feminist thinkers. Her female protagonists seek and find harmony within the traditional social set up. They occupy centre stage in her novels. The attitude and reactions of her protagonists to various issues related to woman provide ample material to treat her novels from feminist perspective. Her primary concern for woman makes her a feminist writer. Her novels are women oriented like those of Jane Austen. She deals with women’s struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother, and most of all as human being.

As a contemporary author, Deshpande presents the realistic picture of the male-dominated middle class society of India. Her protagonists are caught between the tradition and modernity but they try to strike a balance between the two. She is very realistic in the sense
that suggests marriages are not based on love but convenience. Her works exposed the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operative within the institution of the family and the male-centred Indian society at large. She held the social system responsible for the suffering of women. The suppression, domination, subjugation and marginalization have resulted in destroying women physically and emotionally. The author seeks to expose the ideology by which women are trained to play their subservient role in society. The male domination in women’s life is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society and the consequent relegation of women to a secondary position seemed to have prompted Indian women writers to take up the cause of women. In an article G D Barche opines:

She is suffering in our world and her suffering is deeper and deadlier than Sisyphus’ as he was to roll up only one stone, while she is rolling up many, viz. the concepts of ideal of independence and completeness, the concepts of self, sin, love the ideal of detachment and freedom, and so on.[Barche:1998:48-54]

Traditionally Indian women have been treated as marginalized. They were represented as a spineless, wooden creature, subjected to male domination. The laws of Manu dictated the position of women in the family and society. Women were never allowed to be independent and had to spend life under the authority of a man. The sublimation and suppression of natural desires and aspirations creates a deep struggle in women. The society which praises and adores the classic legends or epic like Kannagi, Savitri, Sita, Draupadi, and so on, does not give a necessary respect to womanhood. In reality, a woman is always adopted as a daughter, sister, mother, and wife. She is not viewed as an individual or human beings.

In Deshpande’s literary world, there are women characters taken from almost all the sections of the society. There are doctors, teachers and writers, educated housewives, illiterate maidservants. The women
protagonists demonstrate the changing facets of womanhood. They suffer a conflict between personal desires and social expectations. They question and challenge traditional male oriented norms and codes. They are conscious of the great social inequalities and injustice towards them. They seek to assert their independent identities by bringing forth their suppressed talents. They revolt against their marginalization and question the sexual politics and gender imbalance in the society. The main themes in her novels are women’s quest for identity, the criticism of patriarchy, marriage, man-woman relationships, gender discrimination, mother-daughter relationships, and effect of social-political events on woman’s life.

*Roots and Shadows (1983)* is Shashi Deshpande’s first full-length novel. Indu the protagonist represents the educated middle class and highly sensitive Indian woman. The story of the novel is about the struggle of the protagonist who has a lot of hurdles to cross and achieve freedom. Being smothered in an oppressive male-dominated and tradition-bound society, she attempts to explore her inner self to assert her *individuality*. Deshpande seems to have carved out the character of Indu to depict effectively her own reflections on the travails of a modern Indian woman passing through the contemporary transitional stage in the evolving social values. Sarabjit Sandhu says:

> Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of the West. [Sarabjit: 1991:34]

Indu comes back to her parental home after a gap of eleven years, for her cousin Mini’s marriage which is to be performed in the traditional manner in their ancestral home. She had left home at the age of eighteen to marry the man she loved. She represents new generation and reviews everything with reason and new vision. She explains the
ideal of detachment and liberation and tries to achieve them. She tries only to listen to the voice of her conscience and revolt. But unfortunately, she fails, in all her efforts, miserably due to the impact of culture and tradition, or fear of stigma, or timidity, or all these combined together. She comes back on being called by Akka, the domineering matriarch, as she is on her deathbed. Akka has made her the sole heiress to her property and the household atmosphere becomes charged with resentment by the members of the family for being excluded from the will.

Deshpande has presented very clearly the details of a large Maharastrian Brahmin household, and the myriad woman characters, their greed, jealousy, hopes, fears, disappointments, and anguish. Besides, the problems faced by the girls of the new generation have also been paid special attention. Indu, Mini, and Akka belong to this series of girl children. Mini possesses in her character all the traditional feminine qualities since her childhood. Devoid of any fixed aim in her life, she devotes herself to her family members. Her obedience, silence, and submission never allow her to cross the boundary line of rules and regulation set by the family for the girls.

Deshpande as an Indian feminist writer has shown her concern with the social and cultural construction of gender. She openly protests against the treatment of women as sexual object, and defiance of the stereotyped roles assigned to women. Her bold effort to project the prejudiced attitude of the society towards women is obvious in Roots and Shadows. She not only articulates a thematic and technical maturity but also communicates effectively an intensely apprehended feminine sensibility. She has apparently injected a new consciousness offering varied interpretations of imperishable Indian values, and highlighting our cultural heritage. Indu, as she is brought up under strict
supervision, guidance and restriction becomes acquainted with the real duties of a girl at an early age. From her childhood it is dinned to her mind by the woman members of the family that she as a female and she have to confirm to the pattern of behaviour expected of females. Indu recall this:

As a child they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl they had told me, I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female, you must accept everything, even defeat with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way for female to live and survive. [Deshpande: 1983:158]

Indu hates utter feminity of the girl’s hostel where she reside and narrates the incidents that reveal the tactlessness of her relatives in that period of traumatic pubertal transition. The idea that her body is unclean has been planted in her mind. Indu develops an aversion to the natural biological functions of the female as mother and has act apathy towards bearing a child. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her. Simone De Beauvoir observes:

Indu bitterly recollects how crudely the idea of her womanhood was thrust upon her:

My womanhood...I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, “You’re a woman now,” Kaki had told me. “You can have babies yourself.” I, a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child...And then, she had to gone on to tell me, badly, crudely, how I could have a baby. And I, who had all the child’s unselfconsciousness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it. And I don’t forget she had ended, “for four days now you’re unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything.” [Deshpande: 1983:79]

Indu expected to throw out the traditional role of a woman. Sometimes she fed up the idea of male domination and the subordinate conditions of a woman. She seeks fulfillment in education and career she works as a journalist for a women’s magazine but gives it up out of
disgust for writing about women and their problems and start working for another magazine as Indu explains the reason for shift:

Women, women, women...I got seek of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the key. I couldn’t go. [Deshpande: 1983:78]

Though Indu achieves Personhood yet does not negate the family or the society. This is the reason, Indu and her cousin recalls Mini as a child. Mini possesses in her character all the traditional feminine qualities since her childhood. Devoid of any fixed aim in her life she devotes herself to her family members. Her obedience, silence, and submission never allow her to cross the boundary line of rules and regulations and set by the family for girls. Indu contemplates on the existence of the inner strength in the woman of her family who has spent their whole life slavishly without a word of appreciation for their services. While following their footsteps Mini also accepts that the life of a girl is devoid of choices. Indu could find the reason behind Mini’s submission before her parents’ decision of getting her married to a man who was neither properly educated nor mentally sound. Indu remarks:

A woman’s life they had told me, contained no choices. And all my life, especially in this house, I had seen the truth of this. The woman had no choices but to submit, to accept. And I had often wondered...have they been born without wills. Or have their will atrophied through a lifetime of disuse? And yet Mini, who had had no choice either, had accepted the reality, the finality with grace and composure that spoke eloquently of that inner strength. [Deshpande: 1983:6]

Mini’s father, Anant, was aware that with his weak financial position, he won’t be able to get his daughter married. Being a farmer and have no another job, he has to totally depend on the cultivation of the parental land. Finally, he agreed to marry Mini to a distant relative of Akka, who was not suitable match for her. Mini’s lackadaisical face makes Indu understand that she found the match incongruous. But in
order to save her father from further complexities of her marriage, she poses a semblance of agreement and decides not to show her disagreement. Indu, on perceiving the displeasure in Mini towards her own marriage, requests her uncle to look for a better match. Anant rejects her idea:

May be the boy is little ugly, may be a little stupid... but everything else is fine. The family is good, it’s known to us, they have money, and she’ll be quite comfortable. And Akka had promised she would pay for their wedding expenses as well as the dowry if this came through. What else could I ask for? [Deshpande: 1983:51]

This statement truly reflects the stereotype tradition in selection of groom. A girl’s wishes are never considered. As a matter of fact, Mini did not welcome the proposal of marriage whole-heartedly but gave her mute consent considering the problems faced by her father. Her parents’ growing concern to settle her marriage fills her guilt for being girl, guilt for remaining unmarried, guilt for being a burden on her family. She also feels humiliated when people rejected her on the ground of her physical appearance or the matter of her dressing. After being interviewed and rejected several times, she loses all her buoyancy and enthusiasm, and her only wish is to get married in order to save her parents from the imbroglio of groom search. Mini describes to Indu the efforts made by her Kakas and Kakis as well as her parents to wheedle and lure the boy and his family. Every time they rejected her, she felt downcast and blamed herself for putting her parents in distress.

Among all the women characters, the old tyrannical matriarch Akka deserves special mention. She is rich and childless, and stays in her brother’s house after her husband’s death. Only after her death, Indu came to know about Akka’s life from Narmada Atya. Akka was married at twelve and her husband was tall, bulky and well past thirty. She was sent to live with her husband at the age of thirteen only. She made two
attempts to run away from her husbands’ house. Her mother-in-law whipped her and kept her starved by locking her up in a room for three days. Then she was sent back to her husband’s room. Narmada Atya narrates the story of panic-stricken Akka trying to escape from her husband’s and mother-in-law brutal behaviour.  

But I heard that twice she tried to run away...a girl of thirteen. Her mother-in-law, she heard whipped her for that and locked her up for three days starving. Starved her as well. And then, sent her back to her husband’s room. The child they said cried and clung to her mother-in-law saying, “Lock me up again, lock me up” But there was no escape from a husband then. I remember her telling me before my own marriage was consummated, “Now your punishment begins Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels.” [Deshpande: 1983:70]

Those days sex was a kind of punishment for child brides against which they could do nothing and continued to suffer in silence. Akka’s husband was a wealthy man and kept a mistress. She as a married woman was expected to bear children but she had much miscarriage due to the uncomfortable life she led. Her mother-in-law remade her life miserable for her inability to give birth to a living child. The chain of traditional marriage is heavy and the escape routes are not available for a wife, who often seeks consolation and refuge in oppression, masochism, or mental slavery often leading to her physical decay or death? She is supposed to bear her exploitation and suffering with willing fortitude. Akka, too, has to endure and submit to insult, injuries and humiliation with a stoic patience without any complain.

Indu went ahead with her education and went for an inter-caste marriage with Jayant, who was of her choice. Like her mother, she was segregated from the family for transgressing the traditional mode of settling marriages. Deshpande has given us the glimpse of the rigid system of marriage in India which is decided not on the basis of compatibility but on caste, religion, and dowry. Marriages subjugate and
enslaves woman. Beauvoir emphasized that such a sacrifice of woman is too high for anyone since the kind of self contentment and security that marriage offers woman trends her soul of its capacity for greatness:

She shuts behind the door of her new home; when she was a girl, the whole countryside was her homeland, the forest were hers. Now she is confined to a restricted space, Nature is reduced to the dimensions of a potted geranium; walls cut off the horizon. But she is going to set about overcoming these limitations. [Beauvoir: 1998:469]

Indu marries Jayant, a man of her own choice and of other caste and leaves the parental home. She is swept off her feet. He gives her a feeling of solidity and certainty. She hopes that her marriage with Jayant would enable her to realise the need to belong to be wanted, needed and loved and she is desired the most primary thing for her is to win the freedom to express true self to the world. But she painfully realizes that she has walked into just another trap. She feels that she had been deceived and made to hide her feeling as if they were bits of garbage. Her marriage with Jayant suppresses her feminity and her human demands. She is spiritually and physically dissatisfied with her husband. Her love marriage degenerates into a mere psychological affair and makes her feel that she has abused her body sanctity. After her marriage with Jayant, Indu attends to all the things apparently intended to please him. According to Rose Marie Tong:

A woman may say that she diets, exercise, and dresses for herself, but in reality she is probably shaping and adoring her flesh for men. A woman has little or no says about when where how or by whom her body will be used. [Rosemarie: 1993:187]

Indu is interested in creative writing-a means to articulate her feminine voice to forge moment in art that are arresting and original. But Jayant does not approve her writing. He betrays her hopes for harmony and integration, for peace and happiness. He fails to be her alter ego. Neither is a sheltering tree to protect her in weal and woe.
Whatever Indu does, it is only to please Jayant, and to please him is her way of life. Though Indu seems uncompromising she surrenders at times before Jayant. She says:

_When I look in the mirror I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him...Always what he wants. What he would like. What would please him? It's not he who has pressurised me into this, it's the way I want to be._ [Deshpande: 1983:49]

A woman responding to other’s needs may distract her own sense of identity, of her becoming fluid as to assume any shape. Indu feels as if she had become so fluid that she has no tangible shape, no form of her own. Indu without I of course renders herself as an ideal woman. She is a woman who bears everything without a drop of tear. Women’s experience is primarily defined through interpersonal, usually domestic, and familial relationships- serving the needs of others. Her identity exists largely on being for others. Deshpande voices her views on marriage:

_It’s trap...That’s what marriage is. A trap? Or a cage? May be the comic strip version of marriage...a cage with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other ...isn’t so wrong after all. And it’s not a joke, but tragedy. But what animal would cage itself? [Deshpande: 1983:49]_

Indu’s becoming of problematic, expresses Deshpande’s feminist polemics against sexual and gender roles imposed upon woman in a patriarchal culture. Such relative identity or rather the received role models distort and problematic her self-perception. Such a world reduces woman, like Indu, to a mere thing or a mindless body. With her peremptory and subjugating voice, her feminine instinct for articulation is suppressed. Even ready to please Jayant, Indu agree to his will and desire, and does everything to reflect his image. She gradually realizes that she does not exist for herself but for Jayant only. She feels a sense of existential anguish and insecurity. Indu ultimately realizes that she
has been chasing shadows, leaving her roots far behind in the family and in Jayant. Naren with whom she develops an adulterous relationship is a mere shadow to her. Naren has no permanent place in her memory.

Hence, she decides to go back to Jayant whom she feels is totally innocent. She believes that she only can be blamed for their marital discord. She has created a hell out of the heaven. She had locked herself in a cage and thrown the keys. She had forgotten the roots feeding on only dreams and shadows. She has failed in love. She has escaped from familial responsibilities chasing after oneirodynic and uncrystalling shadows. She realizes that marriage has stunted and hampered her individuality because she saw it as a trap not a bond and the home where the family feels comfort, she saw it as a cage. Now she realizes that all those were mere allusion not reality and all her struggle for life were an act of futility.

Her predicament represents the larger predicament of woman in contemporary Indian society where the new concept of Western education, economic independence, and globalization has completely shaken the roots of old Indian culture and social values. The breaking up of the joint family - the school of inculcating dedication, sacrifice, moral values etc; is the immediate visible impact upon the Indian culture. It has adversely affected different relationships at different levels in general and husband-wife relationship in particular.

In his article “Image of Women in Shashi Deshpande Novel Roots and shadows A Critical Study,” Ramesh Kumar Gupta aptly remark:

She explains the ideal of detachment and liberation and tries to achieve them she tries only to listen to the voice of her conscience and revolts. But unfortunately, she fails, in all her efforts, miserably either due to the impacts of culture or traditional, or fear of stigma, or timidity, or all these combined together.

Indu, who considers herself independent and intelligent, who is proud of her logical and rational thinking and who sets out to reform Indian womanhood, has become (after marriage) like all those archetype submissive Indian women whose identity is only an extension of her husband’s. Marriage has made her acquainted with things like deception and pretentious show. Her desire to assert herself has driven her from affection to hypocrisy. Her marriage makes her feel that there was something shameful in total commitment. Indu regrets:

*It shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I’m like that, he turns away from me I’ve learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I’m passive. And unresponsive. [Gupta: 2002:83]*

Jayant effectively desexualizes Indu in refusing to accept her sexual personality and indirectly moulds her identity according to his prescriptions. Indu articulates her sexual confusion that a woman who loved her husband too much too passionately and ashamed of it. Indu realizes that her overwhelming love for Jayant is disturbing, and her total self surrender to him is frightening. Indu recollects that she has surrendered herself to Jayant step by step, not mainly for love but to avoid conflict and that she has clung tenaciously to Jayant, to her marriage not for love alone but because she is afraid of failure and more over she wants to show to the world and her family that she is successfully happily married woman.

Indu subjected to ill treatment and humiliation. She very well knows the fact that how the situation becomes even worse when unfortunately a woman loses her husband. The burden of widowhood is forcibly thrust and the violation of set rules condemns the woman’s life to the position of outcasts. Their status is reduced. Indu’s decision to cut off all family ties in a conscious choice to break out of the confining
cage of subordinate womanhood. She is cognizant of the fact that her female relations have succumbed to the dictates of the male authority.

Indu’s non real marriage and non real love makes her feel trapped in a negative situation as it starts to shatter her positive struggle to achieve independent selfhood and intellectual liberation. Female sexuality is feared to be a threat which undermines women’s own honour and that of the family. Religious tenets and cultural ethic have always emphasized the child bearing function of women and condemned their pursuit of sexual pleasure. Woman is therefore, enforced to be sexually passive and submissive even towards her own spouse and quested for sexual satisfaction. Seeing that her sexual personality repressed within her marital relationship Indu strives for expression and acceptance through an extra marital affair with her cousin, Naren. But we can’t see any sexual intercourse between them throughout the novel. She attracts towards him only because the lack of conjugal relations with her husband for long time. She always keeps the ground realities of a married woman in her mind. She recognizes her roots that are the homes of her father and husband. The impact of interference of Naren is just the temporary shadow.

After Naren’s death Indu discovers through old uncle that one need not be ashamed of their attachments, as nobody can escape from them and attachments and love are the law of life. He reminds her that the world is made up of interdependent parts, therefore depending on others is natural, and need not be regretted. He also makes her realise that freedom and fulfilment can be achieved by those who have right perception of life and abide by certain rules of life. There have to be some rules so that life can have both dignity and grace. This knowledge gives Indu a new perception of life. She understands the true meaning
and fulfilment, for marriage to be her appears to be only a means to procreate:

Behind the facade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought together...to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue? [Gupta: 2002:3]

Deshpande has very subtly conveyed the message of mutual understanding and co-operation between wife and husband. The Indian women need not to be rebellious like the Western feminists nor like the legendary meek and submissive Indian wives. The Indian women must seek their freedom within the periphery of marriage through mutual understanding without disrupting the Indian socio-cultural values. The novel ends with a positive note with the hope of a new dawn. The novel depicts the permanent mark carved on the psyche of women by traditions, norms, and conventions of the male-dominated society which prohibit them from exhibiting their true self. The mode and style of their development inculcates in them submissiveness, silence and passiveness that had a strong hold on their psyche. Even modern educated women consciously drape themselves with these traits and find themselves in a fix. Thus, Shashi Deshpande conveys the message that the modern Indian women should learn to conquer their fear and assert the selfhood. The novel comes to an end with a note of compromise rather than revolt and revenge.

The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980) is about Saru (Sarita), an educated, economically independent, middle-class woman. The novel focuses on woman’s awareness of her predicament, her want of recognition as a person rather than as a woman and her want of an independent social image. Deshpande portrays the character of Saru as traditional Indian woman who has been marginalized from her girlhood. She has been very much conscious of her gender and loveless relationship with her
parents. The novel opens with Saru returning to her parent’s house after a gap of fifteen years. She had walked out with a vow never to return. Nevertheless she returns to seek refuge against to bear the barbarism of her husband. Her stay in the parent’s house gives her a chance to review with her husband, her mother, her children, and her brother Dhruva. Her earliest memories are those which speak about the gender discrimination shown by her mother in favour of her brother Dhruva. She didn’t show any interest in Saru’s education and personal advancement. She was not allowed to go around freely. Her mother made very unkind remarks about her dark complexion without considering how her words wound her daughter’s sentiments. She remarks:

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.
Why not?
You can’t.
And Dhruva?
He’s different. He’s a boy. [Deshpande: 1990:40]

Saru has had an insecure childhood. As her sense of reasoning and questioning develops, she feels that she is unable to tolerate the preference shown towards her brother. She feels jealous of him when he gets all the parental care and attention. She struggles to attract her father’s attention and succeeds only to some extent. Saru’s mother, who believes a girl to be a liability and a boy an asset, instils a sense of insecurity in her daughter’s mind. Saru rarely speaks to her father, but her brother often has long conversation with her and the father often used to take him out for a ride. There is always a puja performed on Dhruva’s birthday. His birthdays and other religious rituals related to
him are given top priority and celebrated with much zest while Saru’s are barely acknowledged.

This disparity of treatment makes her to think that her birthday is only a matter of displeasure for the family. Her mother’s strong preference for her brother drives her to a sense of restlessness and alienation. She becomes rebellious in nature. When her brother dies by drowning in the pond accidentally, she mutely watches the whole scene without rushing to his help. Since then, she is haunted by the thought that she is guilty and responsible for his death. Her mother accuses that Dhruva died only because of her. Life becomes more desperate to Saru after Dhruva’s death. There are no celebrations at home, her own much awaited birthday passes off unnoticed both at home and at school. Saru’s mind is filled with deep, indelible scars as her mother constantly pins for her dead son and rejects even the presence of her, as a daughter.

Saru’s hatred gets intensified when she attains puberty. She resents the onset of her womanhood. She resents the traditional practice in her orthodox home when she is treated like an outcast during those three days. Thus, rejection by her mother during the early impressionable years leads to psychological insecurity in Saru. She begins to express her feeling through the acts of defiance which spring from her resentment against her mother as a young girl, and then as a child. She hated her, she wanted to hurt her, wound her, and make her suffer. She hopes for a miracle to happen and that one day she would grow up and be beautiful. But when it actually happens, growing up becomes shameful for Saru. The Rigidity of do’s and don’ts prescribed by the domineering mother makes her grow more wild and defiant later. She goes to Bombay to study medicine in spite of her mother’s opposition. Luckily, her father encouraged her. Saru’s mother doesn’t understand the importance of girl’s education.
Saru’s entry into Medical College leads to romance with Manohar (called Manu). Saru is attracted towards Manu. He already is a senior student of post graduation when she just enters in college. He is quite popular and active as the secretary of literary association. In the first flush of her infatuation with Manohar, Saru, however, considers herself highly privileged to have been chosen by him. In her dreams, Saru longs for Manu’s love. She is crazy about him and his love appears to her protective, condescending, all encompassing and satisfying. There is no ego-problem and no assertion of identity. Saru starts fantasizing about Manu. The one dream that dominates her psyche is the age-old feminine dream of total submission to a conquering male. In her imagination Manu is tender imperious and passionate. Later it is Saru who revives the acquaintance with him.

When Manu expresses his love for her, she feels flattered. She becomes exultant for having evoked feeling in someone who is emotionally hard to be touched. However, the very thought of marriage unnerves Saru. Perhaps it is the fear of sex, the unknown. Till they get married, Manu and Saru are quite innocent in their relationship. This may be because of their middle-class inhibitions. Marriage opens the doors of all enjoyment for her. After the first moment of apprehensions, there is nothing that holding in her. Saru, who lacked love once now, finds a saviour in Manu, and by marrying Manu, she has a permanent break in the relationship with her mother. Manu’s interest in her for the first time makes her wanted and loved. She defies her mother to join the medical college and now she defies her once again to marry out of her taste. She recalls the conversation with her mother when she confronts her with her intention of marrying of Manu:

“What caste is he?”
“I don’t know.”
“A Brahmin”.

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“Of course not”.
“Then cruelly... His father keeps a cycle shop.”
“Oh, so they are low caste people, are they?”
The word her mother had used, the disgust, hatred and prejudiced of centuries had so enraged her that she had replied...
“I hope so” [Deshpande: 1990:96]

At a point, Manu fears that cutting Saru off from her parents will be painful for her. But Saru, on the other hand, feels quite detached from her parents. The mother in her turn successfully erases the memory of daughter from her mind and even predicts the fate of her marriage. It is from this moment that Saru takes a vow never to see her parents.

The initial years of her marriage are share bliss when she thinks that she is the luckiest woman on the earth. She describes dingy one-room apartment as heaven on the earth. She is blissfully content in spite of worse accommodation. She describes the room:

The corridors smelling of urine, rooms with their dark sealed in odours, women with inquisitive, unfriendly eyes, men with lascivious stares. [Deshpande: 1983:40]

The new world of happiness discloses all her beauty, beauty of mind and body. Bound by her middle class inhibitions, Saru does not permit herself any physical contact with Manu until they are married. But after her marriage she reveals in the act of love with a wild abandon. Deshpande describes Saru’s feelings:

After the first moment of apprehension...a purely physical response or lack of it rather...there was never any withholding in me. I became in an instant a physically aroused woman with an infinite capacity for loving and giving with a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved. All the clichés, I discovered were true, kisses were soft and unbearably sweet, embraces hard and passionate, hands caressing and tender and loving as well as being loved was an intense joy. It was as if little nerve ends of pleasure had sprung up all over my body. [Deshpande: 1990:40]

Saru bereft of love and attachment, she tries to find everything in her husband Manu. As S P Sen observes:

She marries to attempt autonomy of the self and to secure the lost love in her parental home. Manu is her saviour, the ideal
romantic hero who rescues her from her insecure, wooden existence in her maternal home. Her marriage with Manu is an assertion on and affirmation of her feminine sensibility. [Swain: 35:36]

But Saru’s happiness not lasted so long. Her happiness turns out to be only an illusion. As long as Saru is a student, Manu has been the breadwinner. They had peace at home despite its filth and stench. But problems begin to slowly creep in the moment when Saru is recognized as a doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure and this casts a shadow on their married life. The seeds of jealousy are shown in him when there is an explosion in the nearby factory. Burnt and mutilated bodies pour everywhere and Saru has to attend on them. After this incident, Saru emerges as a successful and reputed doctor almost every morning there is a knock at the door and her visitors demand her medical attention. Saru, young and quite unused to her profession is thrilled with her new job but Manu’s behaviour begins to change. Saru does not observed the slow change in her husband in the initial exhilaration at her exalted status as a doctor. In retrospective mood much later, however she is able to trace the events which lead to the disastrous condition of her marriage. She says:

He had been the young man and I his bride.
Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband. [Swin: 42]

The reversal of roles apparently is much difficult for Manu to accept. He gradually undergoes a change from a romantic husbands to a remorse and uncomfortable with his wife’s steady rise in status. He feels totally ignored as Saru gets all the attention.

In her new role as a career woman, Saru is no longer happy in their shabby apartment and she prefers to move into something more decent and beautiful. She feels that the flat in which she and Manu have been living all these years is narrow and also Manu’s earning now makes her feel that it barely covers her needs. Her works keeps her...
away from Manu for longer hours and she reaches home late at night for which he shouts. Saru’s social and financial status grows far beyond of her husband. She is busy successful doctor in contrast to Manu who is an underpaid lecturer in a third rate college. His ego is hurt by her success, he feels inferior and this sense of inferiority makes him brutal in his behaviour. Though he is normal by day, he turns a treacherous rapist at night and tries to assert his masculinity through sexual assaults upon Saru. Manu feels insulted by the growing status of her wife and makes her victim of his bestiality at night:

I never knew till then he had so much strength in him... I couldn’t fight back. I couldn’t shout or cry, I was so afraid the children in the next room would hear. I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure. [Swain: 201]

Her dream of finding happiness in marriage is soon shattered. The situation seems all the more terrible for her because he pretends that nothing has ever happened. He is perfectly normal in day time total ignorance of his own wrong doings. Now Saru does not share good and cordial relationship with her husband. She scorns the word love and refuse to believe that such a thing can never exist between man and woman. Her attitude has been changed towards Man and marital life. Though she is successful career oriented woman, it brings no happiness at home. Her predicament is contrary to the assertion of most feminist who believe that economic independence brings fulfilment to the woman. The world around her and her life becomes so insignificant that Manu’s position and place in her life becomes relatively unimportant. Saru views sex as a dirty word. With her responsibilities increasing outside the home, she recoils from Manu’s lovemaking and he takes her rejection of sex as rejection of himself. Saru, however, is unhappy over the situation.
Shashi Deshpande, however, proves that in the institution of marriage, an economically independent woman is still bound in shackles and must forever live in fear of hurting the ego of her husband. As Saru observes bitterly:

\[ a+b \text{ they told us in mathematics is equal to } b+a. \text{ But here } a+b \text{ was not, definitely not equal to } b+a. \text{ It became monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, impossible. [Swain: 42]} \]

She is so desperate to save her marriage that she is prepared to sacrifice her lucrative profession.

On hearing the death news of her mother through her childhood friend Manda, she tries to console her father. This desire is aggravated by Manu’s behaviour and hence she goes to him after a gap of 15 years. It is because of this parental hatred and insecurity she had walked out once with a vow never to return. Nevertheless, she returns to seek refuge, against the barbarism of her husband. Saru yearns for security and emotional attachment. She wants her father to support her and her feeling raised against Manu’s brutality. She even rehearses these thoughts and recites them as if she was reading out a clinical history of an unknown patient. But when the real moment comes, she blurts loudly and crudely, “My husband is a sadist.” Her father fails to understand her vocabulary like sadism, love and cruelty.

Painstakingly Saru makes every possible effort to explain to him about her problems and when she speaks to him, is not as a daughter but as a woman to a man. Saru’s father expects that they should talk like matured persons because he feels that this kind of relationship of intimacy or sharing has never occurred even between him and his wife. He enquires Saru about the events that have happened and gradually his unnatural composure and indifference have disappeared. Saru eagerly tells him everything about Manu’s brutality and expresses her helplessness. She expects moral supports from her father and she
becomes more frantic and requests him. On listening to Saru, her father simply leaves her and goes away. Saru lives an isolated and lonely life. She wants her father to listen to her but her father’s unchanging attitude saddens her.

She thinks that they are like people that *are fated to be strangers.* Many times, she wants to tell her father. But her feelings remain inside her. At times, she regrets for having come to her parents house, as she is reminded of her children, her practice and her patients. In all these memories, her husband doesn’t figure at all. Her visit to her father’s house is a kind of escape from the sadist husband and her loveless marriage. It is a kind of solace from her hectic daily routine too. Staying with her father and Madhav who makes no demands on her and on her whereabouts is a relief to Saru. The whole day in her parent’s house is completely dedicated to her own desires and comforts. She also reminiscences the kind of life she had lived as a child.

To Saru, the idea of men going to work, children going to school, and women staying at home to work, clean, scrub and sweep appealed as she finds a bondage in these tasks performed by women who stay at home. This kind of contentment Saru discovers in her new routine life it makes her feel that she has a totally new life and now as Saru calls herself totally changed persons and nothing of the old Saru is left. At her father’s place, slowly she loses the awareness of her feminine. She stops thinking about herself as a woman. The doctor in her is more often seen than the wife or mother in her. Neighborhood women visit her to talk about their ailments. Mostly these women keep everything as a secret.

This makes Saru to think their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them. She calls them stupid, silly, martyrs, idiotic heroines,
Going on with their task and destroying themselves in the bargain, for nothing but a meaningless modesty. Saru like her neighbourhood women can never voice her feelings until the real day had arrived. Her heart explodes and she becomes so restless. She objectively analyses her share in her marriage turning out to be a disaster. Her ruminations make her think that her brother died because she heartlessly turned her back on him. Her mother died alone because she deserted her. Her husband has got a failure because she destroyed his manhood.

After reliving memories of her brother’s death, Saru is able to confront deeper problems. She at last receives confront from her father who advises her to forget about her role in the death incidents of her brother and her mother. He further advises her that she should learn to encounter adversities as they come along in one’s life, and she must be prepared to meet the present problems of her husband Manu. Earlier the disillusionment in her marital life makes her looks on other avenues. Even affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Roa are temporary substitutes for her unfulfilled marital life. Boozie is a handsome and masterful man. Everything about him might from his language, his swift progress through the hospital wards etc., appears to Saru, as if he does everything in perfect co-ordination. Later Saru realizes that Boozies’s interest in Saru is not that of master and student but that of a man and woman. Though it looks strange to her, she responds fittingly to his flirtatious manner. Very soon, their relationship reaches a stage where Boozie helps her with enough money to set up practice in a decent locality. She manages to fulfil her desire of attaining higher education and also better quality of life, which otherwise may not be possible for a common girl like her.

Although Saru’s social and financial status grows, there’s no peace for her at her home. Her feelings on being an economically
independent individual are worse. In fact, her economic independence, though asserted by feminists, brings fulfilment to her. Another extra marital relationship of Saru is with Padmakar, often called as Padma. He was her classmate in Medical College, whom she meets years later, but after a few incidents, she dissuades him from doing so as she wants to bring an end to their relationship. This relationship is neither soothing nor comforting to her.

Saru happens to meet her two childhood friends, Smitha and Nalu while Nalu is a spinster, who teaches at a college, Smitha is a housewife. If Nalu moulds herself with an air of dignity and confidence Smitha surrenders herself totally to her husband. Smitha has given up her identity; her name is changed as Anju, short for Geetanjali, as her husband is fond of Tagore. Saru also despises Smitha for her servile dependence on her husband. When she compares herself of Nalu, she doesn’t seem to be happy on being labelled as a woman who attains completeness just because of marriage and children. Contrasting the joys and sorrows by a wife, a mother, and that of an unmarried woman (spinster), Saru thinks it is difficult to estimate the value of happiness and fulfilment among them. Saru has contempt for the traditional concept according to which the sole purpose of a woman’s existence is to please her husband.

Saru remembers Mai Kaki’s advice to keep her hands soft and smooth, so that her husband will never let go of them. But Manu has left her hands because she has failed to please him. When invited by two students to speak on the topic, ‘Medicine as a profession for women’, Saru starts to rehearse an imaginary speech on the relationship that exist between a husband and a wife, and also imagines an old fashioned couple where the wife walks a few steps behind her husband. She advises ironically:
A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he’s an M.A you should be a B.A. If he’s 5’4’ tall you shouldn’t be more than 5’3’ tall. If he’s earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That’s the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don’t ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive secretary, principal-teacher role, it can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it is not worth it. He’ll suffer you’ll suffer and so will the children. Women’s magazines will tell you that a marriage must be an equal partnership. That’s nonsense, rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care it is unequal in the favour of the husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God help you, both of you. [Swain: 137]

To Saru, marriage is no guarantee for happiness. By gaining the identity as a woman, a new Sarita (saru) is identified to whom past was always receding and there was no future. Saru is in the process of gaining her identity as an individual. Saru understands that it is she, who is self-assertive and that she has been cruel to her people like her own brother Dhruva, to her mother and her husband, Manu. She feels that till her last breath, she will not be able to get rid of the thought that she was cruel to them. You are your own refuge; there is no other refuge. Saru realizes that one has to be sufficient within oneself because there is no other refuge elsewhere and Saru needs to apply to herself what she has cautioned Dhruva once. There is no need to escape from the darkness or curse the darkness. Darkness makes one incapable to see things clearly and objectively. Darkness is also some of constant fear when viewed from outside. It hampers the outlook of the inside, but it holds no terror in itself. The darkness of mind ceases to be terrible the moment one is prepared to face the situation. Saru has begun to understand things as she finds that the dark is not terrible.

*That Long Silence (1988)* is prestigious *Sahitya Academy* award winning novel by Shashi Deshpande. It reveals the predicament of its main protagonist, Jaya. Deshpande in her work depicts the inner conflict of a female and her quest for the self-identity and other sufferings in the
male dominated and tradition bound society where male is considered primary and female secondary.

Jaya, the central character of the novel is an ambitious girl, a supported child by her father. She starts her journey with her father’s favourite name Jaya and passes through different phases of daily life with other identifications as Suhasini and Sita. She finds her role and life fit, only and only in Jaya, “Jaya,” the Winner as her father wanted to make her. She had been brought up in a family, in which modernity of thoughts dominated traditions and drilled social taboos. Her father gave a blow to his family’s expectations, by having a love affair with her mother, thus denying the comprising and adjusting ways of society. This helps Jaya to think herself different.

Like all the girls in the society, she does not want to be shadow of her mother and a typical domestic girl, who visit temples and smear sandal paste, in the hope of their prince charming and to prove themselves devoted and complete housewives. Her father has made her different, indifferent to social taboos and familial rituals. After her father’s death, Jaya feels alone, so much alone that she feels herself better in hostel, than at home. She feels herself completely detached from her mother and brother. She feels disgust for her mother, who has easily recovered herself from the shock of her father’s death.

Jaya is married to Mohan, an Engineer who cares for money, status and marital comforts. She marries not because he is the most suitable groom for her, and also not because, he is her choice, but because she is the most liked girl by Mohan. Moreover, her brother wants to relieve his responsibility, left on his shoulders by his dead father. Jaya’s convent education helped her to be the choice of an Engineer. It is a matter of pride that a wife should be liked by her husband, and rejecting a good offer from her side, is considered an act
of foolishness in our Indian society. Jaya with her ambition to be different does not react differently, because she has none to share her suppressed feelings. After marriage, she adores a new identity, a label to fulfil other’s expectations. Generally a woman’s identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as a daughter, a wife and a mother. It means virtually a woman doesn’t have an identity of her own.

Jaya also has been renamed. Her name is changed from Jaya, a winner to Suhasini, ‘Soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman’, one who lovingly nurtured her family and who knew how to cope. She puts on a new face, the face of Suhasini, to please everyone. Jaya adjusts herself in a new environment, with the face of Suhasini and the heart of Jaya, as she is expected to be a different girl becomes indifferent to herself, her new life, and her future life. A self-introspection starts in her heart; a war is waged between body and mind, between Jaya and Suhasini. In Mohan’s house, she bears all responsibilities with full devotion and dedication, without late and hate. She finds herself in clear-cut lines, regarding rights and responsibilities, work and reward and finally fault and punishment. Everything is the responsibility of the wife and nothing is attached to the husband. Every duty from cooking to cleaning, washing to waiting, making to serving, is only and only share of a wife’s lot. Her early training at home has made her obedient and submissive towards her husband. Her relatives taught her the importance of being with a husband:

A husband is like a sheltering tree. And it was as if she had said ‘Manu’ to me. I ignored her. After so many years, the words came back to me. A sheltering tree. Without the tree you are dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. [Deshpande: 1983:32]

Being Suhasini, she shares everything with Mohan, what a wife is expected to do, but being Jaya, she buries a part of self. She loves her husband so intensely that waiting for him becomes a part and parcel of
her daily activities. Receding fountain of love Jaya cares for a careless person, desires for him without caring for her own desires, the desires which her father imprinted on her innocent mind. She feels happy to lose her identity, to be a fraction of her husband’s complete identity. Working in the purchase office, he prospers well looks arrogant and brash.

Mohan is found indulged in some wrong practice in his office, taking commission. An enquiry set on him. He has to leave Church gate bungalow and decides to move in Dadar flat. Dadar flat is not much comfortable as compare to elegant and well furnished bungalow. Away from the routine, Jaya prepares herself with utmost objectivity. She does not have enough courage to put a question mark on his affairs and issues. She is forced to live a life of exile, separated from home and children, with her husband, to save his false reputation. She tries to adjust and compromise with her lot. She surrenders herself so totally that she is afraid of expressing her likes and dislikes. She always tries to save the dying relationship. Jaya suffers from emptiness among business and a vacuum develops, which she tries to fill. Only she tries to fill, because only she has the fear of hardcore societal codes, the setlines, and the trauma, she will suffer, if she fails in married life. She has to save her identity, her status of being married. Mohan has no share in it, because, he has his own complete identity. It is only for Suhasini, to bear unbearable things, if she desires to see the horizon of her survival.

As Suman Ahuja observes:

Jaya caught in an emotional, eddy, endeavours to come to terms with her protean roles, while trying, albeit in vain, to rediscover her true self, which is but an ephemera...an unfulfilled wife, a disappointed mother and failed writer. [Ahuja: 1989:2]

In the early years of her marriage, Jaya has been on the threshold of acquiring name as a creative writer of some merit. It is Mohan who
has been encouraging her to write. In fact he introduces her to editors of various papers and magazines. On Mohan’s advice, she begins writing *light humorous pieces about travails of a middle class housewife*. It does not satisfy her. She is an intense thinking woman. She has made a good beginning to write about men-women relationships which could not reach out to a woman except through her body. This story has won a prize for its realistic portrayal of life. When Jaya finds some solace in her writing, to reveal her suppressed self, through the realistic stories of men-women relationship, Mohan becomes critical and blames her for dishonouring the sacred vows of marriage, by presenting the gallery of their married life to the world. The little self, whom she achieved and accumulated, the real part of her identity, her creative genius faces a blow, against her husband’s strong decision and once again, she becomes ready to subjugate herself. Jaya knows that there is no truth in his accusation. She does not try to reason with Mohan. She does not like to risk her relation with him. She says:

> Perhaps if Mohan had been angry, if he had shouted and raged at me, if he had forbidden me to write, perhaps I would have fought him and gone on. But he had only shown me hurt. And I had not been able to counter that. I had relinquished them instead, all those stories that had been shape in me because I had been scared-scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage. [Deshpande: 1989:144]

In order to make, the sacred vow of married life strong and more visible, she stops writing real stories and tries her hand for imaginary ones. She adores a fictitious name *Sita* completely foreign to both, Jaya and Suhasini. Love and hate are like blown air balloons, the harder you jerk, the higher it flung. Suhasini and Sita, the shadows of Jaya, haunt her like a ghost. Her fictitious stories as writer gain a high appreciation in the society, but the real one, the suppressed one steals her peace of mind.
Kamat is a middle aged lonely intellectual. He is warming friendly and companionable. As her neighbour on the first floor, treats Jaya as an equal. Jaya is completely at ease in his company, sharing things which she cannot tell others including Mohan. He analyses her stories objectively and tells how she could make them *more forceful and hitting*. After Mohan’s rejection to her about writing stories about their personal life, Kamat rebuilds morale and suggest her to send her writing to woman’s magazines. Jaya is unhappy because the writer in her could not come out to light. She achieved appreciation as a woman writer, by dejecting the woman inside her. She created female characters, but ignored her own character in real life. She felt powerless, after giving powers to others. She allows others to trespass her, to make new ways and path for others, and she did it not because she liked it, but because she was taught to do so for her silent survival.

Jaya was suppressed at every stage of her life. She compromises to confirm to the role of an ideal woman. The actual desire takes a hidden corner, when other concerns dominate. She lost in the tussle of Suhasini and Sita, finds herself tangled in a web of social and family codes, set for a woman by the dictates of the patriarchal society. In her own description, her married life is:

> A pair of bullocks yoked together...a cleaver phrase, but can it substitute for the reality? A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat preserved like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this; we were two persons, a man...a woman. [Deshpande: 1989:8]

The image of the pair of bullock yoked together suggests that yoked bullocks should share equal burden between themselves. But no one knows whether they love each other or not. Loveless married life results in total failure. The relationship between wife and husband is expected to be not only cordial but intimate and enduring. But relations
between Jaya and Mohan are an epitome of failure. It is an emblem of
disgust, disappointment and depression. She feels herself helpless,
before the heap of expectations of her husband and his family. Loveless
marital relationship draws towards Kamat. Her physical intimacy with
Kamat is characterised by a spontaneity ease, but more important in
their relationship, it has perfect mutual understanding and friendship,
that is why his sudden death is a blow to her.

Only and only for the pleasure of Mohan, she is ready to wear
another mask, a new face. But even a single request for keeping Kusum,
her relative, for some treatment, is not acceptable to Mohan. Jaya’s
honesty and loyalty, her creative genius as well as her identity, really
gets a blow, when her husband is found indulged in some wrong
practice in his office, on the pretext of which he had to leave his job.
Though, the fear of social stigma forced them to move to another city,
Dadar, in Mumbai. She keeps mum, but her silence forces Mohan to
explain his fault. Once again, Mohan’s ego is hurt due to Jaya’s silence,
the silence which was louder than the speech. Her husband did not
confess his fault, but blamed her and their children, because he slipped
from the right track to give them more and more comforts. It is the
height of irony when she desperately needs a shoulder to lesson it on,
Jaya is accused by her husband of avoiding him. Mohan seeking the
unstinting support of his wife cringes under the subtle hint of
withdrawal by Jaya. He feels cheated by her failure to communicate
with him on his issue. At one point he bursts out:

I’ve always put you and the children first. I have been patient
with all your whims. I have grudged you nothing. But the truth is
that you despise me because I have failed. As long as I had my
job and position, it was alright. But now because I am likely to
lose it all... [Deshpande: 1989:12]

Jaya is not only broken inwardly, but feels suffocated, with the
fumes and fire burning inside her. When the inside turmoil is intense,
then outward situations hardly matter. Mohan compelled Jaya to realise herself and break her silence. The silence subdued her identity, her real character, and role in the married life. She came under the grab of self-analysis, made herself ready to cope with the actual difference between deception and reality.

A drift in Jaya’s relationship with her husband ran parallel with her struggle with herself for coming out of the disguise of Sita. Her self-analysis made her realise her own fault, for being silent through these years, for not giving some space to some questions regarding her husband’s activities and behaviour. It is a general feeling among women that they see their fault in faults of their destiny makers. Mohan is at fault, for neglecting Jaya and her emotions, feelings and her existence, for being involved in corrupt affairs, but Jaya finds her fault, for keeping silence, where she was not allowed to speak, for caring the person who was careless and finally for being common in the society of special ones. Her literary genius and her real self are suppressed to satisfy the ego of her loving husband, she becomes the other for the person, with whom she wanted to become one. She shared herself, with the self-centered person. She starts performing the role of Sita, the real Sita, who obeyed her husband Rama, without any question.

In the solitude of Dadar flat, Jaya faces double isolation, isolation from Mohan and isolation from self. She experiences her real shadow, the shadow that was deep rooted before her roles as Suhasini and Sita. As Usha Tambe remarks:

_The confused and clumsy Jaya appears a contrast to the smiling, efficient house wife Suhasini. But finally come to grief to herself and realises that her total personality will have to co-ordinate both of them and that fragmentation of self is not possible._ [Tambe: 1994:127]

The daily routines of life appear lifeless and unattractive when one’s own life has no meaning and significance. Only hope left for Jaya
was her pen and paper, on the canvas of which she made Suhasini and Sita dead, and made some light for Jaya to appear. When Jaya came to the fore, and false and bogus attempt to make dying relations alive, got a shock. Mohan misunderstood Jaya as Sita, but little of Sita was left in Jaya. The more Jaya tried to solve the web of their hollow relationship, the less successful she became alienated in her attempts, to gap the misunderstanding between the two made them alienated, not only from each other, but from their own selves also.

It was Mohan’s anger for his lost prestige and reputation that Suhasini tolerated and Sita accepted whole-heartedly and now it was the turn of Jaya, the writer to bear silently, which a wife is supposed to do. The angry outburst of Mohan, his frustration in his life, his hostility which though Jaya shared to some extent, with her silent response, but made her husband upset to a great extent. His accusations, high betrayal and his misunderstanding for Jaya, made him feel alone even in the company of his wife. Jaya’s feeble defence had no chance before his fierce onslaught. Though he pretended to make Jaya free with her own ways, but in reality, he was unable to digest even a few words by her. Jaya feels desperate because she has changed herself, to fulfil the desires of her husband, her children, and finally to keep herself within the boundaries set for a woman. A convent-educated girl, with her own dreams and desires, desired nothing, but the love and care, basic instincts of human beings, and in return, she gets total despair and shattered existence. Jaya feels helpless before the towering decisions of her husband but hardly utters any word. She has only her ideas and feelings.

Even when Jaya felt perturbed due to his behaviour, she preferred to maintain silence, even when she tried to keep the environment cool, her husband left the house, without disclosing this to her, to take
revenge upon his silent wife. This added fuel to her misfortunate life. Now she was exposed to the neighbour’s curiosity. It did matter never to the neighbours whether they were living or surviving, but disappearance of Mohan mattered a lot. Jaya repented, for taking a bold decision, to break silence that had crept silently between her and her husband and crippled seventeen years of her married life. Still she accumulates her hope for Mohan’s return. It is human nature to make speculations and assumptions, in all situations and occasions. She is less disturbed with her husband’s departure, but more with his son Rahul’s message that he had left the company. Jaya, the winner became Jaya, the loser. She lost her senses, and then neighbours came to cure and console her. In such a moment of grief, she had to face her neighbour’s queries regarding Mohan’s return. In the lonely moments of grief, she starts finding fault with herself, and confesses time and again.

It is a generally prevalent thinking in our society that whether man is happy or sad in marital relations, all credit goes to his wife. It does not occur to anyone to find out whether she is happy or not, because she has to feel satisfied at every cost, and in every situation. As Mohan has left, Jaya is under the grab of suspicion. Mukta, her neighbour suspects that Jaya’s friendship with Kamat may be the reason behind the scene. Mohan has the right to put finger on her character, but she has no such share on her part. Jaya feels herself failed in all the roles, and the worst performance in the role of wife, which she played with all her energy and concern. Kamat’s death made her realise the futility of human existence.

Jaya, always in search of her identity, feels disturbed to such an extent that she introspects herself, for the real root of the problem. When Rahul returns in Dadar for his ailing mother, she feels a little
comfort. Mohan’s telegram with the message *all well* fills a sense of joy in her lonely heart.

Mohan will be back ‘All well’ his telegram says. Does he mean by this that we will go back to being ‘as we were’? Does it mean that Mohan has sorted out his problems, and no longer fears prosecution, joblessness and disgrace, we can go back to our positions? Does it mean that he will come back and give me a carefully edited version of has happened - as he has done so often till now-and then ask me, ‘what do you say Jaya’? [Deshpande: 1989:192]

She expected normal behaviour in abnormal situations, and vice verse. She realizes a drastic change in her attitude, when she found herself swinging between what she desired, and what she achieved. Now onwards, she will not allow the silence to cripple her life.

Man is a product of his environment and all his dreams and desires, reflect the shades of this, time and again. Generally, a woman is expected to be the silent bearer of all the natural and man-made sufferings. She is laden with all responsibilities and duties, and finds herself in invisible fences of familial and social codes. Mohan’s accusations made Jaya realise the hard reality about herself. She has to acknowledge to her role, that as Mohan’s wife she has to have been a passive one. She decides to come out of her cozy corner that she had so long preferred to reality. Ultimately, she finds solace and complete meaning of her life as an individual in her writing.

Shashi Deshpande’s approach to man-woman relationship, displays well her strong sense of reality. Instead of portraying the attractive love story of married life, she shows the hard realities of life, in the life of a well-educated girl with literary sensibilities, and the effect of difference in her ideals and reality. In traditional Indian society a woman is always subjugated to the adverse conditions created by male domination but Jaya, by self-introspection, decides to give voice to her different roles in her life. She becomes the real Jaya, the winner when
she conquers her own fears and fences, to bring the hidden self to the front.

*The Binding Vine (1993)* is the fourth novel by Shashi Deshpande which deals with the personal tragedy of the protagonist, Urmila. Through Urmila, Deshpande narrates the pathetic lives of other victims, Kalpana, Mira, and Shakutai. Urmila, an educated middle-class wife and a lecturer who is grieving over the death of her one-year-old daughter Anu, and in the process becomes very sensitive towards the sufferings and sorrows of other people as well. Urmila’s narrative comprises three tales—one about herself and the other two about Shakuntala, a rape-victim’s mother, and Urmila’s mother-in-law, Mira, a victim of marital rape.

The novel opens with Urmila grieving over her dead infant daughter. Although she tries to fight the loss, she feels that forgetting this loss would virtually same as to betrayal. It is her intense attachment to her daughter that becomes the cause of her suffering. Commenting on Urmila’s attitude, S. Indra writes:

> Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow she holds, on to it as she believes that let go of that pain, to let it become a thing of the past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of loss. [Indra: 1995:25] 

Deshpande has presented Urmila as a chaste wife whose sympathy for the less fortunate women is sparked off by her daughter’s death. Despite her longings and frustrations, Urmila is not a radical feminist but one who, tries to make the best of her life by hardening to face the harsh realities of life. Though Urmila has married a man of her own choice, she is desperate of her married life. Urmila and Kishore’s relationship crumbles on account of lack of communication between them. Since the beginning of their married life, Urmila finds that the
bond between her and her husband is not that of love. Even at the very first night of their wedding, she feels the distance from Kishore. Whenever she tries to reveal her emotional insecurity, he asserts himself sexually. Kishore, the archetypal Indian husband never understands the depth of her feeling, like she cannot bear with her husband’s departure. Urmila tries to tell him two times that each time he left her alone the parting is like death but Kishore finds solution in the physical relationship.

This incompatibility to understand each other of course ends in alienation. Earlier in their marriage, Kishore was neither spontaneous nor emotional like Urmila. But after the death of their daughter, he is absolutely uncommunicative. As she keeps distance from the closest, she expects some sort of solace from Kishore as it is also his responsibility as a husband to comfort his wife at this pathetic situation. If Kishore pats Urmila with his consoling words, she can comfort herself in a better way. The relationship between Kishore and Urmila is distinctly manifested as a result she gets repressed.

Urmila suffers from a long separation from her husband. This separation sometimes gives her an opportunity to think of another relationship and there are even moments when she overcomes a longing for physical gratification during her husband’s long absence from her and home. Her friendship with Dr. Bhaskar provides ample opportunity to satisfy her urge. Dr. Bhaskar has declared his love for her but Urmila doesn’t respond to Bhaskar in a way he expects back. Instead, she just holds back and thinks that it is so much easier, simpler to think of virtue and chastity and being a good wife. Urmila’s reaction to Dr. Bhaskar indirectly indicates Urmila’s strong love for Kishore though he fails to do the things as a responsible husband. Though Urmila is marginalized by her husband but she loves him with the endless hope that she will be
loved one day as hoped by all the other typical Indian housewives. This is proved when Bhaskar asks Urmila whether she loves her husband; she confesses that she only loves her husband. The relationship between Kishore and Urmila is really difficult to understand. Commenting on Urmila’s relation with her husband, J P Tripathy says:

Urmila the sailor’s wife and college teacher is more self reliant and has an identity different from that of her husband; she is self respecting and doesn’t want to live on Kishore’s money. She is, however, a sensitive wine and need. Kishore as an Oak to entwine herself around. [Tripathy: 1998:152]

The novelist reveals untouched subject of marital rape in the novel. Urmila’s late mother-in-law, Mira is saga of misery, submission, and sorrow. She was the victim of male dominated society. She has aversion to physical intimacy with her husband and still she has to put up with his obsession for her. It so happens that many years after her marriage, Urmila finds Mira’s diary which is not a daily account of her routine life but a communion with herself. Urmila understands that Mira was a favourite daughter of her father who was obviously proud of her intelligence and talent. Urmila also understand that Mira had a deep desire of being recognised as a good creative writer and a poet. Her poems are the true reflections of her latent feeling:

Huddle in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm
Will I emerge a beauteous being?
Or will I suffocating, cease to exist? [Deshpande: 1992:65]

Urmila goes through the poems in Mira's diary and gets a glimpse of her troubled marriage. Talking about one of Mira’s poems Urmila observed that Mira was only twenty-two when she wrote that. She had been married at the age of eighteen. Since then, she had lived a life which even if normal to most women of that time, must have seemed terrible to her, Urmila observes an unhappy woman who assumed the traditional role of a submissive wife, silently living her life without
raising questions and without having room for discharging her suppressed feelings. She comes to know from Akka how Kishore’s father had pursued and married Mira, a college student.

The poems and entries in the diary are proof enough for Urmila to conceive the forced sexual activity Mira had to undergo in an incompatible marriage. Urmila finds her identification in the poetry and gets involved and finds relief from excruciating pain in the predicament of Mira. Mira’s inner life is made available to Urmila through not only the poems but also through the diary. The entries in her diary provide a glimpse into a troubled life lived by Mira painfully and secretly. Mira’s married life is based not on mutual understanding but on force, she has been the victim of rape.

Mira suffers from is generally not acknowledged by our culture as rape, but the legitimate right of the husband to possess his wife sexually, with or without her consent. Rape has always been a horrible indignity heaped on woman folk by male species, merely on the strength of brute force. Mira’s infatuated husband has exercised this right against her will. Deshpande narrates:

...runs all through her writing a strong clear thread of an intense dislikes or the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married. [Deshpande: 1992:66]

Mira’s relationship with her husband is insensible. Mira’s husband represents the passionate love of men. He never succeeds in developing an emotional bond of love between them. Every day and every moment that Mira spends, there is a cry of rape and anguish. Through all her writing the feeling of a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married. Her marriage is nothing but a black cloud with haunted nights and threats of nightmares. She begins to hate the word “love” as it is uttered always by her husband. To her, love becomes a
hateful thing and all that she desires is to be left alone. Urmila narrates from the paper about Mira’s predicament as wife:

I don’t mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, it is bliss when does that...why can’t he leave me alone? [Deshpande: 1992:67]

She uses her pen as a weapon to save herself from abuse, anonymity and mutilation in the prison house of her husband. Every time while reading the poems, Urmila is filled with the excitement of a hunter. Mira lives in that alien house in that her inmates treat her as a mad woman. She resents the new name given to her, Nirmala, at the time of marriage. She burst out:

Nirmala, they call, I stand statue –still. Do you build the new without erasing the old? A table of rice, a pencil of gold can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira. [Deshpande: 1992:101]

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

I’ve worked hard at knowing Mira, I’ve read her diaries, gone through her papers, absorbed her poems, painfully, laboriously translated them in to English. And now, I tell myself, I know Mira. [Deshpande: 1992:174]

Mira stands as a classic example of the multitude of unfortunate women who are forced into a loveless marriage and finally succumb to the lust of their husbands.

Shashi Deshpande suggests here that forced violation of a woman’s body even in marriage can be as traumatic as rape, even though it is not placed in the same bracket. This type of acceptance with deceit makes Urmila angry, it makes a woman as a spineless wooden creature subjected to male domination. Urmila fights for another woman’s cause while others have fought their own battles. It shows how she exhibits her interests and capacity to purge the society of its needs.

When one day, Urmila goes to the hospital to meet Vanna who is a medical social worker and a friend of her sister-in-law. Urmila learns
of the rape-case of Kalpana. Kalpana admits in the hospital, the outside world moves around her because she has been brutally raped. Shakutai, Kalpana’s mother does not want the case to be reported to the police. She is afraid that it will spoil their name and it will affect the marriage of her second daughter Sandhya. Shakuntala’s reaction is that of a typical Indian mother bred in an oppressive male-dominated society. A victim of rape is a loser on two counts. First, she has been raped; secondly, the society looks down upon such a victim as a kulta (a characterless woman) which leaves the victim in a much miserable plight.

Dr. Bhasker severely protests in rage at the case being reported as an accident. He tells Urmila that there are obvious signs of rape on the badly mauled Kalpana. Even the police officer wants to project it as an accident because rape cases are complicated. He explains and tries to convince them that this case must be recorded as car accident in the name of female honour:

...think of the girl and her family. Do you think it’ll do them any good to have it known the girl was raped? She’s unmarried, people are bound to talk, and her name would be smeared. [Deshpande: 1992:88]

It is clear that nobody wants to make it as a rape case. All offer only lip-sympathy on Kalpana. Urmila is shocked to find that everyone wants to hush up a rape case, and in the process, the rapist is able to get away scot-free. Urmila decided to help and fight for the justice of Kalpana. She tries to explain that Kalpana is not at fault and the man who do this to her is the wrong doer and therefore, he is to be blamed and not she. She asserts:

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 is not her fault, no, not her fault at all. [Deshpande: 1992:147]
Urmila gives out Kalpana’s story to her journalist friend and it is published. Shakutai doesn’t like to be given publicity to the case. Shakutai has one more daughter Sandhya and a son. Shakutai is the breadwinner for her family because her husband doesn’t stay with them. Shakutai holds her daughter, Kalpana, responsible for her own tragedy. On the one hand she is proud of her daughter’s beauty but on the other hand, resent her behaviour:

She's shamed us, we can never wipe off this blot. And Prakash blames me. What could I do? Mira’s infatuated husband has exercised this right against her will. Self-willed. Cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, men are like animals. But she went her way. You should have seen her walking out, head in the air caring for nobody. It's all her fault, Urmila all her fault. [Deshpande: 1992:147]

Shakutai blames her daughter for crossing the limits of a woman’s life and attracting attention by the modern ways of dressing up. She feels that it would unnecessarily attract male attention but Kalpana’s ideas of life are different from those of her mother’s. She was on the threshold of her youth and had her own income. She loved to dress well and move around freely. Her mother’s fears came true now, because Kalpana becomes the victim of lust and she is brutally beaten and raped. The famous Indian English novelist Mulk Raj Anand feels:

No woman in our land is beyond the threat of rape, because of the suppressed energies of the male, through the taboos of patriarchy which deny sex before marriage and make male in to wanton animals who assault any possible victim when possessed by lust. [MulkRaj: 1994:33]

Despite all the opposition, Urmila pursues the case and sees that eventually it is reopened. The police are asked to present their new investigations. With the help of Malcolm, Urmila presents Kalpana’s case in the press. Very soon the issue gains public attention and the government orders for keen investigations. There occurs a demonstration of protest outside Kalpana’s hospital, complete incident
is reported in newspapers. For Shakutai exposure to the media is as bad as Kalpana is being raped. The woman in the assembly and local women activists now stand in solidarity. Shakutai gets social attention. The hospital authorities are instructed to let Kalpana remain in the hospital. Shakutai now seems to be slowly realising the enormity of the situation. Her morality is enhanced and overwhelmed at the demonstration.

The identity of the rapist is revealed who is no other than Prabhakar, Sulu’s (Shakutai’s younger sister.) husband, who is always lusted for Kalpana. Sulu is affectionate and good natured. She tries to help Shakutai every in possible way. Kalpana resists her mother to bring her aunty at home. Sulu is childless and is afraid that her husband, Prabhakar, may marry another woman and shunt her out of his house. Shakutai tells Urmila:

After marriage she changed. She was frightened always frightened. What if he doesn’t like this, what if he wants that, what if he’s angry with me, what if he throws me out...? Nobody should live like that, Urmila full of fears. What kind of life is it?...
[Deshpande: 1992:195]

Prabhakar is an arrogant man. He never cares for his wife Sulu. He wishes to remarry with Kalpana. Both Shakutai and Sulu approve the proposal. Sulu likes it only because if Kalpana comes as the co-wife, Sulu will not be driven out. But, Kalpana is a young girl from a lower class background. She has her own aspirations. She likes to marry a young man of her own choice and rejects Prabhakar’s offer and so he raped her, brutally.

Urmila understand the adverse fact of marriage. If marriage is the only means of security for people like Shakutai, Mira and Sulu are women who are physically vulnerable even within the secure structure of marriage. Urmila’s accusation of her mother, Inni for living her with the grandparents in her childhood brings to light the degree to which
Indian women are subjected to domination by their husbands. Her mother explains to her that it was her father and not she who sent her away. He did so because once in severe urgency she had left the infant Urmila under the care of man servant for that he did not trust his wife relating to childcare. She says that she was a helpless woman who had nothing to do before stern dictates of her husband.

He didn’t say anything to me, he just looks you away... I begged him, Urmila, I cried, I promised him I’d leave you alone, but he wouldn’t listen. Nothing could make him change his mind. You know your papa... I didn’t want to be sent away to Ranidurg, believe me Urmila. I didn’t want that, I wanted you with us, I never got used to the idea of your being in Ranidurg, and I wanted you with me... [Deshpande: 1992:199:200]

The women characters in the novel long for their recognition from the male dominated society. The women at different levels irrespective of their social background are given raw deal. It could be so in the case of low class illiterate woman from the chawls, like Shakutai and Sulu or the urban bred educated women like Urmila’s mother, Inni, her friend Vanna and her mother-in-law, Akka. They need their freedom and fight for their individualities. They wish mutual love from their men but not their mere lust. The need to express one’s feeling and to be heard by the society is the urge for the present day women. Urmila draws society’s attention to her protest and sees less pain in attempting to change the societal roles and attitudes.