Chapter-IV

Early Novels
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The early period of her novel *Roots and Shadow* begins with the marriage of Mini. Indu’s cousin, which is performed in the traditional way in their ancestral home after a long gap of eleven years as she had left home to marry the person of her own choice against the wishes of the whole family especially the old matriarch Akka.

Shashi Deshpande, in the present novel, highlights the problem of marriage faced by middle-class people in finding suitable grooms for their daughters. This problem is well illustrated through the character of Padmini. Since a girl’s mind ever since her childhood is tuned that she is a Paraya Dhan, she tries to attach a lot of importance to it. Mini, brought up in a traditional way, does not like to remain a burden on her parents and she prefers to go to her house thus relieving the family of her burden.
It is indeed a tragedy that even in the modern age, Indian girls echo the same sentiment where it was marriage that mattered not the man. The line of sacrifices in a woman's life begin with marriage.

Indu who has married against the wishes of the family is surprised to hear about Mini's acceptance to the proposal in spite of the fact that the boy had "heavy, coarse features and crude mannerisms." Indu questions Mini if she does not consider it a point to think of marriage. Mini replies "Why should I think of it? I'm past twenty four. I have to get married. What else is there to think about?"

Marriage makes a girl so "dependent" the fear that she may remain a spinster who in Indian society is constantly humiliated. Deshpande, through the character of Mini, gives the true facts of marriage experienced by a middle-class family. These are the problems that every girl in the contemporary world experiences and therefore submits herself ultimately to marriage.

Padmini agrees to marry the dreadful man and yet she is happy because she is "fulfilling her destiny." She is sick of having her father Ph.D. Thesis
hunt around for eligible bachelors, of arranged meetings where she is found lacking in something or the other and explains to Indu the struggle involved in finding suitable marriage alliances:

You don't know what it has been like. Watching Kaka and Hemant and even Madhav-kaka running around after eligible men. And then, sending the horoscope and having it come back with the message, "It doesn't match." And if the horoscopes matched there was the meeting to be arranged. And Mother and Atya slogging in the kitchen the whole day. And all those people coming and staring and asking all kinds of questions. And kaka trying to laugh and talk to those people, while his eyes looked so anxious. And, feeling as if I had committed a great crime by being born a girl. To make your parents look like that. ... And finally if everything was fine, there was the dowry.

Shashi Deshpande brings out the boiling problem of marriage as an evil social practice because right from the beginning to the end it is a
history of woman's suppression, a long drawn out drama of negotiation in which she feels uncertain, is dragged all along the thrashing floor of humiliation till she blurts our helplessly "yes" whether the man is a rake or an idiot or an uncultured boor.

Indu tries to give a picture of the after effects of marriage to Mini and explains to her what it really means: "marriage ... means living with a man. You have to listen to him. endure his habits, his smell, his touch, his likes, his dislikes. You have to sleep with him, bear him children. Can you do all that with this man?"

Mini decides to marry him because she is left with no choice and she can do nothing about it. "Of course I'm marrying him because there's nothing else I can do. I'm no good at studies. I never was. I went to school because ... I had to and then to college because Akka said I must go. Boys prefer graduates these days, she said. So I went. ... There's only one thing I'm really good at ... looking after a house. And to get a home, I have to get married. This is not my home, is it?" This shows that a girl's mind is tuned to prepare herself for marriage right from her childhood.

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Shashi Deshpande in her writings has tried to see and define what an Indian marriage is. Getting the daughters married is a sense of achievement for the parents. There are no emotions involved in bringing the two different entities together. In the novel, Indu defines a traditional marriage contemptuously as “two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue.” She broods over the fate of women in a large family and deeply resents the fact that in traditional joint Hindu families, women are nothing more than puppets, without any identity, voice or name.

Marriage is a deal in which the poor woman is literally bracketed with an animal, for she cannot exercise her reasoning or intelligence and express her genuine individual concerns. Deshpande tries to speak her own views and is at her best when she dwells upon this subject.

_Millions of girls have asked this question millions of times in this country. Surely it was time they stopped asking it._

_What choice do I have? Surely it is this, this fact that I can choose, that differentiates me from the animals. But years_
of blindfolding can obscure your vision so that you no more see tile choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out of your cage of no-choices.

Mini further complains to Indu and tries to justify her decision which gives her an escape from the society’s evil eye which questions the girl: “How old are you? And not married yet! What a pity! I’m tired, Indu. I don’t care what kind of a man he is. Once we are married and he becomes my husband none of his flaws will matter .... A definite article, permanent. Not only for now, but for ever. To be accepted.” Marriage, which is considered a tie of two souls, is thus degraded to an extent that it becomes nothing but a ritual, involving no responsibility. Sharing and understanding of the two minds. Thus, the society influences woman, imposes the burden of marriage and leaves her with no choice.

If this is the case of Mini who has submitted herself to the traditional system of marriage, Indu, in spite of her marriage With a man of her own choice, faces problems of a different nature.
Indu's parental home stood as a symbol of tradition and old world values which, she felt, obstructed the growth of a woman as a being. Indu seeks, through her marriage, a room of her own and autonomy. Marriage to the man of her choice brings only disillusionment when she finds her educated and ostensibly progressive-minded husband no different from the average Indian male. Marriage leads a woman to subjugation and slavery. Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom. Indu plays the role of an ideal housewife because she does not want to destroy the family peace and thus prove her marriage a failure in the eyes of her family. But the role of a wife restricts her self development—firstly by taking away her freedom of thought and expression, and secondly, by denying her the scope of giving free play to her artistic potential.

Though Indian woman is educated, employed and is economically independent, financial freedom alone is not enough. Family, marriage and social norms bind her completely and there is something that provokes conflict in her mind and makes her restless.

Marriage is not the Sarue thing to a man as to a Woman. The two sexes are different from each other, though one has the necessity of the
other. A woman like Indu, who is independent, is allowed no direct influence upon her husband. She has to reach out beyond herself towards the social milieu only through her husband. But the husband instead of becoming a Source of freedom, unlike her ancestral home which was tradition bound, becomes a barrier for Indu’s development. He is unconcerned and indifferent to her emotional urges. Instead, it is Indu who has to cater to the needs of his inner urges and drives.

But my marriage had taught me this too. I had found in myself an immense capacity for deception. I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage.

Indu tries to articulate her feminine voice through her creative writing in which she is interested but her interests are curtailed by her so-called broad minded husband, because they need money. Jayant betrays her hopes for harmony and integration, for peace and happiness. He is not even a ‘sheltering tree’ to her. Instead she finds that she has relinquished her identity by surrendering before Jayant’s masculinity by becoming his...

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wife. Willingly she yields to the demands of marriage and moulds herself up to the dictates of her husband. A woman's relating to other's needs tends to detract her from her own sense of identity. Indu feels as if she has become so fluid that she has no tangible shape, no form of her own.

The meek, docile and humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus defying the male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman’s masked existence. She comes out of her emotional upheaval and decides to lead a meaningful life with her husband. The home she had discarded becomes a place of refuge, of solace and consolation. It is Akka’s house which offers her ample opportunities to know herself. It is here that she is able to discover her roots as an independent woman, a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer. In an interview, Geetha Gangadharan asked Shashi Deshpande if she was giving a message of freedom within the circle. She replied “No. I am not giving any message to anyone. It is how they take it. Of course, some of these are very introspective things .... But certainly, some of my thoughts are always there. They are there for the reader to

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pick and choose. As far as the question goes, all that I can say is ‘This is what I, as an individual, believe in.’

Thus Indu’s uncompromising and paradoxical feminine self, that frantically longed for self-expression, finally finds its roots in the home and with her husband. Indu has confronted her real self and she knows her roots. She need not be ashamed of her body and sexual needs. She is capable of taking decisions not only for herself but for others too, and life does not come to an end With individuals whether it is Indu or Jayant. Thus, as Bhatnagar puts it, “in the end comes the realization that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination and the tenacity to adhere to it. That alone can bring harmony in life.” Indu lives to see life with the possibilities of growth. She has discovered the meaning of life in her journey to individuation.

The Sarue disturbance and conflict have formed the focal point of Indian literature in English. The women writers in India, placed in an orthodox culture, have their roots in their native soil but encounter an
invading western sociological phenomenon in the name of feminism/women’s liberation. Shashi Deshpande, an outstanding novelist of Indian English literature highlights the problems encountered by the Indian women caught between the native Indian and invading western cultures.

Existing between the two cultural polarities, Sara, the protagonist of Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, searches for her self and ultimately grows into an individual rather than an object pinned down by the Indian society to gender roles. In this society, the discriminating socio-cultural values, attitudes and practices cripple the personality of the female child. Extricating herself from the clutches of these chains, Sara chooses the western education and becomes a doctor by profession but fails as a wife, for her male counterpart is a typical Indian who considers himself the lord and master. First her mother, a symbol of Indian orthodoxy, hates Sara for being a girl; now the dominating Indian husband takes himself for a demi God and treats her as an unpaid servant.

Though Shashi Deshpande avoids the western obsession with feminism she still presents the Indian version of the modern woman who
searches for her identity and establishes her self. The entire novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* depicts the emotional and spiritual conflicts of the woman caught between the colonising and the colonised cultures—a predominant feature of the Commonwealth.

The discriminating socio-cultural values, attitudes and practices which cripple the personality of the female child are highlighted in the novel. A girl child is unwanted at birth and never elected during childhood and adolescence. Saru suffers from gender discrimination right from her birth. She is unwelcome in the family because her parents's preference is for a male child as their first-born. Saru sees the jubilation over the arrival of her brother Dhruva at the family as a reinforcement of her discrimination. She remembers how her brother was named: “They had named him Dhruva. I can remember, even now vaguely, faintly a state of joyous excitement that had been his naming day. The smell of flowers, the black grinding stone.” The son is named after the mythological ‘North Star.’ When the ‘North Star’ Dhruva appears in the family horizon, Saru becomes an ‘asteroid,’ as a prefigurement of women who are treated as the “eternal minor.”
The deep-seated hatred in Saru towards the favouritism shown to her brother by her parents makes her think of blotting Dhruva out of the family. The struggle for importance is seen when she thinks: “I must show Baba something, ‘anything’ to take his attention away from Dhruva sitting on his lap. I must make him listen to me not to Dhruva. I must make him ignore Dhruva.”1 When the untimely death snatches the boy away, her mother says that Saru has killed Dhruva: “You did it, you killed him. Why didn’t you die’? Why are you alive, when he’s dead’?”2 Saru puts herself in the dock. The guilt clings to her and haunts her like a ghost. Saru never boldly refutes or denies the charge of murder except in the confession to her father. Dhruva’s demise has always been her subconscious desire and there is very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment. Saru has always felt an inner desire to make him the mathematical Dhruva (pushed off the father’s lap by the step brother) and Dhruva in death becomes a tantalizing North Star controlling her happiness from afar. Further, her parents never bother about her education, casting her a desperate feeling of unwantedness. She is totally alienated from the family.

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"I just didn’t exist for her (the mother) ... I died long before I left home."[^3]

Subsequently, Saru develops a sense of hatred towards her mother who always comes in the way of her progress, imposing restrictions on her daughter without understanding that the new generation is passing through a transitional period where the daughter is sandwiched between tradition and modernity. Herein lies the conflict between the culture of the colonizer, the western and that of the colonized, the eastern; the conflict between Saru and her mother thus represents the clash between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern.

According to Manu, the law maker of the Indian orthodox culture, a woman can never be a decision maker. "A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in [her] house." When Saru expresses her desire to study medicine, her mother cannot sanction her desire to go to Mumbai and stay in a hostel. Her argument is that Saru "is a girl,"[^4] Saru resolves to be a doctor, hoping that a professional career could be "the key that would unlock the door out of this life."[^5]

This, indeed, is the impact of the colonizer’s culture. With a deep seated

[^3]: [Source reference]
[^4]: [Source reference]
[^5]: [Source reference]

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hurt feeling, she tells her mother: “you don’t want me to have anything. You don’t want me to do anything. You don’t even want me to live.” Her final decision to join the Medical College is an act of rebellion, a step towards liberation from a traditional stereotyped existence.

As a typical product of the eastern culture, the Indian girl-child is confused and bewildered at the physical changes taking place within her body at the time of puberty. She feels abhorrent but helpless. With the growth of her body, she is painfully aware of her stepping into that onerous and mortifying state of womanhood. “I can remember closing my eyes and praying .... Oh, God, let it not happen to me. Let there be a miracle and let me be the one female to whom it doesn’t happen.” With the physical growth, she becomes vulnerable to the monstrous and rapacious tentacles of the society.

As Saru studies Anatomy and Physiology, the education introduced into the colonized country by the colonizer, the shame of being a woman falls from her for the first time. It is to her like a sudden release from a prison of fears. The hostel life is a kind of “rebirth” into a totally different
world where she does not have to stay outside for "those three days," she is no longer an 'untouchable,' she can even talk about it, "oh, damm. I must change again. It's like a tap, that's what it is." For the first time she feels proud of her female 'identity' and learns to hold her body straight, to dress and walk gracefully. She can remember "walking as stiffly as possible, holding my pelvis rigid, willing it not to move, so that I would be as unlike her [her mother] as possible."

Saru's next rebellion is her love for Manu. Manu is the saviour, the ideal romantic hero who rescues her from insecure wooden existence in the maternal home. She finds him recognising her worth as an individual, and admiring the qualities she possesses. Now Saru's desire to escape femininity disappears and she sees herself "humbly adoring, worshipping and being given the father-lover kind of love that was protective, condescending and yet all-encompassing and satisfying. There was no then, not as yet, craving for recognition, satisfaction." She feels like the fisherman's daughter who was asked by the king Shantanu to marry him. Saru gives herself fully and unconditionally to Manu to love him and to be loved.
When Kamala comes to know that her daughter is going to marry a man of her choice, the first question that comes out from her is: “what caste is he'? Is he a Brahmin’?” A characteristic question from a woman rooted in the orthodox culture of the colonized. An Indian traditional marriages one of the essential conditions is that the bride and the groom are of the Sarve caste. Kamala is shocked to hear her daughter’s decision to marry a non-Brahmin. The departure of Saru from her mother is the first step towards autonomy; ‘for, the mother is the first pedagogue of the dos on the woman. Saru, however, fights back parental pressure, breaks the societal shackles and marries the man of her choice.

In the next phase of Saru’s life, one finds her a successful career woman enjoying the recognition of her individual ‘identity.’ She becomes the object of admiring attention of her neighbours who come to her regularly for advice and help. She feels exhilarated with the dignity and importance that her status as a doctor seems to have given her. She could no longer admit the idea of being “a small boat towed by a large ship” but is happy to be the larger ship itself. This is the woman’s heritage of the colonizer’s culture.
Shashi Deshpande meanwhile shows how emancipation and success for a woman in the patriarchal Indian society can cause subversion of roles in the family and destroy happiness. The social acceptance and recognition she gains as a doctor and the demands on her time cleave a wedge in her relationship with Manu. Manu cannot tolerate people greeting her and ignoring him: “when we walked out of the room, there were nods and smiles, murmured greetings and namastes. But they were all for me, only for me. There was nothing for him. He was almost totally ignored .... And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the Sarue thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter.”

Saru feels a gradual disappearance of love and attachment which she had once developed. She is assailed by feelings of guilt. She once persuaded Manu to give up writing poetry. He has now abandoned the plan of starting a journal, and has taken the job of a lecturer in a local college. Gone are the days when Manu repeated the most beautiful lines ever said by a lover to Saru: “I long to believe in immortality, if I am destined to be happy with you” and Manu, in turn, ceases “to wake up in
thoughts of Sara.”\textsuperscript{12}

Saru’s gradual change in attitude towards Manu and their marriage corresponds with her change in attitude towards sex. She finds “the aggressive, virile masculinity” a mere facade and the recent beard a mask to hide something to assert the thing he lacked. Though she has known and loved Manu, she is quite unnerved at the thought of marriage. It is perhaps the fear of sex, the unknown. Then, with marriage, she takes a different stand. “I was hungry for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love, of my being loved, of my being wanted.” In due course, she feels utterly humiliated at the thought of being used and reduced to “a dark, damp, smelly hole.” She sees sex as a dirty word and the experience, a terror, an inhuman insult to her personality. “And each time it happens and I don’t speak, I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. Maybe one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow painful death.”

As for Manu, his inflated ego bursts as he is forced to accept his wife as his equal. He does not come up to the societal expectation that a

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male should have a job and high income. He is far behind the ‘husband’ about whom Saru elaborates in her speech. A traditional woman walks a few feet behind her husband. The male is her superior in educational qualification as well. “If he is an M.A., she should be a B.A. Her stature should be less than that of her husband and her salary must not exceed his .... They will tell about economic independence and an in-dependent identity. Forget the words. If Draupadi had been economically independent, if Sita had independent identity, you think their stories would have been different? No, there are things that have been voluntarily surrendered, consciously abandoned, because that is the only way to survive.”

In the Indian culture, a woman’s identity is defined by others, in terms of her relationship with men, i.e. as daughter, as wife, as mother, for she does not have an identity of her own. Saru has absolutely no respect for the abject acceptance of this dictum religiously practised by the Indian wives. The wife of one of Manu’s friends accepts total effacement of her very presence and position by remaining as a silent, unobtrusive “nameless waiter in a hotel” till the end of the dinner,
unintroduced to the friends. This lady obviously remains a shadow whereas Saru wants to be the substance itself casting a shadow. “If I cast no shadow I do not exist.”¹³ Saru has utter contempt for her friend Smita who is happy to even change her name to “Gitanjali” just to please her husband.

The last phase of Sarita’s life brings her face to face with her own self. In feminist terms, Saru’s return to her parental home could be interpreted as what Kristeva calls .. the refusal of the temporal order and the search for a landscape that would accommodate their need.” The homecoming helps her to sort out her problems, to analyze her life, to review and re-examine her crisis. Standing in front of her parent’s house, Saru feels like “ragged Sudama standing at the palace gates.” She is only vaguely aware of what she has come to ask for: “It was not to comfort her father that she held come. It Was for herself. What she had hoped to find.”

The escape from all the demanding roles gives her a sense of relief and an opportunity to reflect on her life. She realises how in her quest for freedom to be her-self, she has merely exchanged one role for another and in the process has become “just a ventriloquist’s dummy.” She knows that

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somewhere on the way she has lost contact with her real self which now lies obscured if not completely lost. She must peel away the multiple roles in which she has swaddled herself before she can arrive at the truth about herself. Saru leaves home twice in the novel, once to establish her independence from her mother’s suppression and next to establish her indispensability to her husband and children. When victimised by Manu, she starts on a quest for home. “Home is the place where, when you have to go there. They have to take you in.” Saru is taken in but she finds herself still a homeless refugee,” a fleeting interruption.” This feeling of homelessness drives her occasionally to a longing to be released from existence itself:

“To be alone? Never a stretching hand? Never a comforting touch? Is it all a fraud then, the eternal cry of... my husband, my wife, my children, my parents? Are all human relationships doomed to be a failure?”14 This feeling of homelessness is indicative of inner disintegration. At times Saru sees herself as two separate halves. She has to integrate the two halves in order to maintain harmony within and without.
Loneliness, one of the concerns of the modern society, is not a disease, but a symptom of man's condition and this awareness is the first milestone in one's journey into oneself. Edmund Fuller remarks that "man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and min, but from inner problem... a conviction of isolation, randomness, (and) meaninglessness in his way of existence." Even Saru the realist who sees the ultimate human reality in the human body and in its process of decay, finds aloneness as a painful but inescapable human condition. She realises that the suffering of multitudes does not mitigate one's own suffering in any way. The alienated soul cries out in despair: "would it always be a failure, any attempt to reach out to another human being? Had she been chasing a chimera all her life; hoping for some one? Perhaps the only truth is that man is born to be cold, lonely and alone." However, this awareness does not leave Sarita in despair. Shashi Deshpande brings in a note of positive affirmation by offering her protagonist the realisation that if life is an illusion it is the only reality that we know. "Therefore the only thing is to go on as if it is real knowing all the while it is only an illusion."
The brief stay away from Manu and children provides Sara with a chance to review her past, her own psychology, her own place in relation to others in the family and the society around. With the self-realisation comes the decision to confront the problems. She must open the door to her husband and confront him fearlessly. Prema Nandakumar writes: “Sarita cannot forget her children or the sick needing of her expert attention; and so she decides to face her home again.” The darkness of the shadow, of the light, of the fear leaves her. Saru resolves to face her life like Sudama who steps out into the world calmly and courageously. Deshpande and Sara seem to think that a woman’s life is her own and the time has come when a woman must think as an individual.

Shashi Deshpande carefully avoids the western feminist’s concept of emancipation and presents the Indian version of the modern woman who searches for the whole of her ‘identity’ and not fragmentations of her self. Out of the swirling restlessness, Sara emerges as a whole woman who is not dependent on any-one outside her. Deshpande cautiously puts aside the western notion of a woman’s emergence in terms of separation.
from her life-partner, for an existence without any relation to male and society, a life in isolation is no existence. Having suffered the long conflict between the cultures of the colonized and the colonizer, the Indian woman, Saru, establishes herself neither as a totally liberated woman, the typical western nor as an orthodox Indian, the submissive female. The entire novel is thus a fictionalization of the Indian woman's heritage of the Commonwealth.

Yet another successful first attempt has been Deshpande's foray into the world of classical music. Madhu is writing the biography of a famous classical singer, Savitribai Indorekar, doyenne of the Gwalior Gharana, and this calls for a deep understanding of Hindustani music on the part of the author. Deshpande never falters and seems to be on familiar ground, using the jargon and idiom of music quite effortlessly and all the while writing in her impeccable English. As Meenakshi Mukherjee ob-serves: "Of the four remarkable novels I have read in recent times that deal with music-Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music*, Sal-man Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Bani Babu's Bangia novel *Gandharvi* and
now Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande, I think, faces the toughest challenge. This has to do with incompatibility between the discourse of Hindustani music and the English language.

The novel, however, is less about music and more about the fascinating vocalist, Savitribai Indorekar. In spite of Deshpande’s repeated denials of being a feminist writer, she creates characters who often contradict such statements. Savitribai is one such character, vividly portrayed and brought to life by the author. Physically she appears to be a frail woman. Looking back, Madhu re-members her as:

_a small sized woman. Even from my child’s perspective she had seemed petite. Age and illness have so shrunk her that she’s a doll-sized woman now.... The skin is fine and delicate, even if it is crinkled like tissue paper. Her arms are slim and firm, but the hands, with their branching of veins, seem incongruously large for those delicate arms._

She is, however, imperious in her attitude to her servants, students, and even her biographer, often giving her instructions on how to conduct
the interview. It needed tremendous grit and determination to be born in a traditional, orthodox Brahmin family and make a name for oneself in the field of classical music. Madhu observes the unspoken resentment in Bai’s voice when she recalls how she was abruptly asked by her grandmother to stop singing when she was performing as a child during a family gathering. Madhu herself recollects how “In Neemgaon she was ‘the singer woman’ and there was something derogatory about the words, yes, I can see that now, about the way they said them.”

But Madhu refuses to pander to the publisher’s wishes to write a trendy feminist biography. They feel that “Victim stories are out of fashion, heroines are in.” Madhu, however, “cannot impose the new concept of heroinism on an old-fashioned woman who whitewashes her life through selective amnesia.” She records the life of a young woman who had lived a sheltered life of a daughter-in-law of an affluent Brahmin family, a woman who even as a child had been part of a large family. For a woman with such a background to elope with a Muslim tabla player and live in a strange town among total strangers must have required immense courage.
That there are different yardsticks for men and women in our society is obvious to Madhu who, in her childhood, was a witness to the rejection of Savitribai by conventional society. She remembers how in Neemgaon "each family had its place marked out for it according to religion, caste, money, family background, etc."^{19}

She is aware that her father with his unorthodox ways was an oddity. Being a widower and bringing up a daughter on his own with only a male servant at home, observing no rituals or religious customs and openly indulging in a drink or two every evening, he obviously stood out in a conservative place like Neemgaon. But, looking back, Madhu realizes that while people were willing to overlook her father’s eccentricities and his foibles they were not so generous when it came to accepting Savitribai. "Being a man he could get away with much. He could live the way he wanted without open censure or disapproval."^{20} It is only when a woman dares to defy convention that people are shocked. As Madhu observes, "In a sense, neither of us belonged. Munni’s family, with her singer mother, absent father and another man a muslim sharing the home, was of course radically, shockingly different."^{21}
Madhu also gives the example of Savitribai’s father-in-law, who had a mistress, a singer famous for her Thumri singing. It was common knowledge that he visited her regularly. The women looked on in amusement and gossiped about it. They wondered at his choice of a mistress but there was never any outrage over the fact. “That he had a mistress was accepted, a wife from one’s own class, a mistress from another—this was normal.”

For a man to indulge in his love of music and even to have a singer for a mistress was alright. But, for a daughter-in-law to be learning music seriously, as if she was going to be a professional, was scandalous and unthinkable. Though Bai had the support and encouragement of her father-in-law, Madhu could imagine the anger, contempt and ridicule she had to face from the other women when she returned to her life among the women, after her music classes. She could imagine the jibes and the hostility and the way she would have been cast aside like an untouchable. She says:

>To be set apart from your own kind, not to be able to
conform, to flout the rules laid down, is to lay yourself open to cruelty. Animals know this, they do it more openly, their cruelty towards the deviant is never concealed. But the subtle cruelty of persistent hostility leaves deeper wounds. There's always the temptation to succumb, to go back to the normal path and be accepted. To resist the temptation speaks of great courage.  

Madhu also remembers the gossip surrounding Bai in Neemgaon. There was a Station Director who frequented Bai's house and got her many contracts with the radio, and was generally believed to be her lover. Madhu remembers the children teasing Munni and calling him her mama, a kind of euphemism for a mother's lover. Bai denies the existence of any lover, while recounting her story to Madhu. But to the town, in Madhu's childhood, it was very simple-why would a man go out of his way to do so many favours for a woman, why would he visit her so often? All such assumptions ending finally in the conclusion: "A woman who'd left her husband's home-what morals would she have, anyway!"
Madhu is left quite confused at times about Bai’s courage or lack of it. She had, undoubtedly, led the most unconventional life anyone in her society would ever imagine. But behind these acts of bravado was a woman who wanted to conform, to be accepted by society.

Savitribai was not the stereotypical feminist with a devil-may-care attitude. This is evident in her blanking out Ghulam Saab’s name while relating a story of her life to Madhu, her biographer. This reveals her anxiety to cover up her youthful indiscretions in order to present a picture of respectability. She even goes to the extent of hiding the details of her daughter born through her association with Ghulam Saab. Madhu who is aware of Savitribai’s past and her daughter Munni, is unable to digest her indifference to her daughter, more so, because Madhu herself is a doting mother, grieving over the death of her son.

Madhu feels that she can give Bai the immortality she desires only if she is willing to pay the price of revealing her daughter to the world a daughter whose existences she had successfully obliterated until then. She cannot understand why, when she had the courage to walk out on her
marriage and family, she was so frightened to reveal the existence of her child. She wonders how “She gave that child the name ‘Indorekar’-the name she adopted as a singer-not comprising either her maiden name or her married one. Meenakshi Indorekar. Marking her out as her child alone, not the child of her marriage, not the child of her lover. This surely is a statement I cannot ignore?”

Munni, however, desperately hankered after the name her mother had left behind and went to great lengths to dissociate herself from her father and, after a while, her mother, Bai had found conventional life stultifying, but Munni yearned for it all her life. As a child Madhu recollected how Munni refused to accept Ghulam Saab as her father and instead concocted stories about a lawyer father who lived in Pune. She also remembered how the girls in their neighborhood tormented her with questions:

What’s your name?

What’s your father’s name? Where is your father?

Who’s the man who lives with your mother?24

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Years later when Madhu met Munni in a bus and recognised her, the latter refused to answer to the name of ‘Munni’ or even acknowledge her childhood friend. She declared that her name was ‘Shailaja Joshi,’ trying as it were, to desperately wipe out any connection with her past.

Frustrated motherhood of a different kind is depicted through the picture of another woman, Shakutai. Although Urmila is neither a friend nor a relative of Shakutai, she develops a concern for her and her daughter Kalpana, again because of the binding vine of humanitarianism. Shakutai, who is choked to learn that her daughter has been a victim of rape by somebody, has been spending her days in the hospital attending upon Kalpana. When Urmila happens to meet Shakutai and understands her plight, she tries to give her moral support. Dr. Jain has examined the patient, Kalpana and gives the report. He certifies that Kalpana has been raped and wounded badly and is duty-bound to report it to the police. Shakutai’s helplessness and sorrow are unlimited. Un-educated, poor and abandoned by her husband, she has to suffer from the disgrace and dishonour brought about by her daughter’s freedom, recklessness and
lack of practical wisdom. Shakutai is frustrated in her life both as a wife and as a mother. She requests the doctor through Urmila not to report the rape case to the police. Although Urmila is not related to Shakutai, she is bound to her by the bond of sympathy and understanding. She escorts Shakutai to her humble house. She visits the hospital repeatedly to offer moral support to Shakutai who is deeply worried about the gossip in her chawl generated by her daughter’s case. She tells Urmila how she had married a worthless man who was jobless and who forced pregnancy on her and how Kalpana was born as an unwanted child for her. Since Kalpana’s stay in the hospital has been almost interminable, the authorities of the hospital are planning to discharge her from there. But Shakutai does not know what to do next and where to go, especially when she has no money to support her. Urmila wants to help her in her own way. She introduces Shakutai to her classmate, Malcolm, who is a journalist and explains the whole history of the case and the decision of the hospital authorities to discharge the patient i.e. Kalpana. Accordingly, Malcolm interviews Shakutai and gets the news published in the local newspaper.
much to the chagrin of the poor mother. In spite of the fact that the journalistic publicity causes terrible embarrassment to Shakutai, it helps her at least in one practical way. As a result of the wide publicity in the newspapers, the authorities of the hospital decide not to shift Kalpana from there. Like Shakutai, Sulu also is helpless and has a libidinous husband who had an eye on Kalpana from the beginning. Sulu is shocked to know that it is her husband Prabhakar who has raped Kalpana and been trying to escape the Police. Shocked by the terrific news of her husband’s heinous act, Sulu commits suicide by burning herself. Sulu who was the only person who offered some kind of emotional security and moral support to Shakutai is no more now. Shakutai, thus, becomes an embodiment of suffering in the patriarchal society of India. Whereas her sorrow is aggravated by the factors like illiteracy, Kalpana’s tragedy is caused by adamant, self-will, recklessness, exhibitionism and limitless freedom. Shakutai tries to find meaning in her life by giving her daughter all the facilities which were denied to herself-like good education, a good job and a respectable marriage. But all her dreams are frustrated by her
daughter’s reckless and brainless behaviour like painting her lips, dressing herself up and moving about with strangers, without knowing her own biologically determined limitations. Thus the mother and the daughter exemplify two contrastive patterns of behaviour, but ironically enough, both of them suffer in their own ways. The solution to their problems is not easy to achieve. Both of them are Identical in the quality of their frustration, though different in their mode of frustration. Urmila tries to share their sorrow purely on the ground of humanitarian sympathy.

Whereas Urmila is bound by the vine of sympathy with Shakutai and her unlucky daughter, Kalpana, in the present, she is also bound by the Sarue vine with her own mother-in-law who lived in the past. When she accidentally discovers the Kannada writings of Mira safely kept in a trunk on the loft, she reads them avidly and discovers the sad story of Mira. She is sad to learn that Mira, being a sensitive girl, did not love her husband who could not understand her heart or mind. Mira’s husband possessed her physically, but could not comprehend her psychic and artistic dimension. Mira was, thus, subjected to rape in marriage and being a lady
of super-sensitive temperament, had a great repulsion for the so-called ‘love’ or sexual act. Theirs was only a physical marriage and never a marriage of minds or hearts. Thus, frustrated with the physicality of marital life, Mira tried to achieve her true identity by writing beautiful lyrical poetry. That was the only way to escape from the sense of isolation and emptiness of her humdrum life. Urmila, who reads through the pages of Mira’s poems, is deeply touched by the tenderness of feelings expressed in them and can easily guess her suffering through her own feminine imagination. She shed tears of sympathy for Mira’s miserable condition in the past. She wants to translate and publish Mira’s poems in order to immortalize her in the world of art. That is the way of paying her homage to her dead mother-in-law.

Urmila is also frustrated in her own married life like Shakutai and Mira, but in a slightly different way. Although she is educated and employed as a lecturer in a college (unlike Shakutai) and has married a man of her choice after falling in love with at first sight on the day of her grandfather’s death by suicide, she is not totally happy. She wants to be a good housewife...
and find pleasure in her home, husband and children. But the contingencies of her husband’s job have taken him away from her. An officer in the Indian navy, he comes home once in a while to spend his time with his wife and children. But Urmila longs to have him permanently with her at home and fears that she may lose him forever. Kishore wants to alleviate her anxiety by having sex with her. Although Urmila submits herself to him in sex, she has a repulsion for that—a quality that she shares with her own mother-in-law Mira. Urmila longs to reach his spiritual centre, but does not unfortunately succeed in it. Contrary to her habit, Kishore never tries to understand her spiritual aspect of life. To that extent, she is frustrated, though materially she lacks nothing. In spite of her husband’s long absences from home, she never tries to look at another man for amours. Unlike a modern emancipated woman, she wants to be a chaste wife and loves her husband deeply. That is the reason why she does not show any positive response to Dr. Bhaskar Jain when he proposes to her in spite of his knowledge of her marital status. Urmila, thus, happens to be a sensitive woman rather than a radical feminist and can be taken to be
the mouthpiece of the novelist. She derives consolation for herself from extending sympathy to similar women like Shakutai and Mira whose frustration is perhaps greater than her own. In spite of the difficulties and obstacles caused by the patriarchal society, these three women endeavor to channelize their emotions in different ways because of their strong urge to survive. Having entered a *chakravyuha* from which there is no escape, they want to make the best of their given life by hardening themselves to face the harsh realities of life. Shashi Deshpande has, thus, offered an affirmative vision thereby upholding the ultimate goodness, beauty and truth of life quite in line with the Hindu philosophy.

In her latest novel, *Small Remedies*, Shashi Deshpande seems to have honed her skills to perfection. Her protagonist is still the urban, middle-aged and educated woman, but her canvas has broadened to encompass a cross-section of people who belong to different communities, professions, and a level of society. Madhu Saptarishi, is not much different from her counterparts Indu, Sarita, Jaya, Urmi and Sumi in age, education and family background. Also, all of them in some measure or the other
face upheavals in their marriages-upheavals which are inevitable when a woman refuses to conform to her accepted role as wife, mother or sister. But, moving away from her near perfect portrayal of a traditional Kannadiga-Maharashtrian Brahmin family, Deshpande ventures to write about a Goan Christian family and also mentions a Muslim tabla player and briefly touches upon his life and the people surrounding him, notably his grand-daughter, Hasina.

In a review, Meenakshi Mukherjee briefly sums up Deshpande’s works and observes the noticeable change: “In Small Remedies, Deshpande is attempting much more than she did in her earlier novels—all five of them different from each other—but smaller than this in scope.... But none of them gathered up, as this new novel does, in one large sweep, the plurality, diversity and contradictions of our composite culture where an Anthony Gonsalves (the reference to “Amar Akbar Anthony” is deliberate), a Hamidabai and Joe can all be part of Madhu’s extended family, and the daughter of Ghulam Saab can opt, though not very easily to get accepted as Shailaja Joshi.”
Deshpande, while writing of people like Savitribai and Leela, people who dared to be different, has also created characters like Munni who desperately seek the approval of society. Malathí Mathur, a reviewer, writes: “At the other end of the spectrum is Munni, Savitribai’s daughter who turns her back on her mother and all that she stands for, in a desperate desire to conform, having encountered early in life the poisoned barbs that society levels against those who dare to be different.”

Apart from Savitribai, Madhu’s narrative also includes the saga of another equally, or perhaps more, remarkable woman, her aunt Leela who was “ahead not only of her generation, but the next one as well.” (94) She was a fiercely independent woman and was strongly committed to the communist ideology. She had participated in the Quit India Movement, but was critical of Gandhiji’s principles of Ahimsa and Satyagraha and thought that it was ridiculous to allow oneself to be beaten up. As she grew older, however, she mellowed down and regretted some of her actions. It was evident that she was no run-of-the-mill activist, but a woman who had the courage of her convictions. She resigned from her

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party when she felt that the party's reaction to a political situation was not appropriate.

Though Leela was a generation older than Madhu, she was financially independent and supported herself. When her first husband, Vasanth, died she took up a job and educated her brothers-in-law. She lived in the crowded chawls among the cotton mills and worked for the welfare of the women afflicted with TB. It was this which first brought her into contact with her second husband, Joe, a doctor who had established a clinic especially for TB patients.

Leela and Joe were poles apart and Madhu exclaims at the strangeness of Joe falling madly in love with her. He was a widower with two children, spoke impeccable English and was very widely read, quoting from his favourite writers at the drop of a hat. Literature and music were the two great forces of his life, in addition to medicine. Leela, on the other hand, wore 'ayah saries,' according to Phillo, Joe's housekeeper. She spoke no English and knew nothing of literature or music. She had no sense of humour, according to Joe. But theirs was a wonderful companionship and a beautiful relationship, according to Madhu.
Leela was a person who disapproved of a life that did not look beyond one's own self. Madhu recollects her reaction to the film 'Devdas.' When she remained silent for a long time after watching the film, Madhu thought that the film had evoked memories of her dead husband, who like the hero of the film had died of TB. But what Leela had to say surprised and amused Madhu, Joe and Tony: "Now I know," she said, as if she had solved a puzzle. "Now I know why that poor man drank so much. He had nothing to do, he didn't have any work at all.

If an intelligent man like him remains idle, what else can he do but take to drink?"

Leela disliked the superior status her family gave itself and wondered what made them so special. She did not find anything even remotely worthy in their holding on to the lands which they had inherited. She did not believe in the caste system and was the only one among Madhu's relatives who accepted Madhu's parents' marriage and invited them to stay with her when they had no place of their own.
Leela was a passionate believer in the communist ideology but did not hesitate to speak up against the party when the need arose. After putting in years of hard work, she was sidelined by the party bosses and never reached the top of the hierarchy, while men who worked under her reached there easily enough. Once, a widow of a sitting member, who was killed, was given a ticket to stand for elections. This provoked Leela, who had never earlier complained, to comment, “It seems you’ve got to become a widow for them to remember that you exist.” This is, indeed, a telling statement on the chauvinism that rules all political parties.

Savitribai too understood how much more difficult it was for women to rise to the top when compared to men. Madhu wondered if she had ever heard the phrase ‘gender discrimination,’ but she had certainly experienced and accepted it as the normal course of things. Madhu remembers how she had once commented caustically speaking of a young instrumentalist who had reached the pinnacle in no time: “Nowadays they become Ustads and Pundits even before they have proper moustaches.”

At the foreground of the novel is the story of the narrator Madhu
herself. She is commissioned to write the biography of Savitribai. She had always been intrigued, even as a child by Bai’s relationship with Ghulam Saab and Munni, their daughter. The novel covers that period of her life when she is grieving over the death of her only child, Aditya. In remembering and re-telling the stories of Leela, Savitribai and Munni, she presents the glaring inequalities in gender in society. The pity of it is that some of the victims are not even aware of the injustices heaped on them.

The themes and forms of women’s writing also deserve some consideration. One major theme is the problem of personal identity as experienced by women. We saw earlier that culturally women have been defined by men, they have been the ‘other.’ By redefining the self, women try to struggle free from social and literary confinement. In women’s fiction we find characters who derive their identity primarily from the reactions of others. Padmini (RS) changes her clothes, according to the attitude and taste of the family that comes to ‘see’ her. Jaya (LS) feels ashamed of the film songs she sings—when her father comments on her
poor taste. Later on, after her marriage, she also tries to be like the women of Mohan's family.

Most women feel less like individuals than men. This is because they have more permeable ego boundaries. The theme of madness is closely related to the theme of self-identity. In *That Long Silence*, Kusum goes mad because of pressure from her-in-laws. In her troubled state of mind, Jaya identifies herself with Kusum and defines herself with reference to her as non-Kusum! She thus projects her own fears of madness onto Kusum.

The relationship of women to each other is another theme to be found in women's fiction. The mother-daughter relationship is of particular interest in this regard. Although the mother is once seen as dominating, when the daughter grows up, she realizes that in reality her mother was not dominating but dominated. The dominated figure does not provide a very adequate model for the daughter, who is caught between her conscious realization of her mother's victim age and her infantile identification with her. In *The Binding Vine* Urmi harbours...
misunderstanding about her mother for years together, until she learns the truth as a grown-up woman. Saru (DHNI) tries very hard to win back the same place in her mother's mind that she had before Dhruva's death. To achieve this, she becomes a doctor and creates her own place in the world. But until the end, her mother keeps saying that she has no daughter; she only had a son and he was dead. In Small Remedies, Munni's inability to see her mother associated with a Muslim leads to her rejection of her mother. Years later, her refusal to recognize Madhu is an indirect way of affirming that her rejection of Savitribai was not merely a child's whim.

Besides the mother-daughter relationship, there is bonding between women only because they are women who happen to understand each other better. This bonding cuts across the barriers of caste, class and education. The upper caste, educated Urmi (BV) becomes a part of the world of Shakutai, a working class, illiterate woman. Jaya (LS) goes to hospital with her maid Jeeja. She can understand Mohan's mother's silence more than Mohan does himself. In the joint families portrayed in Roots and Shadows and That Long Silence, the worlds of men and women are
totally different. But sometimes we also see jealousy and the de-sire for
domination, as between Sunanda and Anant's wife (RS) or Jaya's mother,
grandmother and Vanitamami (LS).

The search for self and an attempt to define it also explains the
frequent mixture of fiction and autobiography. In all the novels of Shashi
Deshpande, not only does the protagonist remain at the centre but even
the story is told from her perspective. This may also be interpreted as a
refusal to conform to traditional genres of the dominant literary culture.
Just as Daitl writers in Marathi have written autobiographies at a very
young age and shown a very different world to people of the upper castes,
women too have tried to show men what they have suffered through all
these years.

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