Chapter 4:

Suppression and Liberation: Manju, Manjari and Devayani

For centuries, women have been confined to four walls of house. It is not only a physical confinement, but mental, social and traditional confinement too. By the wrong notion about woman as a weak gender, they have been deprived of freedom they deserve. Having no other option to express her aspiration, she silently tolerated it. With the education, awareness and some social reformation, women became conscious about their selves. They learn to evaluate their lives. They realized that it is marriage that binds women’s life. Because of emotional and conventional ties, women suppress their aspiration and urge of liberty. The contemporary women have come out from the caged condition. They come out with a negative impression of marriage, as it restricts women’s freedom and compels them to live for others. They wish to free from this age old system to ensure their way of liberation. Manju, Manjari, Kshama and Devayani represent the class of women who tend to get rid of family relation and responsibility in search of their liberation.

This chapter deals with the women characters of four novels, namely If I Die Today, Come up and Be Dead, Moving On and In the Country of Deceit. If I Die Today and Come Up and Be Dead are different in genre, and hence, merit less space as they fall into the category of popular fiction with death, suspense and thrill as their chief elements. They do not address issues pertaining to Indian women. They fall in the category of Agatha Christie’s novels as Shashi Deshpande is much impressed by Agatha Christie’s writings coincidently. The narrator of If I Die Today is also reading one of Christie’s popular novels. However, there are some significant differences in the writing of Christie and Deshpande. Elenore Geethamala observes,
Agatha Christie created characters and incidents through imaginations and builds the story where as Shashi Deshpande’s stories are from her experience she gained around her. She is of the opinion that her characters are not created like Agatha Christie’s. These were real people. It is indeed right to be called as campus fictions. She is mainly concerned with human relationships stressing more on the marginal voices – their concern with life and death that gives a philosophical mode to the novel. (Geethamala, 2009:59)

A. K. Singh also gives the similar opinion about Deshpande’s writing, as he says,

It is this assertion and celebration of life that makes Deshpande’s work different from popular writer – be it Agatha Christie or someone else, for novel as such is exploration of human situation and life in fictional terms with a rich imaginative fullness where the sole interest does not lie in the surprising turns of the plot and in mystery of ‘whodunit’ but in the life which it generates and in the active participation that it depicts. (Singh, 1998:61)

*Come Up and Be Dead* is similar to *If I Die Today* in its subject matter and genre. Deshpande derived the title of the novel form Charles Dickens’ novel ‘*Our Mutual Friend*’. Like *If I Die Today*, *Come Up and Be Dead* is also a different kind of novel as the incidents of murder and sexual exploitation of young girls living in a hostel is viewed by an average woman, and narrates the story. In this context, Rama Gautam opines,
This novel, typical to Shashi Deshpande’s style, but different from her other novels, explores the predicaments of men and women hailing from middle-class milieu. It may not offer a nail-biting thrill, nor conceal the murderer effectively till the end, but it traverses through psychological thoroughfares, letting the characters grow over the reader by throwing up conflicts that resemble Indian middle-class realities seen and felt through a woman’s gaze. (Gautam, 2005:145)

Moving on portrays the life of Manjari, a widow. She reads her father’s diary and comes to know about their lives. The reading of diary and the experience of short married life make her realize the need of independence. Although she knows that her life will be full of predicaments, she prefers to live a lonely life in search of her ‘self’. With her daring efforts to face odds of life and unconventional thinking, she emerges as a new woman.

In In the Country of Deceit, Devyani also walks further on the path of individual liberty. Despite the emphasis on marriage by her elder sister and aunt, she decides to remain spinster. For her bodily desire, she plunges into sexual relationship with a married man, much older than her. Like Manjari, Devyani also prefers to live a lonely life. Her negative attitude to marriage is the outcome of her experience in her early youth. With the character of Devyani, Deshpande makes a bold experiment to write about live-in relationship in socio-culturally orthodox society.

If I Die Today describes the predicament of woman and the issues of man-woman relationship. Like her other novels, the narrator of the story is an educated middle-class working woman. The story is sat in the campus of S. D. M. Medical
College and Hospital, established by Shethji. He is a visionary person who can translate his vision into reality; and he wants his hospital to be ‘the best in the country’. (IIDT:1)

Apart from the elements of a popular thriller novel, it involves human sensibility. As the author is preoccupied with the delineation of human life, especially the lives of middle-class women, it seems to bring the reader into the complexity of human communication. The story is narrated by Manju, a lecturer in a Bombay College. She is pregnant and gives birth to a baby girl at the end of the novel. With the major event of multiple deaths in the hospital, she witnesses the personal lives of the people living in the campus. Most of them are doctors and specialist in the field of medicine. Nevertheless, Manju finds them not different from ordinary men in terms of their emotions and man-woman relationship.

Along with the discovery of murder of three people, the inner lives of people in the campus are also revealed. The narration begins with the arrival of Guru in the hospital for the treatment of cancer. He is a relative of Dr Ashok. He knows that he is going to die after some time and often utters the lines of Sir Thomas More with some modification, “If I die today, you die tomorrow.” (IIDT:8) Guru is “a brave man who had risen above all human weaknesses and crossed that dreadful barrier – the universal human fear of death.” (IIDT:10) He reminds the reader the character of Anand in Hrishikesh Mukherji’s film ‘Anand’.

It is with the arrival of Guru that the mystery of Prabhakar Tambe’s death comes on the surface. Tambe was a popular leader of workers of Shethji’s factory. The fear of revelation of Tambe’s killer takes lives of two people - Guru and Tony - one after the other.
The serial killing provides opportunity to Manju to analyse her life and the lives of the people around her. Parallel to the murder mystery, Deshpande cannot avert herself from writing about the predicament of women. Deshpande’s concern in If I Die Today is the life of woman after marriage. Marriage plays an important role in the life of woman which prompts her to think about her ‘self’ which eventually brings her to the truth of man-woman relationship. Marriage is the middle phase of her past and future life. She accepts changes in her life before marriage in order to adapt to the life after marriage. Her future life lies on her the introspection and realization of ‘self’, and also the strength she shows to attain it.

The women characters of If I Die Today, like the protagonists of Deshpande’s other novels, seem all well and happy outwardly. They are well educated middle-class women associated with prestigious professions like doctor and lecturer. They are blessed with relatively good husband and children. They manage to balance her career and domestic duty of taking care of husband and children. However, inwardly they feel unhappy for which their husbands are responsible. Though the spouses are all highly educated and intellectual, they fail to understand each other’s aspiration and requirements. The most desired elements like education, financial independence and motherhood seem to upset their domestic lives. The life of the narrator, Manju and her husband, Prem are also not exceptions.

Prem, a pathologist, working in the S. D. M. Hospital, is a sensible person and a perfect match for Manju, a lecturer in a Bombay College. The couple is a happy-go-lucky kind. Manju is going to conceive her second child after a daughter. Manju is educated, financially independent and sensitive woman who understand her need well. She is not the woman who becomes helpless without the support of her husband. She
is aware of her own existence and her voice. She is emotional and loving wife, but in
her pregnancy, she realizes the predicament of woman. Her view about happiness at
the outset of the novel is very remarkable from the point of mundane life. She
observes,

I have always thought it a strangely significant thing, the fact
that happiness is so rarely used in the present tense. Happiness
always was or will be. It never is. (IIDT:4)

Talking with Guru, she speaks about the real nature of Indian men. The
education, profession or social status does not change their attitude towards women.
Despite better education and wisdom, their inner ‘selves’ remain unchanged. Manju
observes,

It has nothing to do with his being a surgeon. It’s the Indian
male. Look at the Shahs. Dr Shah is not a surgeon, he’s an
anaesthetist, but the pattern’s the same, isn’t it? It never even
occurs to them that they might do something for their wives.
They think that they’ve played their role by bringing home a
pay packet. (IIDT:28)

Prem was not the first man in the life of Manju. Before him, she was in love
with Rajiv and wanted to marry him. But Rajiv could not convince his parents who
were against this marriage. He did not prefer to go against the will of his parents, and
hence, denied to marry Manju. Manju became disappointed, but learnt a lesson of
living life with what it offers. On losing Rajiv, she says,
I had thought then that it was the end of everything for me. But not much later I met Prem and realized that life means moving on, it means putting the past behind you. I had to forget Rajiv, I had to accept that my life was now linked to Prem’s. (IIDT:33)

She married Prem and enjoyed her life with him until her second pregnancy which prompts her to think about her life from a different perspective. Manju realizes silence in her life. She says, “I thought of my own marriage and the silences and barriers that existed between Prem and me.” (IIDT:43) Her second pregnancy instigates her to analyze her ‘self’. She observes,

I’d heard of a pregnancy bringing a husband and wife together. With Prem and me, it seemed to have the opposite effect. We had drifted even further apart. Unlike my earlier pregnancy, this time I felt as if I was alone in my struggle to bring my child to life. I don’t know whether Prem had sensed this feeling of mine, but he kept himself aloof. He looked after me with the detached kindness of a stranger. We had even, I realized one day, stopped quarrelling, as if we did not even have any areas of disagreement between us. (IIDT:45)

The rift between the spouses results into overreacted anger. Manju wants her daughter Sonu to be a bold and independent girl, free from any fear. Once when Sonu hesitated to go to toilet before bed, Manju forces her to go there alone, without the help of Kamala or Prem. She thinks,
The child refused to budge. The struggle between us became fierce and ridiculous; for some reason I couldn’t let her off. She began to sniffle, saying, ‘Papa, Papa.’ Her tears and moans irritated me, I didn’t want her to grow up a clinging vine. I wanted her to be fearless and independent. (IIDT:46-47)

Looking this harsh and unsympathetic treatment to her daughter, Prem blames her to be self-centred. He shouts,

You want this and you want that! Can’t you ever see anyone but yourself? Not even your own child? What kind of a woman are you, for God’s sake, to do this to her? Leave her alone. Let her be what she wants, let her do what she wants. (IIDT:47)

Manju’s pregnancy restricts her physical movement and the silence makes her disappointed. Instead of enjoying her motherhood, she feels it as imprisonment. Manju realizes herself deprived of freedom. She says,

Yes, where else could I go? But was I going home because there was no other place? And yet, what could I do? There was Sonu. And the child to come. For a moment, I resented them bitterly. Motherhood, I thought – it’s a trap. Keeping you in a cage until you lose the desire for freedom, until you forget what the word ‘freedom’ means. (IIDT:48-49)

Manju and Prem is a good couple. Both of them are intellectual. They are not sexually dissatisfied, nor have extra-marital relationships. However, after many years of living together, Manju realizes that she has not known Prem completely. She
knows his body, but does not know his mind. Though they are educated, their relation is based on the requirement of body and domestic comforts. They have yet to attain the complete union of mind and body. Prem, during a heated argument, blames Manju,

That you had never cared. You married me because, well, because you had to marry someone. You had told me about Rajiv, remember? (IIDT:110)

Manju feels difficult to prove her honesty. She regrets for her discloser to Prem about her affair with Rajiv before marriage. She feels that her disclosure would unburden her heart and Prem, being a good natured intellectual person, would understand her honesty. Instead Prem seems envious like Madhu’s husband in Small Remedies. Like other middle-class Indian males, Prem also feels annoyed and becomes suspicious after listening his wife’s affair with Rajiv before marriage. Manju regrets for her voluntary disclosure of it. Her illusion that the relation between Prem and her is based on mutual trust and free from uncertainty, disappears. She tries to convince Prem about her honesty and transparency. She says,

What is Rajiv compared to the life we have together? I was a damn fool, Prem. I thought I was doing the right thing, the honest thing, by telling you about it. But I was stupid, I never thought that I would be hurting you. I was just proud of my honesty. Rajiv doesn’t exist anymore. There’s only you. And Sonu. And this baby waiting to be born. (IIDT:110)
The differences with Prem and the need of a good companion result into a good friendship with Guru. This is the reason that she is having a totally different opinion about Guru, compare to others. He is a blackmailer, unfaithful lover for others, but for Manju, he is a good friend she could dream of. She finds a good companion in him. She says,

As a girl, I’d dreamt of the perfect lover; as a young woman, of perfect husband. For the past few years, it seemed to me now, I had been longing for the perfect friend. And I had thought I had found him in Guru. A man who understood and sympathized with all my feelings. It had been an almost perfect relationship, I thought. A woman would have known too much about my emotions and feelings; she would not have been as curious as Guru had been. (IIDT:100)

Though Guru is a patient and was going to die after some time, Manju’s relation with him is beyond sexual feelings, she says,

With a man, of any age, there would have been that gritty, uneasy sense of our gender between us, we would have always been conscious of our sexual feelings. With Guru, may be because of his illness, it had never been there. (IIDT:100)

Manju feels miserable despite no apparent pain. A. K. Singh comments,

She (Manju) is neither content nor confident. She is in a rather miserable state and unable to see that her feelings of misery are not due to her faults. She seems to have become a victim of ... a
passive aggressive husband who neither hits the wife nor say
even a single angry word to her, but by his actions, words and
sly comments makes her feel guilt-ridden and censured. (Singh,
1998:61-62)

The behaviour and ‘passive aggressiveness’ of men control women. The
second pregnancy is expected to bring husband and wife emotionally closer, but it
does not happen. She feels silenced and aloof. The things in the lives of Manju and
Prem do not go as per their plan. She is apprehensive about something unpleasant
may happen. Singh rightly points out the cause,

The real problem, however, does not lie in womanhood,
wifehood or motherhood but in the attitude of the middle-class
male which deprivileges the woman against the man the
moment she becomes a wife. (Singh,1998:62)

Like other women, Manju also experiences the illusion of life. Marriage does
not fulfil her expectations, and hence, she is disappointed with it. She says,

A marriage. You start off expecting so many things. And bit by
bit, like dead leaves, the expectations fall off. But this – two
people who have shut themselves off in two separate jars, who
can see each other, but can’t communicate - is this a marriage?
(IIDT:26)

The reason for unhappy marriage is the attitude of the Indian male who
imposes himself as a burden on the Indian woman. Manju observes this Indian male
attitude in Dr Kulkarni too. Though he is a surgeon, he is not different. Education and
social status has failed to change male attitude. A close observation would show the
dual personality of man like Dr Kulkarni. Manju once says,

Dr Kulkarni is a strange man. For all his polite smooth exterior,
he’s really a turbulent character. He can’t bear any
disagreement, no, none at all. Any opposition throws him off
balance. If you disagree with him, he takes it as a personal
insult. He’s the same in our conferences and meetings, it’s
painful to see a man with such a thin skin. (IIDT:119)

Like an orthodox man, Dr Kulkarni is longing for a son and heir. He has deep
grievance for not realizing his expectation. He treats her daughter, Mriga, in an
insulting manner. His attitude towards her wife Shanta makes her a dull shadow of her
husband. Mriga once tells Manju,

My mother! Sometimes I talk to her rudely, I say things to her I
really want to say to him. It’s no fun, though. She’s not real.
She’s only a shadow. His shadow. Sometimes I even feel sorry
for her. I can’t even hate her properly. Mothers are supposed to
be important, aren’t they? Mine isn’t. I never even think of her.
(IIDT:94)

Mriga is so annoyed with her father’s ill-treatment to her on the ground of her
being a girl, she dreams to be killed in an accident. Her disgust for her father is very
heartrending. She says,

I don’t like him. Not anymore. At one time I used to dream, oh,
all kinds of silly things. One of my favourite dreams was that I
would be hurt in some kind of accident, a car would run over me or something. And I would be laying in hospital, bandaged, you know, and pale and dying. And he would come to me. He would be terrible sorry. Tears would be pouring down his face. Mriga, Mriga, he would say. And I would smile bravely, and reply, don’t cry, Daddy and then I would die with a smile on my face and he would be heartbroken for ever and ever. I’ve finished with such dreams now. (IIDT:94)

Dr Kulkarni is having an affair with Rani, the Dean’s wife. He hides his relation with Rani and tells lies about it to Shanta. He is a disloyal husband to Shanta. Mriga, though only fifteen, knows everything about it and feels very sorry for her mother for being deceived and ignored. During her pregnancy she finds opportunity to understand attitude of men living in the campus. She realizes that there is no difference in their attitude to women.

For the first time in *Come Up and Be Dead*, the chief characters, Kshama and Devyani are spinsters. The novel is set in a big school campus with a girls’ hostel in a small town. The incidents of murder give contrast to the backdrop of the old and peaceful atmosphere of the campus full of green and large trees. Kshama is the Head Mistress of the school and is admired for the changes she introduced in the school. She shows preference to discipline with reasonable liberty also. Mr. Methews, the Chairman of the Board, mentions that she is the second Indian and first woman to hold this post. The novel describes the universal theme of evil. One carries both good and evil qualities within. He tries to acquire good qualities and suppress the evil in his mind. One who cannot maintain good qualities, evil overcomes automatically; and he
slips into illusory world of pleasure that eventually leads him to acts of crime. The chief characters of the novel show the universal inner struggle between good and bad. In the context of the eternal human problem of evil described in the novel, B. D. Sharma observes,

Evil is the greatest of human problems. In Shashi Deshpande’s novel Come Up and Be Dead it makes its appearance in three forms: revengefulness, lasciviousness, and proneness to commit murders. (Sharma:65)

Mr. Varma, a member of the Board of Governors of the school, is a reputed person. No one can doubt him from his behaviour that he may be the mastermind of call girls business. He supplies young girls to the clients as a part of revenge on his wife. His wife had deserted him soon after marriage. He grows abhorrence for all women, and therefore, takes revenge by exploiting young girls from the school. He is an example of revengefulness. Sanjay, Sharmila and Mridula are the victims of unrestraint desire for lasciviousness. They go beyond any scruple of morality and decency. Sanjay makes Sharmila his mistress at a very tender age and Mridula becomes pregnant even though she is not married. Sensual temptation spoils their lives as kamaturanam na bhayam na lajja and lead them to the world of crime and a pathetic end by killing innocent people prompted by fear of being exposed. B. D. Sharma rightly points out,

The proneness to commit murders is there in Sanjay, Dr Girish and Mridula. Sanjay kills Pratap, the younger brother of Kshama, and Jyoti Raman, the Biology teacher. He makes attempts on the lives of Sonali, Jyoti’s daughter and Sharmila.
Girish resolves to eliminate Devyani; and Mridula kills herself.

(Sharma, 1998:65)

He further observes,

The fact also signifies that the post-Independence pseudo-Western values which have become quite popular in, at least, a section of the Indian society, are according to Deshpande, dragging young people away from virtue. (Sharma, 1998:67)

Deshpande shows the plight of women in the contemporary society. For centuries, they have been used as a tool of carnal desire. Woman, intentionally or unintentionally, fall in the vicious circle of crime and sex, and becomes victim of man’s dominance.

Though Deshpande narrates the story of crime and suspense, her inclination to portray women’s predicament is also visible underneath. *Come Up and Be Dead* reveals the search of identity within the limited span of the novel. The narrator, Devayani and the chief character, Kshama are in search of their identity. Kshama is successful in achieving the position as a Head Mistress and Devayani (her cousin) looks after her domestic chores. Both of them decide to remain unmarried. However, during the course of time and witnessing the incidents at the school campus they change their outlook.

Kshama is revolutionary by nature. She introduces major changes in the school curriculum and takes bold and innovative steps in changing the principles of school. She has courage to change the set up by herself. She abolished uniforms for
two senior classes, added new courses and appointed men teachers. Sapna upholds these changes and favours the HM, saying,

I know the school belongs to an era that’s past and seems to cling on to it. I know the HM is doing the right thing bringing about changes. It’s perfectly right her abolishing uniforms for the two senior classes. Though, I must say, it isn’t fair to the girls who can’t afford to dress well; nor to those who have no taste. And Indian music, that’s right too. No reason why we should close our ears to our own music. And bringing in male teachers, I heartily agree with that. Too much of the zenana atmosphere otherwise. (CUBD:47)

The Board is very happy with her decision. Her attitude and capability rose to success. But happiness is often followed by sorrow. Kshama also experiences the same with unexpected incidents happened in the school campus, coincidently with the arrival of her brother, Pratap.

At the outset of the novel Kshama is very happy and satisfied with her achievement as a Head Mistress of a famous girls’ school in a town. She has a good upbringing and education in her childhood. Like Jaya (LS) and Madhu (SR), she is encouraged by her father. Her education enables her to maintain emotion and discipline in her life. She enjoys her success and achievement until the incidents of murder take place in the school campus. The author describes her personality as,

There was no doubt at all that the woman who stood on the dais was fully in command, both of the situation and herself....there
was an unmistakable air of authority about her. It shows in her perfect composure, in the way she dressed....one would have thought – here’s a woman who knows what she wants. And gets it....The agony of indecision, the torment of not knowing what she wanted to do – these things had never had any place in her life. (CUBD:5)

Kshama is known as a perfectionist attitude as she is very conscious about managing her emotions. “Nothing untidy in her life. Even her emotions washed, ironed, neatly folded and put away.” (CUBD:20) She is over conscious about her position and achievement. During her life, she develops sibling jealousy for her younger brother, Pratap. Because of her self-consciousness, love, emotion and relationship have no place in her life. She prefers to live as a spinster, free from the bondage and burden of relationship. Therefore, she does not like her own brother, as he ignores her. Kshama, being an ardent lover of discipline, she does not like Pratap’s liberal way of life. She likes to be dominant, and hence, does not approve of the privilege given to him traditionally. Since her childhood, she compares herself with Pratap. She develops disgust for him because he has to perform religious rites and his presence is unavoidable. Though she is a favourite child of her father, Pratap enjoys superiority in religious ceremony, as he is a ‘son’ and she, a ‘daughter’

Nevertheless, she does not do away from her duty as an elder sister. On a trekking camp, Pratap meets an accident and gets his leg fractured. Kshama brings him her home, not because of emotional attachment, but as a part of her duty. She doesn’t like her arrival as he is a burden on her. She prefers to live alone free from marital bond, she does not like anyone sharing her achievement. To some extent her
nature seems eccentric as she discharges her duty as an elder sister but lacking emotional attachment with her younger brother. As Sapna says,

It’s not what she does, but the way she does it; going her own way, crushing those who come in her way. Like the chariot of Jagannath. (CUBD:47)

The seed of search for identity search sowed in her childhood. She rejects the favour given to Pratap as a son. Her attitude forces her to remain isolated and free from intimate relations with others. When she first went to hostel, she felt lonely among so many girls. She says,

When I first went to the hostel, I suffered. It was terrible. I didn’t know how to speak to the others, how to laugh, joke and make friends. And the others ignored me too. (CUBD:182)

She is very conscious about her identity and individuality. As she deliberately prefers to maintain isolated life, family duties are burden for her. She believes that emotional attachment is a trap that makes a parson irrational. On her decision to bring Pratap at her house, she says,

I made a mistake. I shouldn’t have brought him here. Family duties, family responsibilities – I fell into those traps like any other emotional, irrational person. It means nothing else but an easy way out for the weak. You get into a mess and let go. You say to someone else – it’s your responsibility to get me out of this. Why should I be responsible for this? I didn’t ever burden anyone with my problems! (CUBD:182)
She blames Pratap for damaging her prestige as a Head Mistress. When something rubbish is written on the black boards of the classes against Pratap and Kshama, she thinks, “Surely, I’m above such dirt, such trash. It would never have dared to come near me, it never has until now, if it hadn’t been for Pratap.” (CUBD:74)

Kshama’s quest for self makes her ambitious. She loves freedom and success. Her pride and self confidence are responsible for her unhappiness. She is interested in nobody, but self. Though she is dependent on Devyani in household chores and brings Pratap when he is unwell, she hides her inclination to family bond and tries to maintain her dignity.

However, there is a change in her attitude towards others at the end of the novel. She also realizes the requirement of human relation and emotional attachments. She realizes the need to break the rigid wall of restricted beliefs. As Elenore Geethamala observes,

Kshama...come(s) up with truths of (her) inner self. Kshama realizes that the high wall around the school did not matter much compared to the wall, which she built within and around herself. She decides to break the wall. There is a change in her personality. (Geethamala, 2009:74)

Kshama decides to accept the importance of relation. This is possible when one allows the other in her confined life. She realizes the truth that in the path of identity search, human relation cannot be ignored. Identity is not an isolated entity. It can be attained and enjoyed among the people around us. Attaining identity putting all social and domestic duties aside is not complete. It can be enjoyed fully when it grows
among the chores of one’s duties towards others. Though she does not think of marriage, she accepts the importance of intimate relation in life; and hence, adopts orphan Sonali after the death of her mother, Mrs Raman. Observing the changed attitude of Kshama, Geethamala opines,

The conventional thoughts and ideas are scientific to the core. In the modern society these conventional habits are called rigid. Actually Kshama planned to relax some of the rules to give more freedom to the girls. The disturbances in the school taught her lesson that traditional habits cultivated for a long period are genuinely beneficial. She decided to change her own personality from sternness to becoming soft at heart.

(Geethamala, 2009:74)

The novel is ironical in terms of the two major characters – Kshama and Devayani. Kshama who is conscious about her ‘self’, succeeds in achieving prestige and popularity. At the height of her success, there is a steep fall that changes her outlook. On the other hand, Devayani, cousin of Kshama, remains in the backdrop associated with household chores throughout her life. Later she appears as an important and strong character. Although she is an ordinary woman, her inquisitive nature leads her to reveal the murder mystery in the campus.

Devayani lives with Kshama and looks after her house. The lives of both are quite different, but they have similar opinions on some issues. Both of them avoid marriage and live as spinsters. They ignore the family relationships. They form their negative attitude to family relations from their childhood experiences. Devayani is twenty seven and is crossing marriageable age. Most of the part of her life has passed
in taking care of the members of her family. Earlier, she looked after her sister during her pregnancy and child birth. Then she took care of her mother who was suffering from epilepsy. Under the fear that it is a hereditary disease, and her children may inherit it, she does not marry. The fear and lack of liberty in life makes her feel lonely and her life becomes uninterested. As she says,

Achievements. How strange it sounds now, at this time, when a person is judged only by he or she has achieved, but I had never thought of achieving anything. Marriage had been the only positive achievement my parents had pointed out to me. But, even while I drifted, I had steered away from that. What if I have children who twitch and dance and utter hideous sounds like my mother? To live was enough for me. To go after achievements meant taking on the risk of failure. And of envy and hostility if you succeeded. I wanted neither. (CUBD:104)

After the death of her mother, she lives with Kshama, as she is an orphan and has no shelter of her. All these experiences formed a notion in her mind that family relationship is bondage and hampers the freedom. Lack of individual liberty restricts development of an individual. She lives with Kshama, but there is no affection between them. “Devayani serves as a foil to her cousin supplying a kind of domestic identity to her.” (Desai:93) They live under the same roof because they need each other. Devayani is paid for her service. She takes her financial independence as the first step to her search of identity. She says,
I had to keep reminding myself. I’m not a schoolgirl now. I’m a woman of twenty-seven tackling a job, a paid job for the first time in my life. I’ve got to succeed. (CUBD:31)

She seems very conscious about her individuality. Her sister, Sumi, suggests her to stay with them instead of working at Kshama’s house as a paid servant. Devayani does not accept it, saying:

Yes, I thought. And become an unpaid servant in your house. A baby-sitter. You wouldn’t mean to do it, you’d be kind enough in a patronizing way – poor Devi, she’s so shy, she’s better at home with the children – but that’s how it would be eventually.

(CUBD:32)

Devayani also pursues the way of searching her identity. She does not have any remarkable achievement of her. She lives a very ordinary life as a paid servant of Kshama. The stereotypical life within the house and living a life without achievement or purpose, depending on other for shelter and money, prompts her to introspect. She says,

...there were uncomfortable moments when I felt a strange unease within me – as if I was fighting something within myself that refused to be subdued. And then I thought of how much simpler life must have been for women when no achievements were expected of them. Just to be daughter, wife, and mother was enough. And if you wanted none of these, there was God. You opted for God and sang and danced to Him
and even if people called you crazy, you were safe. But I was neither daughter nor wife nor mother now. What was I then? Nothing? In a sense, it was a restful to be nothing and yet there was this feeling too that I might as well be dead. Come up and be dead. (CUBD:104-105)

Outwardly she inquires into the sequel acts of crime in the campus and connecting the loose strands of murder, inwardly she is redefining her life. Like Kshama, Devayani also realizes the importance of affection of relationship later. During her casual inquiry into the murder, she comes to know how deeply Dr Girish loves his wife, Shaheeda. Though he is one of the accomplices in the call-girl racket, he does everything to make her wife happy and fulfils her expectation of a wealthy life. Though his love for his wife led him to the antisocial activities; it creates a positive impression on Devayani. Devayani realizes the necessity of a good companion in her life too. She desires to be loved. She thinks, “Now, looking at this man’s face when he spoke of his wife, I wondered – would I have had this from some person if I had been beautiful?” (CUBD:116) At his clinic, Dr Girish tries to kill Devayani. He also reminds Devayani that her life is worthless as she has no family ties. He says,

Who is there for you? Is there anyone who cares whether you are alive or dead? In any case, people always forget. Is there anyone you will be sorry to leave behind and go? Anything? (CUBD:219)

These words instigate her to change her opinion of life. She decides to go back to her home and start her life afresh. She realizes that family relationship gives purpose to
life. If the tie of relationship restricts one’s liberty, it gives fulfilment at the same time. Living for other gives satisfaction amid the drudgery and pain. In this context S. Radhakrishnan says,

True liberty does not lie in the individual’s independence of social control. It consists rather in the deliberate regulation of social forces for the positive development of the individual. (Radhakrishnan, 2010:73)

Her experiences and sufferings give her true knowledge that the search for ‘self’ without family ties is partial. Her decision to start her life with a new outlook ensures her determination to attain her true identity.

Jyoti Raman, mother of Sonali and a biology teacher, is also a victim of male dominance in her life. She was married off at an early age of sixteen, when she was not mature enough to understand the new relationship in the lives of man and woman. She found that, for her husband, marriage means nothing but sex “which seemed to her both abnormal and insatiable.” (CUBD:141) She became the victim of marital rape. She learnt that “…you couldn’t scream ‘rape’ – not when it was your own husband. And if she did, who would hear?” (CUBD:141) She got pregnant at early age, and gave birth to Sonali. After the birth of Sonali, Mrs Raman did not go back to her husband’s house which resulted into divorce. For her parents it was a great tragedy, but for her, it was freedom from helplessness and despair. She knew then with confidence and certainty what she wanted. She completed her education, got job and, with her daughter, moved away from her silently disapproving family.
She took solace that her daughter would understand her and would be on her side. But Sonali breaks her expectation. She shows inclination to her father. Mrs Raman comes to know something about the murder and the sordid business in the campus. She plans to leave the place with her daughter, but before she could leave, she is killed and meets an unfortunate death. Though, Mrs Raman’s is one of the minor characters it seems stronger in facing odds of life all alone. She realizes her ‘self’ and attains her identity without the support of her husband or family.

All the events happen in the lives of various characters, the protagonist and the narrator realize to change their attitude. In this context, Mutalik Desai opines,

Deshpande’s novels echo the old master’s voice considerably. Dickens narrative at least shows some sense of a renewal of life through suffering and through a kind of purgation. Looking at Kshama in the last pages of Come Up and Be Dead, one senses her purgation and renewal, her determination. Walls must come down, chains that bind must go. Mere glint and sparkle aren’t enough, especially when they remind one of spiked fences. (Desai, 1991:99-100)

Kshama and Devyani live with their own beliefs. During the course of time, they attain their identity by changing their attitude. The experiences of life have taught them to give up rigidity and realize the importance of family and social ties that play an important role in the construction of one’s identity. Devayani’s return to her native and Khama’s adoption of Sonali imply their internal change and commitment to start afresh.
Moving On is the story of Manjari Ahuja. Deshpande has applied the technique of double voice. It is narrated by the protagonist, Manjari (called Jiji) and her father, Badri Narayan (called Baba). Both of them recall their past – Manjari, by her memory and Baba, by his diary. Baba wants it to be read by his daughter, Manjari, after his death. Thus, the characters and the past events are developed through her recalling of them and reading Baba’s diary. The story revolves round Manjari who comes to know the lives of her parents and other relatives through the diary, and at the same time, is prompted to evaluate her past. Deshpande’s style of double narration implies the internal and external conflict of Manjari’s life that eventually influences her present and future. Manjari is a widow and lives alone for nineteen years without longing to get married again. Compare to the protagonists like Jaya, Saru and Sumi, Manjari’s character is stronger in facing the odds of her life. She is successful in handling the situation of her life except that of Nature’s will. She does not confine up to the movement of self-realization or contemplating merely the way of identity search. She realizes her individuality and sets the events of her life according her will. The novel widens the scope of the protagonist’s life. As Deepa Alexander points out, “Deshpande’s novels are specific, modernizing women in their traditional milieu. Moving On will widen women’s space.” (quoted by Geethamala, 2009:158)

The events in Manjari’s life happen in two places – Mumbai and Bangalore. She remembers her childhood and youth passed in two houses in Bangalore – one is demolished twenty years back and the other is under threat. These houses symbolize her past and present. In Deshpande’s novels, places are important as they play important roles in the construction of identity. Manjari is not an exception as she thinks,
I believe that the places we live in are not just shells we inhabit; they become part of us and influence not only our lives, but our natures too, making us act in certain ways. I have only to think of what I became in the three months we lived in Shyam’s family home, living among people who were wholly indifferent to Shyam and me. I remember how I changed, even in that short while, from an open, friendly girl into a suspicious, unhappy one. (MO:262)

Manjari’s attitude is shaped gradually by various experiences of her life and also by the revelation of the lives of her parents – Badri Narayana and Vasundhara, Malvika (Malu, her sister) and other characters. Her life is full of happy and sad moments. She tries to put up with the situation that takes place in her life. She accepts birth and death as the two extremes of life. Life cannot be static. It is always flowing. She says,

...death, just as much as birth, knits us into the being of a house. Death more than birth, I think, because the finality of death keeps your memories chained to a place. With birth, there is a moving on, a going ahead, memories piling up, diluting the original ones. (MO:75)

Like other protagonists of Shashi Deshpande, Manjari is also rebellious in term of taking decision by self against the will of her parents. And it is her rebellion that changes her life. In fact this rebellious nature is inherited by her from her grandfather who broke many of the family rules. He followed Gandhian philosophy and married a Harijan girl who was orphan and was “brought up as a daughter by his
(grandfather’s) guru, the man who had initiated him into Gandhism.”(MO:15) It created a great turmoil in the family. He was forced to change his decision, but he remained adamant. As a result he was disowned by his father.

Deshpande has involved characters of different caste. Manjari’s grandfather married a Harijan girl and Manjari married a Sindhi man. Both the time the outcome is the same, despite the gape of three generations.

The novel reveals the events of Manjari’s life by moving past to present and present to past in a complex way. She married at the age of eighteen with Shyam, a photographer associated with film industry. She becomes the mother of a son, Anand. After around three years of their marriage, Shyam dies by drowning in the water of sea, a seeming cause of suicide. Manjari becomes widow at a very young age. Now she is forty and lives alone. The hardship of her life is more than her life before marriage, as she was supported and protected by her family members. Her decision to live alone and face terrible situation gives impression of existential theory.

Manjari’s father’s diary describes the lives of his family members, including his personal life. He insists Manjari to read it saying ‘This is for you’. Initially she hesitates to read it thinking that it is an intrusion. But ‘it was the curiosity of a child who wants to know what her parents are saying about her’ tempted her to read it. Manjari recalls her life and evaluates it from a different perspective. Though the events in her life are not unknown to her, Baba’s diary provides a new point of view to her past.

The lives of Badri Narayan and Vasundhara - Baba and Mai - are reflected in Manjari’s process of introspection. The diary uncovers the lives of Baba and Mai,
their youthhood, college days, their love affair, their happy married life and later sour relation, their nature and attitude, their association with the family of RK and BK.

The quest for identity is pushed in the background and appears in the form of passions. It is with the instrument of passion various characters realize their ‘selves’. Thus, the quest for identity is described indirectly and it pervades the novel. As Geethamala observes,

> Every person has a passion in life. There is this implication throughout the novel. Man is in search of his self, so he develops a passion for something…(Jiji’s) father has a passion for the human body. The same passion is passed on to Jiji like a legacy. (Geethamala, 2009:161)

Manjari also feels, “There has to be some passion in life, otherwise life becomes humdrum.”(MO:25)

Manjari’s father, Badri Narayan is a professor of anatomy in a medical college. His interest is to study the structure of bones in human body, and therefore, he is nicknamed ‘Haddi doctor’. He did not have faith in God or destiny. He seems to be an atheist. For him, events during life including birth and death are merely accidents. He writes,

> I have never believed in Fate or Destiny, nor in the sense of something that makes puppets of us. There is no Great Plan, no Creator with a Great Design. I believe that we are freak occurrences in a universe which in itself is a freak occurrence. Set in motion, it has no choice but to keep going. (MO:54)
His friend, Mistry, used to say that life is a time pass. Badri agrees with these words as life and time run parallel to each other, but time is always the master as it dictates the pace. It is time that sets parameters of our life. Later his attitude changes. He realizes that we are born with our life pre-planned. One works according this plan. And yet, some events go beyond our control and something happens against our wish. These events are controlled by the Great Controller. He says,

But I have begun to think that we come into this worlds with our lives mapped out for us. And that our actions, our struggles, are part of this map as well. We are not passive spectators of our own lives, we are not mute witnesses to the events in it. Yet, some of it remains beyond our control; at times, our own actions, our interactions with others, may work against our plans. We have to accept it. (MO:54)

Reading the diary, Manjari comes to know the relation of her parents, their passion and love, similarity and differences of their nature. Badri was fond of Vasundhara. He liked her wife’s presence and loved her beauty, but never expressed it verbally. He used to exhibit his endearment simply by one word ‘Vasu’. He would be impatient whenever she was delayed to respond his calling her, which was the proclamation of his feelings for her wife. Manjari realizes that Baba’s courtship did not end over the years. He always wooed her and proclaimed his love for her. Of the two of them, he was admirer, and she was the one who let him admire her. Vasu was in control and Badri was the one who yielded to her wishes.

However, it was one way passion. Badri had frankly admitted in the diary that Vasu was not capable to understand his desire for sex and therefore, was not
responding to him. It was one of the reasons that Mai could not understand the feelings of Manjari for Shyam. On the contrary, Badri could understand and accepted Manjari’s desperate love for Shyam because he had passion for body. Even after their marriage, Badri and Vasundhara took some time to get adjusted to their physical needs. Her lack of desire made Badri suspicious about her love for him. He thought that she might be loving somebody else or she might not like him. But it was not so. She was very faithful to him. She was hurt by Badri’s doubt, and hence, let her body respond to his desire, and made their marriage consummated then. Even after that, she continued her negation by one excuse or the other, and thus, failed to understand her husband’s desire. Though they were a good pair of husband and wife, there was one thing missing to make them a perfect couple. Badri could not understand Vasundhara’s suppressed idea of romance beyond body and Vasundhara could not understand Badri’s passion for her body. Badri accepts that he failed to convey his feelings to Vasundhara, as he writes,

Today, when I remember these things, I am full of sorrow, I grieve for both Vasu and me. I am grieved that I failed to convey to her the enormous tenderness I felt for her. That my passion, my urgent need of her body, erased all the other messages of love and tenderness. Why did I fail to make her understand that what I wanted was not to possess her body, or rather, not only to possess her body, but to feel myself complete by merging into her? (MO:111)
Badri remembers his teacher’s words that humans are the greatest mysteries. The endless and incessant probing to solve the mysteries of the universe, and after solving many of them,

The enigma of our own selves remains unfathomable. The ego, the libido, the unconscious – how little they explain! Such tiny dots on a vast uncharted map. The truth is that each one of us is a universe more complicated than the limitless universe we inhabit. (MO:111)

Till the end of his life, he could not understand the philosophical concept of eternal and transient. He could not absorb the idea that body is only an outer covering. The essence within it, which is invisible, cannot be realized by humans who experience life through senses. For them, the invisible essence does not matter much. Badri also looks at the life through senses and hence, after the death of Vasundhara, he feels nothingness in his life. Vasundhara was suffering from gangrene. She underwent two amputations. She did not wish to live long to suffer painful and dependent life. But Badri wanted her physical presence. He referred to Buddhist philosophy that human body itself is a privilege. Vasundhara had a totally different attitude. She always ignored the body. Badri had put a human skeleton near the entrance of the house. Vasundhara did not like the idea, as for her, it is something inauspicious, and hence, she used to turn away from it.

The passions of Badri and his wife, Vasundhara are different. Contrary to his interest in human body, Vasundhara’s interest is in art and creation. She loves aesthetics. Her passion is not merely for human body, but for love, feeling, emotions, which is quite different from that of her husband which she reflects in her writings.
Vasundhara is a Marathi story writer. She started writing stories before her marriage. Initially, she does not become popular, but after the publication of the story ‘Manasi’ which is later selected to be filmed, she came into the lime light. However, her stories are contradictory to her own nature. They do not correspond to her personal experience, nor do they reflect her attitude to life. Most of her stories describe love, passion and happy ending. The titles of all the stories are given from the name of the heroines. The last story, ‘Blackout’, is an exception. ‘Blackout’ is quite different story from the rest as it expresses feminist angst. It was criticized by the feminists. It is a story of a Muslim woman during the Bangladesh war. A blackout was imposed everywhere, and the violation of it was an unpardonable offence. The woman intentionally switched on the light. Immediately, a group of men broke into the house and dragged her husband out. He was brutally beaten and killed. The woman went into the bedroom and began to undress. She looked at her bruised body – the marks of her husband’s cruelty. Instead of crying for the death of her husband, she sighed with relief and thought, “I can sleep tonight.” She got freedom from her husband’s cruelty.

Unlike the nature of her stories, Vasundhara is very rigid and strict with everybody in her real life. Her marriage with Badri was the result of love at first sight, yet their attitudes to life are different. Initially, they have happy married life, but when the question of Manjari’s marriage with Shyam takes place, their differences come on the surface. Even the reasons for the protest of the marriage are different. Badri is worried about Manjari’s study. Manjari leaves the study of medicine after one year for the sake of Shyam. Badri tells Manjari,
I didn’t mind your marriage so much, it made me angry that you gave up your studies. I thought you were giving up your life. It was like committing suicide. (MO:95)

The missing link in their marriage is reflected in their attitude to the relation of Manjari and Shyam. Both of them reacted differently. One could accept it, the other could not. Vasundhara does not agree with the marriage as Shyam belongs to Sindhi community. The marriage of Vasundhara and Badri Narayan was an inter-caste marriage too, as Vasundhara does not belong to Brahmin family. Yet she disapproves of it on the ground of different caste. For her, it is not a marriage of true minds but attraction of body. She says,

You don’t know what you want, you don’t know what you’re doing. It’s only physical, don’t you understand? Your body is confusing you. (MO:187)

Manjari realizes the duality of her mother’s nature that she writes the stories of love and emotion, but in her real life she is obtuse to understand Manjari’s passion for Shyam. She does not forgive Shyam till the end. Manjari experiences the liberal nature of her father against the rigidity of her mother. Compare to Vasundhara’s rigidity, Badri seems liberal in justifying Manjari’s rebellion, as he writes,

I made the mistake of trying to shape Jiji’s life. I look back to the time when I tried to make her share my interests, to make my beliefs hers, a time when I tried to make her take on my ambitions and I am amazed. How could I have done it? My daughter, I thought, my child, I told myself. Did that give me
the right to take over her life? We come to life as individuals; to be a parent is to be an instrument, the means of letting another human enter the world and have the experience of living – that’s all. But I thought my daughter’s life was mine to shape. In my worst moments, I think Jiji’s actions were an act of rebellion against this, against me. (MO:241)

The rebellion of the younger generation is not so surprising to the sociologists like William Goode. It is the outcome of the effort of the new generation to create a new world and the similar rebel may continue in the next generation, as he says,

...it is apparently characteristic of large-scale societies undergoing rapid social change that young people in their late teens rebel against their parents to a greater or lesser degree. Modern revolutionary societies attempt to harness the rebellion by calling upon the new generation to invest all its energies in the creation of a new world. Of course, time carries its own irony, for time eventually stills the turbulence of any given generation, whose members themselves are likely in turn to become parents facing their rebellious adolescents. (Goode, 1994:91)

Manjari observes that her mother failed to understand Baba’s love for human body and beauty of body. And at the same time, Baba’s love emerged from his interest in body, failed to understand Mai’s feelings. Though her writing is quite different from what she is in real life, it, in fact, exhibits her inner aspiration of love
beyond human body. “What Vasu fails to get in real life, she achieves through her writing, always giving the ideal family image”. (Naik:219)

Manjari seems to have inherited qualities of both, her father and mother. As Geethamala points out,

In the daughter Jiji, there is a culmination of both the qualities of her parents….Her love for human body led her to follow her father into learning medicine but eventually she discontinues her studies. The inclination to heart that Mai upheld in all her stories gains importance in her life that drives Jiji to love Shyam desperately and consequently marries him against the wishes of parents. (Geethamala, 2009:161)

Manjari inherits love for body and sense of beauty from her parents. Shyam had made her realize her beauty and let her rejoice it. Her passion is observed by her father also, as he writes,

I remember how bewildered I was by the change in her after she met Shyam; I found it hard to imagine that a girl so intent on her career, so devoted to her parents, could turn overnight into a passionate, rebellious woman. (MO:203)

The elements of physical and emotional need that her parents could not balanced, is balanced in Manjari and she enjoys the love for body and romance.

Manjari does not mind the turmoil in the family and their protest. She even sacrifices her study despite her father’s annoyance. She gets just B.A. degree and takes up odd jobs. She has a very short happy married life of merely three years.
Shyam’s irresponsible behaviour, Malu’s rape and Shyam’s death left Manjari with never ending responsibility and hardship. She has to live her life as a widow. She is victimized in the society in various ways because of her widowhood. She faces the challenges of her life single handedly without being dependent on any. She seems very strong character. In the critical time and when all the favours are available from Raja (BK’s son), she does not tend to take help, nor does she accept the marriage proposal from Raja.

Badri’s sister, Gayatri had married to RK. Badri and RK were friends and after the marriage of Gayatri and RK, two families came closer. Thus, Raja (RK’s younger brother BK’s son) and Manjari are childhood friends. Raja is a widower. He proposes Manjari to marry him as both of them have lost their spouses. In fact, Raja had a soft corner for Manjari even before her marriage with Shyam. Raja’s proposal for marriage has many practical reasons that may do good to both of them. Raja is willing to marry Manjari on the ground of adjustment and support to each other. Manjari understands the meaning of her remarriage with Raja. Although there are convincing reasons for marriage, she finds problems also. She thinks that marriage cannot stand on the base of adjustment. It takes place as a result of deep passion and attraction for some one. She turns down his proposals on many occasions. She thinks,

Raja and I...? Childhood friends, yes, comrades yes. But Raja and I...? We don’t agree on anything; we think differently about almost everything, we’re always on opposite sides of the court, always in different camps. Yes, so many reasons for not marrying Raja. So many reasons for marrying him as well. But you don’t marry someone for reasons, you marry
because...because...? I married Shyam because he was Shyam.

That’s all. (MO:305)

Reasons and adjustment are not sufficient ground for marriage. Her aversion for (re)marriage expresses her doubt of plunging into the same womanhood and restart the process of shaping ‘self’ according to the expectations of others. It is not possible to love other by protecting her individuality. Lola Chatterji rightly points out, …to be free is to be lonely...But there is always the beacon light of love. And love leads to the certainty of marriage. But marriage invariably takes you back to the world of women, of trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, self-abnegation. To love another and to retain yourself intact, is that possible? To assert yourself and not to be aggressive, to escape domination and not to dominate? (Chatterji, 1986:147)

Manjari is firm on her decision not to lose her individuality, and thus, maintains her identity by facing her problem on her own way. As a modern woman, she does not like to be considered inefficient or incapable. She can handle the things, normally a man is supposed to. In an argument about buying and driving a car, Raja explains the difficulties in having and maintaining a car for the woman like Manjari. She does not accept his arguments and shows her confidence to manage it any way. She says,

I’ll learn. It’s not impossible. It’s been done before. And let me fulfil at least one of my middle-class dream, Raja. Having a car of my own – you privileged men who take these things for

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granted can’t imagine what it means to people like me.

(MO:65)

She learns to drive it. For her, driving car is not merely a matter of skill; it is her success in realizing that woman is not inferior to man. It is realization of her control on her life. She says, “I want the brakes under my feet, not someone else’s. I don’t want a dual control, the control should be mine, mine alone.” (MO:88)

In her childhood, Manjari was proud to have a happy family. She was happy to become ‘Jiji’ after the birth of Malvika (Malu). She felt herself a responsible elder sister always focusing her attention on Malu. She used to say, ‘Baba, Mai, Malu and I’. Her frequent utterances of the phrase was sometimes ridiculed by others. Nevertheless, they were a close-knit happy family. Over the years, she learns that all days cannot be always happy. Happiness and sorrow are the inseparable parts of life. She says,

All families follow essentially the same path: a gradual distancing, a tapering off of bonds, hostility and rivalries between siblings, expectations and disappointments that distance parents and children. Things have to change; only a child can imagine that things remain the same forever, that families remain the way they were. (MO:47)

She recalls her father’s words that bones are the strongest part of the body and remain for a long time piling up the memories. But bones are strong up to a point and so is the family. After a period of happiness is over, it starts shattering.
Manjari decides to live alone and makes herself mentally prepared for this. She experiences the dejection and disloyalty in marriage. One whom she loved so passionately, and sacrificed everything, turns out to be utterly disloyal and irresponsible. She receives shock from Shyam’s debauched act of raping her younger sister, Malu, who is suffering from asthma. She knows that she cannot live with these unbearable memories of her conjugal life with Shyam. She has to bury these memories and prepares to move on. She thinks,

I don’t want to think of these things, I don’t want to bring up these memories. I left them behind the day I turned away from the sea, turned away from death, back to life. (MO:190)

She desires to live life free from marital bondage. She learns to shield her ‘self’ and protect her individuality. Although she knows that living alone is not easy, and the social condition is also not so favourable for the women like her, she determines to learn walking alone. Her passion for Shyam makes her see the world from Shyam’s eyes. The sudden departure of Shyam and her disappointment in being dependent on him changed her attitude, as she thinks,

Since Shyam’s death I’ve travelled alone. No one has any right over me, no one can tell me what I should do or not do. Even my parents forfeited their right to control my life. It was when I stood facing the sea after Shyam’s death that it began, and it has grown over the years – a conviction that I would not let anyone into my life ever again. There were the children – I had to accept that – but apart from that I would not let anyone get
close, become part of my life. No, I would not be hurt again if I could help it. (MO:261)

The experience of married life and loneliness thereafter, she introspects that marriage is a deceptive state of happiness for woman. It is not fair in terms of individual freedom. Woman is supposed to dissolve her ‘self’ and gives shape to her life according to the expectations of others. She curtails her freedom and submits to the dictates of her husband or family members. In this context Rosemarie Tong observes,

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

In the effort of fulfilling others demands, her identity is lost. Her confused individuality creates nothing but disorder in her life. Manjari understands the meaning of the phrase - Man is a social animal - that it is a process of losing individuality. The sudden and untimely death of Shyam leaves her with the questions of ‘selfhood’. She analyses,

Now I’ve got used to being alone. Living alone is an art that one learns finally to appreciate. To know that there is no need to look at the clock, that nothing is a must, is a pleasure. I can eat when I want, I can eat what I want, I can do things at times I find convenient....I gave up these early bath as soon as I left home, but the children’s needs still kept me glued to the clock.
Now I am free of that as well. The TV remote has become a symbol of my freedom; I’m mistress of all I survey, I decided what I want to see. (MO:62)

Before the death of Baba, he gave the house to Sachi (daughter of Malu and Shyam) and sidelined Manjari, though she is his immediate heir. She is hurt by this and feels being repudiated by her father, but later her grievance is removed as Sachi proposes to share the house with Manjari. Sachi realizes that it is injustice to Manjari and hence wants to share the house with Manjari. Manjari’s self respect would not permit her to occupy the house when her father gave it to Sachi. But Sachi thinks it an injustice to her and wants to undo the mistake of her grandfather, she becomes ready to occupy it.

It remained a mystery for Sachi that why her grandfather gave the house to her instead of Manjari. Shyam had raped Malu and impregnated her. Malu was suffering from asthma, and hence, died soon after giving birth to Sachi. Manjari adopts Sachi and brought up her as her own daughter ignoring all the harsh truth behind her birth. It is the noblest part of her life to easily accept Sachi and never let her realize that she is her stepdaughter. The way she cared Malu in her childhood days, she cares Sachi.

Badri’s and RK’s families were very close to each other. Badri’s sister, Gayatri married RK. Owing to the closeness of the two families, the childhood of Manjari, Malu and BK’s (RK’s younger brother) children, Hemi, Premi and Raja was full of enjoyment. Later, the big house was demolished and the place was sold as an underworld don wanted to grab this place and also wanted to run illegal activities there. Despite their wish RK, BK and Badri could not save the house. This incident happened some twenty years back. Thereafter, Badri and RK jointly constructed
another house. After the death of RK and Gayatri, Badri owned the house, and later gave it to Sachi.

After twenty years Manjari faces the similar threat from the builders eager to grab the property. They play various tricks to trap her and compel her to sell the house. They even offer money, but she does not yield. When they realize that she is not willing to sell the house, they start terrorizing her. She receives threat calls. She feels her life at stake. She knows if she marries Raja, she can be protected. Yet she does not change her determination of living alone. She acquires courage and faces the challenge of notorious builders on her own way, and never yields to their plan of selling the house. At the end of the novel, she comes out victories in her effort as the man behind the conspiracy is arrested by the police.

Manjari’s life as a young widow is full of hardship and humiliation. Finding her alone and struggling for job, she is victimized by various people. One of her friend’s husbands had eye on her and wanted Manjari to be his mistress. In another incident, her employer, who was nearly of her father’s age, wanted to have sexual relation with her. As Manjari did not give in, he fired her from the job and spread rumour that she had a bad character. To protect herself from such sexual exploitation, she changes her appearance. She gives up wearing saris because she does not want to look like woman. She cuts her hair short to be looked like man. Yet, she cannot hide her womanness and the exploiters can identify her and try to trap her. She says,

They can smell it, yes, they can smell the woman in you. No matter how you dress, whether you shave your head or hide behind burkha, they come at you, wanting your body, touching
you, drooling over you, sniffing at you. Like dogs. Like dogs in heat. (MO:284)

RK’s sister’s son Venkat, who is the DIG and investigates the matter of threat phone calls, also warns her,

...you’re a female, you live alone, there’s no man around – all this makes you an easy victim. (MO:138)

As a lonely woman she faces internal and external challenges. Outwardly she takes the responsibility of Sachi and Anand, faces proposals of Raja and fights with the terror of antisocial elements. Inwardly, she is conscious of her individuality. She knows the need of her body as well. She, therefore, falls into sexual relationship with Raman, her tenant living on the upper storey of the house. Although the boy is quite younger than her and has no future of the relation, she continues meeting him in the nights. She does not have any feeling or affection for the boy. Her sole intention is to satisfy her sexual desire without being tied up in marital relation. She wants to satisfy the need of the body without losing her individuality. However, amidst the bad experiences of her life, she struggles to protect her and learns that ‘the dark holds no terrors’.

Manjari’s struggle for freedom and for being autonomous is ideological conflict with the set rules of patriarchy. Despite the double fold struggle – inner and outer – she comes out triumphant. The only weakness on her part is her failure in sexual restraint. She succumbs to the need of her body. However, her giving in to sexual desire is not at the cost of her autonomy, for it happens with her choice and desire; and not of the desire of Raman. Manjari’s determination to move on is a two
way process of self evaluation – from within to without and from without to within. This process poses a question of achieving complete freedom and autonomy of ‘self’. In the context of Manjari’s struggle for autonomy, Chanchala Naik observes,

(By) living alone, can she find freedom; can she live of her own volition, beyond the dictates of her own desire? These are crucial questions not only to Manjari as an individual and a woman, but central to feminism as well as to all humanity. (Naik, 2005:223)

The term ‘autonomy’ means self-determination; the right to live independently within the constraints of morality. Individual autonomy involves one’s identity as an independent individual. It is this identity that constitutes one’s selfhood in relation to multiple other selves in a society. Taking the middle path of relational autonomy by Manjari, Naik says,

Manjari is the new woman, who redefines freedom and also relationships. She is thus a model practitioner of relational autonomy, situated in family and bound by relationships, yet subservient to none. An affectionate daughter, a loving sister, a caring mother and a good friend, she is hardly imposing or demanding, and is not dependent on anyone....Her engagements with life adopt a middle-path – be yourself and allow others to be; live on your own terms and let others live on their own. (Naik, 2005:227)
Through the character of Manjari, Deshpande visualizes a social set-up where one is provided equal opportunity without considering one’s gender. Family should stand on the base of cooperation and companionship. She does not agree with the idea of attaining financial independence and authority, and desert family, become dissatisfied wife and seek divorce to do away responsibilities of family. The novel, thus, advocates relational autonomy. Manjari’s efforts to balance autonomy of ‘self’ along with the filial bondage is her success in achieving relational autonomy as a new woman.

*In the Country of Deceit* which is the latest novel of Deshpande so far, portrays adult love. It is the story of Devayani who appeared in Deshpande’s earlier novel ‘*Come Up and Be Dead*’. The theme and genre of *Come Up and Be Dead* and *In the Country of Deceit* are quite different. In *Come Up and Be Dead* Devayani was the narrator and was second important character. The novel was about Kshama’s life and her confrontation with murder mystery. *In the Country of Deceit* is the story of Devayani where Kshama does not appear except by her couple of letters she writes to Devayani. The character of Devayani lingered in the mind of the author for nearly twenty years and finally she penned the character in her new story. Thus, the novel gets her protagonist and narrator from *Come Up and Be Dead* and also keeps the same background, yet it is not the sequel of it, as the author says in the acknowledgement of the novel:

The characters of a novel become a part of your life during the writing of it. However, once the novel is done, they gradually let go, allowing others to take their place. But Devayani, who appeared in an early novel, *Come Up and Be Dead*, lingered
with a quiet persistence for years, until I knew there was another story of hers which she wanted me to tell. And so this novel, in which Devayani comes back, along with her cousin Kshama. Nevertheless, it is not a sequel. (CD:261)

It is the story of Devayani who is 27 and crossing the marriageable age. After returning from Bangalore, she comes to her native place Rajnur, a small town in Karnataka. The novel begins with the demolition of the old house and construction of a new house under the supervision of her elder sister Savitri (Savi), an architect by profession suggesting a fresh start of life. As Devayani says in the beginning, ‘Ground Zero’. It was I who said the words. And, in spite of the death knell sound of the words, in spite of their association with destruction, Savi knew what I meant. For us, this was not an end, but a beginning. A fresh start. A clean slate. (CD:1)

The metaphor of ‘house’ is used in almost all the novels reflecting the issue in the lives of women protagonists. In the context of In the Country of Deceit, it suggests three things, viz;

(1) It is a fresh start of the protagonist’s life after shedding all the memories of her past.

(2) It is constructed under the supervision of Savi who represents the social outlook. As the house has to follow her instruction, the woman protagonist has to conform the dictates of social conventions.

(3) The house is the symbol of the space given to woman in our society.
Thus, for Devayani it is a new life. She decides to live her life different from she has lived so far. She wishes to live for her without being tied up in the family relations that deprives one’s own liberty.

The novel does not follow the style of double voice as it is narrated by Devayani only. Nevertheless the voice of other characters is presented by their letters. It seems a dialogue between subjectivity and objectivity; individual liberty and social restrictions; tie of marriage and pleasure of live-in relationship. As the novel describes love and relationship, it involuntarily slips into an argument of morality and freedom of love. In a question asked about love and relationship described in the novel, Deshpande says,

Most of my novels emphasize love because I am fascinated by the idea of love. Devayani, the protagonist of my new book *In the Country of Deceit*, falls deeply and passionately in love. Relationships are not something one decides on. They happen naturally, especially adult relationships, and one must know what the consequences are and take responsibility for it. It is very difficult to judge if adult love is good or bad. Human beings always crave for love, even in death a dying man wants to hold someone's hands. (interview published in DNA)

Like Manjari, Devayani also decides to live alone in her newly constructed house in Rajnur. She rejects all the proposals and suggestions of marriage. She receives letters from her elder sister Savi who is living in Delhi with her doctor husband. She also receives letters from her aunt Sindhu (her father’s sister) living in
America and is suffering from breast cancer. Sindhu also tries to convince Devayani to get married and settle down. Kshama, her cousin, writes her informing Devayani to return to Bangalore to join service as there are good offers. They are very sympathetic to her and are worried about her future. Devayani ignores all the suggestion from various characters as she is firm to decide the way of her life by herself. Savi, Shree (Savi’s husband), Sindhu and Keshav (Sindhu’s husband) represent social point of view. Despite convincing arguments in the letters, they cannot convince Devayani to get married. Devayani is in search of realizing her true ‘self’ by taking the rout of independence. She does constant effort to construct her identity completely free from family bondage and social conventions. Thus, she walks further on the path paved by Manjari in Moving On. Manjari prefers to perform her duty to others without being captive in matrimonial bond, while Devayani prefers to realize her ‘self’ ignoring all the social conventions that restrict one’s expression of love. “As Devayani moves away from a traditional norm in search of satisfaction, it then becomes her quest for an authentic selfhood.” (Narula, 2010:200) She engages herself into activities like gardening and teaching English to the school children.

Devayani’s desire for living alone emerges from her early youth experience. From the very beginning she has to shoulder the responsibilities of a mature person. Her early days of youth pass in looking after her family members. She helps her sister Savi during her pregnancy and child birth. Her father commits suicide and mother falls ill as she is suffering from epilepsy. She looks after her mother who dies a few years later. Before returning to Rajnur, she lives with Kshama to look after her domestic chores. Then she takes care of Sindhu after her surgery. She realizes that family relation is a burden and deprives one from individual liberty. She, therefore,
decides to live her life free from any family bondage that binds her into the activities against her choice; and hence, do away from the bondage of marriage as it may restrict her freedom. If she gets married, she would have to pass her life in looking after her husband and children and sacrifice her ‘self’. Thus, the bondage of family tie and desire of freedom lead her towards the realization of her individual existence. Her desire is similar to that of Manjari as she also prefers to live alone. However, her desire emerges from her bad experience of marriage.

The responsibility and care of the family at a very young age lays negative impression on Devyani. She wants to be free from the family ties that bind one’s freedom and individual identity. She wants to enjoy life without any kind of family tie, as she says,

All these years I had been the accompanist to other people’s lives. First I had been a follower of my spirited, beautiful elder sister, then in charge of my parents’ lives, the observer of their tragedy. For a brief while I had acted as my cousin Kshama’s helper and later I had been Sindhu’s attendant after her surgery. Now, for the first time, I had to play solo. I had no one else to look after, no one to think about. I felt as if I was waiting for the curtain to go up, waiting for something to happen. (CD:8)

Her life as the attendant and accompanist ignites desire to search a place where nobody knows her. She needs a place where she can live her life by her wish independently and grow as an individual. She is fed up with the stereotypical question about her marriage. She says,
I had wanted to go to a place where no one would know me. Away from a place where people would ask, ‘And when are you getting married?...It was restful to know nobody. I felt as if I had shed my past and become a new person altogether. I was not Devayani Mudhol, I was an anonymous Nobody. (CD:15)

After returning to Rajnur and settled down in her house, she comes into contact with Rani, a former actress. Rani comes from the life of glamour and glitter. She is unknown to Rajnur and therefore, feels lonely. Her loneliness brings her closer to Devayani. Rani, whose real name is Priya Ranjan, gets married to Kailash Navilur (KN) a businessman from Rajnur. She lives with her husband and two children. It is her second marriage. Earlier she married Prem, a film personality. She had a daughter, Roshni, from her first marriage. Rani had extra-marital relation with the film star, Mahesh Tiwari. Despite the protest of Prem and Roshni, Rani continued meeting Tiwari who was drunkard and was very cruel to her. She finally stopped meeting her. After a few days she heard the news of his suicide. Then she got divorce from Prem as well.

Rani marries to KN and settles down in Rajnur. KN has built a big house for them. However their relation is not so intimate. Their marriage is a mutual convenience. For Rani, it was an easy and comfortable life with a wealthy man and for KN, it is “a beautiful wife, one more possession he could be proud of.” (CD:158) Both of them have separate rooms. “And yet they had two children. Perhaps, like royalty, he visited her occasionally after advance notice.” (CD:158) Both Rani and Devayani watch Rani’s films in a chronological order. Most of them were love stories of young lover with happy endings, except one which was a love triangle. Rani’s talk
about her past life indicates her sickness for the glamour world she has left in Mumbai. Though her life is ruined by her association with film industries, she still wishes to go back to the glamour world and do good movies. She contacts several producers and finally gets a role in a movie which is a story of a betrayed wife. She does this to fulfil her lover Mahesh Tiwari’s dream.

It is in one of the parties at Rani’s house, Devayani meets Ashok Chinappa, new Deputy Superintendent of Police of Rajnur. They fall in love at a first sight. Although Devayani knows that Ashok is much older than her and is married. Although she knows the fact that Ashok lives with his wife and a ten years daughter, she falls in physical relationship with him. Both of them are mature, and therefore, they know the future of their relationship, as Ashok says in one of their initial meetings,

I’m a married man. I have a daughter, she is nine, no, she’ll be ten this year. I don’t know your age, but I know you are much younger… I can promise you nothing. Nothing. (CD:91)

Savi, Sindhu, Shree disapprove this relation crossing the line morality. Despite this, Devayani continues meeting Ashok at various places including her own house. As she knows that her relationship with Ashok is not acceptable on moral ground, she hides it from everybody and meets him secretly. She is thus, stepping into the country of deceit. That is the deception to her conscience.

Devayani’s attitude is moulded by her stay with various people - her aunt Sindhu, sister Savi, her parents and Rani. Sindhu is very sympathetic to her. Even though she lives in America, she regularly writes to Devi and shows concern about
her stable life. Sindhu insists Devi to get married and suggests many suitable men. Unlike Devi, Sindhu had married twice. Her first husband died of illness. Instead of being disappointed, she considered her destiny of short period of married life as ‘a preview’. Then she met Keshav and proposed him; and eventually married him. She shows deep trust in marriage and hence, insists Devayani to get married as well. Her experience shows that marriage makes one important person for his/her spouse. One becomes priority for him/her. In her letter she explains the importance of marriage, as she writes,

I know marriage is not the final solution, or even the best. But at least once you’re married you know you are not alone. You know that you come first with somebody, that another parson is deeply concerned with you all that you do, with what happens to you. A captive companion! (CD:26)

However, Devayani’s plan is completely different from Sindhu’s suggestion. She wants loneliness and independence. She doesn’t want a captive companion from marriage. The letters of Savi and Sindhu force her to consider and reconsider her way of life, her position, her priority and her future.

Devayani’s relation with Ashok raises a conflict between love and goodness. Love, when added with honesty and commitment, becomes goodness. It is goodness that makes one’s life worthwhile. In an interview with The Hindu, Deshpande says,

Yes. Seems odd, doesn’t it? But when you think of what love does to people and the things love makes them do… My novel explores the slippery, treacherous terrain that love takes people
into….I realised that I have been exploring the idea of love in all my novels. Different kinds of love, the different faces of love. I also find myself increasingly interested in the idea of goodness in human beings. The emphasis today, perhaps because of the times, is on violence, on evil. Goodness, when it is written about, is made to seem like weakness. In fact, we shy away from the very word. We speak of values instead. Nevertheless, goodness is real, it exists — not only in people like Bapu or Mother Teresa, but in ordinary people. It is these people who make life worth living. So, whether it is Joe in Small Remedies, Kalyani in A Matter of Time, Akka in The Binding Vine, or Gayatri in Moving On, they make life possible for others.” (interview with Usha K. R.)

However, one should not misunderstand the author’s point of view. Deshpande does not advocate live-in relationship or sexual relation out of wedlock. She seems to suggest change in social outlook from its rigidity and orthodox nature. It should consider freedom of individual as long as it does no harm to others. In this context, Arti Nirmal opines,

Deshpande, in no way advocates illicit or extra marital relationship or adultery of any kind but through the character of Devyani she certainly attempts to fight against certain orthodox conventions of the society. She bestows her heroine with so much strength that she can challenge the conservative norms of society. Due to this reason Devi does whatever she wishes to
do and attacks severely on the double standards adopted by the
society to judge something. (Nirmal, 2012:5)

The love of Devayani and Ashok is so intense that they do not mind the social
customs. Ashok seems to have crossed the limit of sanity. He himself feels that it is
madness and accepts that his behaviour is not like a mature and wise man. He says,

Since the day I saw you in Priya’s (Rani’s) house, your face
has been with me. I can only call it being haunted. I keep
seeing it all the time. And yet I want to see you. Do you know I
go for a walk in the morning past your house hoping for a
glimpse of you? Like a stupid teenager – a man of my age! If I
were not afraid of what people would think, of what they
would say, I would stand outside your gate all day. I would
wait all day for a small glimpse of you. What am I doing! What
am I saying! This is madness. (CD91)

The author also upholds that love cannot be distinguished according to age. She says
in an interview to DNA,

It is very difficult to distinguish love according to the level of
mental maturity. A 60-year-old man or a woman can fall in
love and behave like a child. People realise the true meaning of
love only when they fall in love. (interview with DNA)

Devi and Ashok love each other passionately. Devi is moved by Ashok’s
frankness and honesty in saying that he can promise nothing to her. Devi
unintentionally changes her attitude. Despite much difference in their likes and dislikes, Devi loves him ignoring all of them. As she says,

…it was true that we had very little in common. Music for him was jazz and Beatles and for me, Hindi film songs, Hindustani classical and ghazals. He loved open spaces, the jungle, horses, dogs and I had my books, my walled garden, my plants. He could not imagine a meal without meat, and for me, even an egg was anathema. Yet, when we were together, none of it mattered and I, who hated the smell of whisky, could inhale his whisky-smelling breath with ecstasy. (CD:208)

Once, Devi visits KN’s mother and comes to know the terrible story of KN’s mother. She was deserted by her husband and abandoned her with her sons. KN’s father is dead now. The story of betrayal is forgotten by the world, but her anger was as fierce as if it had happened yesterday. She cannot forget her pain and suffering. The wound of pain is so deep that it is unlikely to be healed. Devi relates it with her relationship with Ashok. She feels guilty thinking that his wife would also hate her when she will come to know about it. Because of her, his wife will be cursed with the same fate as KN’s mother. Devi thinks,

Does she too hate me this way, the woman I saw once, the woman neither Ashok nor I ever speak of? We try to deny her existence, but she exists, she is real. And hating me, perhaps, the way the old woman hates her rival. And what about the girl, the girl with the long flashing dancing legs and eager face?
Will she be scared by her mother’s hatred? Will her life change forever because of what Ashok and I are doing? (CD:162)

For the first time she evaluates her act on moral ground. She accepts the existence of others from the social point of view. One has right to enjoy his freedom as long as it does not affect the lives of others. Social custom does not permit human emotion that intentionally or unintentionally claims possession of one beloved breaking the ties with others.

The passionate love of these two adults also create a sense of guilt, a sense of deceit. When Devi could not sleep the previous night because of obsession, she tells Ashok the next day,

I thought of many things. Of how wrong this is and why I was even thinking of it....It’s you – you are committed, you are...you are married. And I thought of marriage and wondered – how can you do this? It’s so wrong. (CD:130)

Devi realizes that she has entered in the territory of human relationship which violets the social norms. She has to rely on falsehood. She has to tell lies to everyone who cares for her. She thinks,

I had entered the country of deceit. I could no longer be open and honest with people I loved; I had to deceive them. I was glad they were far away, these two women (Savi and Sindhu) who loved me. If they were here, they would have known something had happened to me. (CD:147)

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She realizes that Ashok’s relation with her is an act of adultery which is never acceptable to society. Whatever her feeling or understanding is, having physical relation with a woman other than one’s wife is an adultery. Her cook Kusum was married too. Her husband was disloyal to her and had relation with other woman. Devi feels it as an injustice to Kusum. Now the same thing she indulges in and does injustice to Ashok’s wife. She thinks,

I now realize that adultery remains adultery, whoever the couple may be. That it is always riddled with guilt and fear, constantly swinging between euphoria and despair. I know this too, that the main preoccupation of all adulterous couples is: how do we meet? And where? (CD:149)

Ashok reminds his promise to her and tries to convince her to trust him. He says that he had promised her nothing except two things – love and honesty. As Devi is under the impression of his love, she cannot think otherwise. A married man promises love and honesty who would have promised the same to his wife as well. One who betrays his innocent wife and ignores his daughter, can betray Devayani also at some point of time in future. He promises honesty to Devayani, a more beautiful woman than his wife; he may betray her for another woman more attractive than Devayani. In this context, Shree’s doubt is valid, as he says,

But to me the most important one is loyalty. Only if there’s loyalty can you have an honourable marriage. And how can you expect a man who is disloyal to his wife and his marriage to be loyal to you? (CD:198)
However, Devi has full trust on Ashok’s loyalty. She tells Savi that he has never cheated her. For her over estimated trust, Shree asks her, “Devi, are you not cheating yourself?” (CD:198) Savi becomes angry and doubts to be under hypnotic effect. She says, “You’re crazy. He’s done something to you. He’s hypnotized you, he’s corrupted you. This is terrible.” (CD:219) Shree’s doubt is appropriate as Ashok has relations with many other women. He himself accepts it, and yet, tries to convince that he does not intend to use her body only. In his emotional conversation with Devi, he says,

I’ve never thought of you as a body to enjoy, to have sex with. The first time I saw you, it was your face, the way you looked…I may sound like a fool, but I felt I had found something I had been looking for all my life….I’ve had other women, yes, I admit it, but I have never felt this way, there has never been anything like this. What I feel for you is…is…Loving your body is part of my love for you, only a part….I’m speaking the truth. (CD:234)

For Savi and Shree, Ashok’s emotional and convincing argument cannot be trusted. On the contrary, Devayani experiences ecstasy when she is with Ashok. She is so obsessed with his memory that her conscience cannot judge right or wrong of her relationship with Ashok. On one hand she goes closer to him and on the other hand she feels guilty also. She thinks,

I knew it was wrong; nothing could make it not wrong. And yet, I had rushed into it. Why had I done it? I knew the answer.
I did it because I wanted him, I wanted to be with him, I wanted to be in his company, I wanted to sleep with him, I wanted this relationship…Relationship? What relationship? Mistress? The other woman? The kept woman? I pushed the words away; I thought instead of love…words I had never heard spoken, words I had only read in books, words which had now become real. (CD: 142)

Devayani who is now transformed into Divya chooses the right course of action for her life. She stops relation with Ashok. Ashok is also transferred to other place. Devayani’s decision to discontinue her relationship with Ashok does not come out of pressure of her elder sister and aunt, but it is her own decision to avoid risk of breaching social custom. Like other protagonists of Deshpande, Devayani is enlightened and has realized her requirement. Her decision to break her relationship with Ashok and live with his memories, she succeeds in obeying the social convention and personal choice. Maria Philomi rightly points out,

Deshpande’s women are enlightened, culturally rooted, awakened to the realities of life and make decisions of their own. Their decisions are not out of their ignorance, inability or submissiveness. They decide making an analysis of the situation, crossing all barriers of identity crisis and subordination. (as quoted by Arti Nirmal, 2012:6)

Devi realizes that lives of Ashok and her are different. Both of them have different position and different commitment. She is free from commitment to her
family member as she is unmarried, while Ashok has ambition and commitment associated with his family. Devi thinks,

He loved me, but he also had his ambition, his work, his dreams of a future life. And, threaded through the design of his life was the strong strand of his love for his daughter, a thread that linked him, whether he liked it or not, to his wife. Love was not enough, no, it was never enough. (CD:210)

Devayani is confused to judge right or wrong. She cannot understand the social outlook on love. One’s emotions are restricted by social laws. For her, a person can realize her existence and enjoy the life to the highest point if he is completely free from attachments. It is the irony of her life that she rejects all the proposals of marriage from her friends and relatives; and plunges into an illicit relationship with a married man older than her. Like Manjari, Devayani also determines never to get married and live a lonely life. She is in search of her real ‘self’. She expresses her desire to touch the pick of pleasure in her life which she is deprived of by her family ties. She is obsessed with her first sight of Ashok, and experience highest kind of delight. She thinks,

Why was it haunting me? It was the extremeness of the gesture, its flamboyance, may be, declaring a small moment of supreme happiness, announcing the pinnacle of achievement. I want that, I thought, I want a needlepoint of extreme happiness, I want a moment in my life which will make me feel I am touching the sky. (CD:25)
Devayani and Manjari know the need of their body. Hence, they find the way to satiate their sexual desire without sacrificing their hard-won independence. This complex situation leads Devayani to the country of deceit. Her attraction and love for Ashok is so intense that she ignores right or wrong, and breaks all the social barriers. Thus, ‘the country of deceit’ has manifold interpretations:

(1) There is a deception in Devayani’s love for Ashok. Despite overt wrong, she justifies it saying, “…he listens to me the way no one has listened to me before, making each word of mine a precious jewel.” (CD: 200) She is under hypnotic effect of his personality in which she does not care for good or bad, right or wrong.

(2) Her love compels her to tell lies to her near and dear people like Savi, Sindhu, Shree and Keshav against her will.

(3) For the sake of the fulfilment of her desire, she does injustice to Ashok’s wife and daughter. If social conventions are put aside, humanity does not permit a relationship that does harm to other’s lives in the name of one’s liberty.

(4) She indulges in the illusion that she loves Ashok, and does not want anything from him. She says that she doesn’t even expect marriage with him. However, tempting a married man into an illicit relationship is virtually a claim of possession. She also reflects,

What do I want, you ask me. Marriage? No, I will not speak of it. I know it will never happen; though I must admit that I have
secret hopes that he will come to me one day and say, ‘I am free, we can be together. (CD: 200)

(5) She believes that her love is not merely the fulfilment of bodily desire. It is more than this. Again, it is her illusion. Her relationship has no future, no identity, no responsibility, no commitment and no social acceptance. The lovers cannot feel proud and declare their relationship openly. They are supposed to meet secretly.

(6) From social and spiritual point of view, no one but one’s wife is permissible to enter into the ‘territory’ of her husband; and husband visa versa. Hence, Devayani’s relationship with Ashok can be justified on personal ground, but from social point of view, it is in the circle of deceit. She has to hide the reality. For Devayani, all is good as far as her love for Ashok is concerned, but at the same time, it has a sense of guilt as well, as she accepts that she in the country of deceit

Devayani attempts to go beyond social conventions to realize her ‘self’. Her path of realization goes through her body. Like Manjari, Devayani “is in quest of meaning in her life and the place of her choices in the scheme of things.” (Narula, 2010:200) Rekha Narula further says about the author’s outlook by portraying the character of Devayani,

…the issues of women sensuality and sexuality taken up by the author implies rejection of prudery associated with them. At the same time one cannot overlook the fact that the author has a very balanced approach. She is meticulous about the socio-

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cultural milieu of the society for which she writes.” (Narula, 2010:200)

Whatever is the outlook of society, whatever is the good or bad on ethical ground, Devayani makes a daring effort to cross the line of social ethics. She emerges as new woman who is more self conscious, trying to create her own world of happiness. In context with Devi as a new woman, Dalvir Singh Gahlawat observes,

Devi is one of Deshpande’s modern women trying to come to terms with themselves and their place in family and society; trying to reconcile their individual freedom to that of their ‘given’, which is not simply ‘culture’ or ‘society’ or class/caste, but also the freedom of others. (Gahlawat, 2012:8)

However, in the country like India relationship between two adults without marriage is a new, and so far, unacceptable concept. Deshapnde has attempted to show the western concept of live-in relationship from woman’s point of view. However good or suitable it may be, it is still far from social recognition. Like Jaya, Saru and Indu, Devayani too, has to confine in the realm of social customs after succeeding in realizing her ‘self’.

The protagonists of the works under scanner have their conclusion on intellectual ground. Within the limited scope of middle class milieu, they have completely different experience. They need physical as well as emotional comforts. In realizing their self they come to different conclusion. Manjari and Devayani need to become rebellious and remain adamant in their decision to keep their individual freedom. From her experience, Manju realizes the need of social change that changes
outlook of men towards woman. With the education and radical change in life style, man remains hypocritical. For Manju, marriage is an inevitable bond that makes one’s life enjoyable, provided it is a union of mind along with body. Kshama also realizes the need of unshakable and permanent relation that supports one to make his/her life purposeful. Identity of person without relations with other is not a complete one. Kshama and Manju realize requirement of intimate relationship, while Manjari and Devayani realize the requirement of relational freedom, free from marital bonds.

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