Chapter I

Introduction

Literature is an expression of life through the medium of language. It blends both art and morality. Literature perpetuates human thoughts both in terms of time and space, and therefore, every creative artist expresses himself / herself to represent the issues that are temporal as well as timeless. Of all the literary forms, novel is the most faithful, convincing and effective vehicle of depicting a nation’s ethos. It is the most potent, pliable and popular means of communicating a creative experience. It evokes and touches the profound thoughts in and about human life. It is a sum total of writers’ experience, feelings, imagination and moral vision. It has come through English language and western education in India. It’s progress in India is due to the liberal thought from the west.

Indian Writers in English have made significant contributions to the development of novel in English in India. Ever since the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Rajmohan’s Wife (1864), Indian novel in English has grown considerably bulk in variety and maturity. However, the emergence of three literary luminaries, major trio, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan brought new hopes about the prosperity of Indian fiction in English.

Indian fiction in English is also enriched by talented women novelists including Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Attia Husain, Santha Rama Rao, and Shashi Deshpande. They write about women, their conflicts and their predicaments against the background of contemporary India. They also analyse the socio-cultural
milieu and values that assign Indian women their role and image towards themselves and the society. Their chief concern consists of their exploration of the moral and psychic dilemmas and repressions of their women characters along with their efforts to cope with the challenge and achieve a new harmony of relationship with themselves and their surroundings. They try to tell the world the obstacles women face and the disadvantages they suffer in an orthodox Hindu world.

The earliest Indian women writers portrayed the traditional image of woman. Now, the woman writers portray the realistic picture of a woman with a thrust on her sense of frustration and alienation. The characters created by them are torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. Their crisis of value adaptation and attachment with family and home pull them asunder. The plight of the working women is still bleak as it is aggravated by the problems of marital adjustments and quest for and assertion of her identity. Commenting on the same, while analyzing Deshpande’s novels, R.S. Pathak in “Shashi Deshpande : The Making of a Novelist” admits : “Her (Deshpande’s) real contribution lies in the portrayal of plights and problems, trials and tribulations of the middle-class Indian women – specially those who are educated and have chosen a career for themselves” (29).

The first generation women novelists depicted women as traditional in outlook. These women writers wrote mainly to voice their concern for and sympathise with the suffering of Indian women rather than to censure the society. There was no room for anger and tension in their works.
The women writers project Indian women from different perspectives based on their interest and ideologies. Sahgal, Shobha De, Namita Ghokhale present women belonging to upper class society, most modern and contemporary in their outlook. These women attach no value to morality, consciously maintain extra-marital relationship, and have desire to consummate sex before marriage and hardly care for consequences. Markandaya portrays rural women, sincere, poor, hard-working, looking after their household chores, family and relationships but suffering mutely all along. Geeta Hariharan takes women from both upper-middle and lower classes as does Manju Kapur. Arundhati Roy portrays women belonging to the lower class. Desai delves deep into the psyche of her women characters.

Women have been depicted in various ways by writers of modern Indian Fiction in English. Male novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar and so on depicted women characters in their novels but only sketchily and superficially. The women they portray seem to be distant from reality; too crude, moralized, or sentimentalized, mainly because the women characters have little scope in their works. It is with the works of women writers like Markandaya, Desai, Kamala Das, Sahgal and Deshpande that the role of women in the family and society is given close scrutiny as well as a new dimension. While Markandaya deals with women suffering in poverty in rural and urban backgrounds, the other women writers of Indian fiction in English portray women of urban and upper-middle class. They portray women with the sense of frustration and alienation.
The emergence of women writers writing in English in India is of great significance. It brings a new age of brightness for Indian women. But the subordination still lingers long in the society. K.S. Ramamurti in *Rise of the Indian Novel in English* observes: “the relief from dependency was still out of the reach of most women. So the battle for emancipation was taken by a few educated women who, in their effort to communicate to the world their own bitter experiences as women as well as their ideas of social reform, turned writers” (67). Equally John B. Alphonso – Karkala in *Indo-English Literature in the Nineteenth Century* observes: “They tried to tell the obstacle women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give form and shape to their autobiographical accounts, which attracted publishers both in India and abroad” (78). Fiction by women writers constitute a major segment in Indian English literature. In this juncture, S. Prasanna Sree in *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Study* says:

The struggle to establish one’s identity and to assert one’s individuality has led the women to wage a desperate fight against the existing social order of the day. It is therefore, imperative for women to determine their new role and to redefine its parameters. The portrayal of women in literature helps them to do so as it provides them with role models drawn from the sufferings of the women characters, harassed under the chauvinistic male domination. Their thematic concerns and ideological preoccupations paved way to establish the synchronic and diachronic developments and continuity in the construction of the subjectivity of women. The similarities and dissimilarities in the writer’s perceptions of
the selfhood of women, given their different socio-cultural milieu, suggest a continuum of different possible responses. (18)

The attitude of women writers has changed in recent times. Their writings are based not only on observations of external behaviour but also on the internal journey in the psychological realm of the feminine sensibilities. They make straight journey into the psyche of their women characters who are torn on account of the tensions generated by the discord between the individual and the surroundings.

Women novelists writing in English attempt to project woman as the central figure and they present the predicament of woman. Their instinctive perception of and insight into women’s reaction and responses, problems and perplexities, the complex working of their inner selves, their emotional involvements and disturbances help them portray their women characters with all their longings and aspirations and hopes and frustrations.

Born in 1938 in a brahmin family, Deshpande grew up in Dharwar and has subsequently lived in Bombay and lives presently in Bangalore. She has written nearly twenty books. Her first publication is a collection of short stories, *The Legacy*, appeared in 1978. Two years later, in 1980, her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* was published. Throughout the seventies, she apparently wrote a number of short stories, publishing them in magazines and newspapers, some of which later found place in the collections of her short stories. *Terrors* is however, not really the first novel to be written, the first being *Roots and Shadows* which was completed in 1978, a year before *Terrors*, but published only in 1983. The year 1982 saw the publication of a crime
novella If I Die Today, and in the mid-eighties three collections of short stories came out in quick succession – Nightingale (1986), It was Dark (1986), The Miracle (1986). If I Die Today though published in 1982 works in a very different manner from both Shadows and Terrors. The narrative approach is quite different in each one of them. Later, in 1988, appeared That Long Silence which brought her the Sahitya Akademi Award. And in 1993, after a gap of several years, appeared two novels. The Binding Vine and Come Up and Be Dead. The latter is once again a crime novel but stands in between children’s literature and adult fiction as it is a story located in a girls’ school. A Matter of Time (1996) and Small Remedies (2000) are the other two novels and The Stone Women and Other Stories is her sixth volume of short stories. In 1993, Penguin had brought out another collection, the fifth one; Intrusion and Other Stories which carried several stories from earlier volumes and four of which have surfaced in The Stone Women. Collected Short Stories, Vol. I (2003) brings together several of her well-known stories from earlier volumes and includes a few hitherto unpublished stories.

Familiar with both Marathi and Kannada, as the first was her mother's language and the second her father's, she has chosen to write in English. The other two have remained more or less 'spoken' languages. English happens to be the only language she is competent in. Writing in English may have restricted her readership but has in no way acted as a constraint on her choice of subject matter or milieu. Her novels reflect middle class lives in both urban and small-town environments. They are thickly populated with sprawling extended families. There are family retainers and slum-dwellers, domestic servants and dependent outsiders. And as the narratives move from one generation to another, social changes are also reflected as women move out of the confines of
domesticity into public spaces. Deshpande deals very minutely and delicately with the problems of middle-class educated women. Jasbir Jain in *Gendered Realities, Human Spaces: The Writing of Shashi Deshpande* says that Deshpande has “worked through historical and traditional contexts, explored psychological conflicts and inner spaces, brought together time and space to create narrative meanings and has related multiple literary traditions of language, gender and culture” (11). Deshpande is concerned with the power equation within the marital relationship. Deshpande is influenced by the writers like Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Erica Jong, Bronte sisters, and Jane Austen. Writers like Simone De Beauvoir and Germaine Greer stimulated her writings.

Deshpande never wishes to be called a feminist writer. In fact, all her novels focus on the experience of being a woman. Her protagonists are usually intelligent, educated women who are familiar with contemporary thought. They are faced with the concerns and choices of the middle-class Indian women like Choice of Career, Choice of a Partner in Life, then the problem related to the role of career women, and the role of wife and mother. In this connection, Evangeline Shanti Roy in “Shashi Deshpande’s *The Binding Vine: A Quest for the Anchor of Life*” observes that “The agonizing dilemma of the woman who has been exposed to the influence of progressive education and western feminism and is at the same time conditioned and controlled by stereotyped Indian role models, is brilliantly evoked in novel after novel” (75).

Women constitute half of the world’s population. They are not treated on par with men. They are oppressed, suppressed and marginalized. In a male dominated society, woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent homemaker
with multifarious roles in a family. She has to endure and sacrifice herself but her individual self gets little recognition in the patriarchal society. Mary Ann Fergusson in *Images of Women in Literature* says that “in every age woman has been seen primarily as mother, wife, mistress and as sex object” (4). She is inculcated with the idea of self-negation, of pride in patience, of the need to accept a lower status through the roles of Sita, Savitri and Gandhari. She has to be passive and has to accept the given role in shaping her destiny. However, the role of woman has been full of contradictions.

For ages, woman lived under the protection of either parents or husband. This made her life safe and smooth. The new education has awakened her to her real self. She starts craving for independence and self-reliance. She begins to shed her timidity and shun abject surrender to the protective cover provided by man. The modern, educated young woman questions the man’s willful unconcern for woman’s wishes, likes and dislikes. Woman too makes money independently. She revolts against the age-old slavery, suppression and oppression. This striving of the modern woman to be free and self reliant is often debilitated by her timidity and difference.

Society characterizes woman as ideally warm, gentle, dependent, and submissive. Family life and work patterns convey the idea that woman should be subordinate to and dependent on man. The male-dominated society does not want her to be equal to man. In spite of the educational opportunities and economic independence, woman is surrounded by domestic injustice and the crude customs of the society. She works outside as well as inside the home. Woman suffers due to the emotional attachment with home. As she has sense of individuality, she does not want to lead a passive married life.
The image of woman in Indo-English novel is based on the traditional, ancient literatures of India, which showed woman as a devoted wife or a mother. The postcolonial writers of Indo-English novel equipped with a new education and sociability have different perspectives on the images of woman. Especially, the women novelists are responsible for the new image of woman struggling against the oppressive social norms of the male-dominated society. The image of the woman in the postcolonial context / fiction is a crystallized form of two different things. Firstly, the image of woman as a custodian of extraordinary moral virtues incorporated with devotion and sacrifice has become an archetype. Secondly, the image of woman in quest of her identity has emerged from the archetype. Commenting on the portrayal of woman in Indian English Fiction, R. Mala in “Sexual Predicament and Shashi Deshpande’s Women” says:

Indian writing in English has now entered a new phase—the phase of an inimitable representation of the New Indian Woman who is dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural, natural or sexual roles assigned to her from the unconscious dawn of the patriarchal India. This new woman of the Indian English Novel views herself as the object of cultural/social oppressions and attempts to rebel against them, consciously or unconsciously, within her living space. But at the same time, she reflects the inability to reject her cultural/social background totally and hence fails to transcend the horizons depicting a revolutionary spirit. She therefore stands at crossroads, caught between tradition and modernity. (50)
The women portrayed in the fiction are sufferers and endurers. They have to bear their destiny / fate. In this context K. Madhavi Menon in “The Crisis of Feminine : Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*” observes : “One of the most structured patterns of Indian society is the role assigned to man and to woman. Woman is the follower, man the leader. Woman is the sufferer, man the ordainer. Woman is of the home, man of the world” (33). The role / image of a woman remains the same even though women writers try to change / reverse the same in their writings. It is observed by Betty Friedan while commenting on the image of woman in *The Feminine Mystique*. She says :

In an earlier time, the image of woman was also split into two - the good, pure woman on the pedestal, and the whore of the desires of the flesh. The split in the new image opens a different fissure - the feminine woman, whose goodness includes the desires of the flesh, and the career woman, whose evil includes every desire of the separate self. The new feminine morality story is the exorcising of the forbidden career dream, the heroine's victory over Mephistopheles: the devil, first in the form of a career woman, who threatens to take away the heroine's husband or child, and finally, the devil inside the heroine herself, the dream of independence, the discontent of spirit, and even the feeling of a separate identity that must be exorcised to win or keep the love of husband and child. With the career woman out of the way, the housewife with interests in the community becomes the devil to be exorcised. (31)
Women have to perform different roles – daughter, lady love, wife, mother, grandmother and so on. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* classifies women into three categories as follows.

Women were divided into three categories: “The True Housewife Type”, “The Career Woman”, and “The Balanced Homemaker”. She takes the utmost pride and satisfaction in maintaining a comfortable and well-run home for her family. Consciously or subconsciously, she feels that she is indispensable and that no one else can take over her job. She has little, if any, desire for a position outside the home, and if she has one it is through force of circumstances or necessity. ‘True Housewife’ had a certain ‘reluctance’ to accept new devices that had to be recognized and overcome. The second type – The Career Woman or Would-Be Career Woman was a minority, but an extremely ‘unhealthy’. For such women, though not necessarily job-holders, do not believe that a woman’s place is primarily in the home. (168-169)

Deshpande has her own concept of woman and womanhood / woman’s role. She believes in the reality that women are exploited in their different roles and subjugated through various means adopted by men in the different contexts. She strongly advocates that women have a certain potential within and have a right to put it into use. However, their identity is dependent. Their desires and ambitions are given secondary status. In fact, Deshpande constructs the idea of womanhood in the kind of life a woman should live. It is not something divine or holy. It consists of earthly life lived as a human being.
Women have freedom of expression, emotion and they follow their own instincts. Her women become ruthless to achieve much in life and what they think correct. The connection between tradition and modernity, conventional and unusual embedded in her novels pronounce the transition of values in life from the past to the present, from the patriarchal structure of the society to the liberation of women as equal partners. Rashmi Gaur in “Images of Indian Woman in Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence – Stereotypes, Myths and Realities” makes a survey and points out that

The backdrop of most of Deshpande’s novels has been prepared by women who are victims of such pathogenic misogyny. These women have suffered the atrocities of men in silence and without protest, as they were not aware of protest as an option to change their world. Their inner turmoil, flabber-gasted emotional resilience and relational bondage, has been suggestively juxtaposed against the desperate struggle of her protagonists to define and obtain a self-hood, thus putting it in a sustained and sharpened focus to indicate the changing dynamics of man-woman relation. Deshpande’s narratives bear the authenticity of a woman’s signature. She has rejected the masculine dialect and the masculine perception of virtue, relationship and content, and laid bare before us the subversive role of tradition in perpetuating the secondary role of women emphasizing the need of discrediting its legacies if women have to emerge as liberated and emancipated beings. (6)
Woman occupies a central place in Deshpande's novels. The novelist presents a subtle analysis of conflicting phases underlying reason, and to some extent, to suggest a way out of it. Her earnest aim is to analyze the image of woman in her novels and also in her short stories. Woman plays diverse roles both indoors and outdoors. She participates in all the hitherto male-dominated spheres. Consequently, she faces the fate of tossing between tradition and modernity. Her novels have, like those of Jane Austen's, a narrow range. They are more or less a fictinalisation of personal experiences. Most of her novels present a typical, middle class housewife's life. Deshpande's main concern is the urge to find oneself, to create space for oneself and to grow on one's own. One striking thing about her novels is the recurrence of certain themes. But the predicament of women, especially those who are educated and belong to the middle class, has been most prominently dealt with. Many of her characters are persons who are frustrated either sexually or professionally. Her novels generally centre on family relationship - particularly the relationship between husband and wife and the latter's dilemmas and conflicts.

Deshpande's main focus in her fiction is essentially on woman and her role in a male-made mundane society. The culture that created a Sita and a Gandhari has denied an existence to woman except as a daughter/sister, a wife/daughter-in-law and a mother/mother-in-law. The Hindu society has denied woman of the possibility of being a 'SHE', a person capable of achieving individuation. She is a non-person. It is as Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* observes:

Thus the logic of the feminine mystique re-defined the very nature of woman's problem. When a woman was seen as a human being of
limitless human potential, equal to man, anything that kept her from realizing her full potential was a problem to be solved: barriers to higher education and political participation, discrimination or prejudice in law or morality. But now that woman is seen only in terms of her sexual role. The barriers to the realization of her full potential, the prejudices which deny her full participation in the world, are no longer problems, The only problems now are those that might disturb her adjustment as a housewife. So career is a problem, education is a problem, political interest, even the very admission of women’s intelligence and individuality is a problem. And finally there is the problem that has no name, a vague undefined wish for something more than washing dishes, ironing, punishing and praising the children. (44)

On the other hand, Promilla Kapur in The Changing Status of the Working Woman in India thinks that husband is mainly responsible for the tensions. Kapur writes:

They like wives to take up jobs but dislike them to change at all as far as their attitudes towards their roles and statuses at home is concerned and dislike their traditional responsibilities being neglected which results from their pre-occupation with out-of-home vocation. Their attitude towards their wives being employed is found to be ambivalent. (366)

The working wife has to face the problems of marital adjustment. She experiences a conflict of values. She is not able to combine the two roles thrust upon her, those of woman in the family and the woman as a worker.
Deshpande portrays modern, educated and career-oriented middle class women, who are sensitive enough to the changing time and situations. They are aware of the social and cultural disabilities to which they are subjected in the male-dominated society. They want to rebel against them in their search for freedom and identity, but they find themselves up against well-entrenched social inertia. Conscious of the predicament of a woman in a male-dominated society, especially when she is not economically independent, the author presents her women as desiring to become economically and ideologically independent. She finds them caught up in a conflict between their family and professional roles, between individual aspiration and social demands. Indu in Shadows and Jaya in Silence being women writers, are torn between self-expression and social stigmas-material and psychological. Terrors, Shadows, and Silence deal with the Indian woman in disharmony with her sexual, cultural, and natural roles. That is why R. Mala in “Sexual Predicament and Shashi Deshpande’s Women” makes a strong note that:

She leaves the place of disillusionment and lives a longer life wherein she unconsciously lingers in the past and then swings back to the present. This recuperates her mental dilemma and leads her to an ultimate realization of herself. She decides to assert herself not only as a woman, wife, or mother, but also as an individual. Deshpande’s woman does not resort to suffering stoically. Neither does she find a new radical way out of the problem. Paradoxically, she chooses and rejects both ways – staunch rebellion and meek acceptance. (52)
Deshpande desires to bring forth in her novels the changed society. She lays more emphasis on women. The predominating issues and themes in her novels emerge from the situations that focus on woman caught in the crisis of a traditional society where the shift is taking from conventional to unconventional. She traces out the tensions in which the Indian woman is caught. The reasons of Deshpande’s choosing the middle-class woman may be her own background as she hails from a middle-class family. She is pre-occupied with the social forces at work in society; the clash between the old and the new; between idealism and pragmatism and the middle-class woman representing a larger part of the contemporary Indian society. The woman she portrays is a forerunner of the doomed female of modern India. Woman in Deshpande’s novels is an unconventional one. She willy-nilly submits herself to the tradition. She is an appendage to man or family. Though economically independent, she is emotionally dependent on her husband. She deals with the middle-class woman, who represents the majority and covers a wider area in the modern society. The female protagonists in her novels are young girls who can be led astray, married women who suffer silently, and working women who, most of the time, are out of the family and come in direct contact with the society.

Culture allows the woman to be a daughter or a sister in her parental family and to be a wife or mother in her husband’s family. In addition, she has to play an additional role as a professional woman / career woman. Nature assigns her sex-based role wherein she is limited biologically. Though she is divided between cultural and natural roles, she has to play a subservient secondary and marginal role. She finds her womanly self trapped and suffocated within her family.
In Deshpande’s novels, the traditional mother appears to be stereotype, oppressed, and weak. The gap between mother-daughter relationship is not allowed to be paved. The mothers always wield their power over their daughters and families. However, the authorial intrusion, makes mothers isolated figures. They are dominated by their men-folk. They are harassed by their in-laws. They are misunderstood by their daughters. The young ones appear to have inherited the rebellious spirits of their mothers.

Another aspect of the parent-child relationship is the relationship of daughters to their fathers. This relationship is also projected at several levels. Indu’s father is gentle and withdrawn, but he ensures that she has a good education (Shadows). Saru (Terrors) works towards an equal relationship with her father. He, too, had supported her demand to be educated. Gopal (Time) walks out on his paternal responsibilities, but Sumi is, towards the end, able to work out a kind of relationship with her own father. Madhu in Remedies has only a father, being a motherless child and she is able to relate well to him and to other surrogate fathers like Joe and Hamidbhai. Even fatherhood is difficult in societies where gender segregation is accepted and the young growing girl is advised to give up both free movement and free communication. But it sits easier than motherhood on the individual because a man does not have to struggle for an independent identity. He already has it because he is male. Savitribai in Remedies speaks warmly of her father despite the fact that he was the one major obstruction in her pursuit of music. Lata in the same novel thinks of her father while there is not a single photograph of her mother in the house. Sons, on the other hand, are resistant to their fathers and if not resistant, they distance themselves. For Mohan (Silence), it's his father who is responsible for the kind of life they have led. Gopal (Time) is busy living out the guilt of his father. The
relationships, in fact, respond negatively to the authority exercised by the same sex parent. But generalizations are simply not possible because 'parenting' is not the only factor responsible for this. Social forces like caste and religious prejudice, and personal emotions like jealousy are equally powerful determinants.

Deshpande deals with the inner world of the Indian women in her novels. She portrays her heroines in a realistic manner. Basically, she writes about the situation of women and their failures in the fast changing socio-economic milieu of India. She writes about the conflict between tradition and modernity in relation to women in the middle class society. Women are the centre of her fictional world. Their desires, efforts, and her failures in the traditional Indian society are the local points in her works. Hers is a strident and militant kind of feminism but her depiction of women’s world is authentic, realistic and credible. Her novels present a social world of complex relationships. Doubt, anxiety and a feeling of void of values push her characters to intense self examination. Her women are particularly caught in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles. N.B. Masal in “Shashi Deshpande’s A Matter of Time ‘As an Exploration of a Woman’s Inner Life’” admits:

Shashi Deshpande is a woman writer, who writes about women. Most of her writing comes out of her own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society. It comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing different roles. Her writing comes out of her consciousness of the conflict between her idea of herself as a human being and the idea that society has of her as a woman. As a woman writer she deals with gender-related experiences. (17)
Some critics identity her as a feminist but she cannot be called a feminist in the Indian context as she is concerned with woman and woman alone. Commenting on the protagonists of Deshpande, Evangeline Shanti Roy in “Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine: A Quest for the Anchor of Life” observes:

The Deshpande protagonist is never a radical militant feminist who wants to overthrow all social, moral and sexual taboos in order to become a free woman, but a woman who feels the need to go beyond socially and culturally determined roles to carve a space for herself within the typical Indian situation, to discover who she is and retain her selfhood without sacrificing family ties and age-old values. (75-76)

Her main concern is with the problems of women. So that only she voices the social and psychological and marital problems in all her novels. Beena Agarwal in Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande says: “She explores and exposes the long smothered wail of the fragmented psyche of her female protagonists, imprisoned within the shackles of domesticity, drifting between tradition and modernity. In spite of her concern with the traditional position of women, she portrays them as living individuals, struggling and endeavouring to make spaces of their own in the existing social order” (50-51). Further, Agarwal asserts emphatically:

Shashi Deshpande conceives the fable of her narrative within the periphery of the real life experiences, escaping the shadows of romantic idealism. In the traditional society of India, woman is essentially acknowledged as a shadow of male identity with little scope for the
assertion of her choices. Traditional images of women essentially affirm the subjugated status of women but Shashi Deshpande categorically tries to establish that woman is endowed with inherent potential to recognize her femininity and to assert her inward powers as an individual. (50)

Her female protagonists reconstruct their identity but simultaneously assert to defend their bodily commitments that are essentially a part of their inner self. Deshpande depicts the anxiety of the educated, independent, middle class Indian woman searching for a balance between her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother in a predominantly patriarchal society. It is because

Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to evaluate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all she could do to debase and enslave her mind. (Grimke, Equality of Sexes 10)

So in all her works one can find that women strive to step out of the prescribed or ascribed roles. They do so consciously. So that only Shantha Naik in A Comparative Study of the Novels of Shashi Deshpande and M.K. Indira : A Social and Cultural Perspective details:

The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's novels are depicted as more intelligent and capable women than men. All her novels are in the first person narration, which naturally express the feminine point of view. They
react to outmoded traditions and superstitions, which tend to impinge upon their personality. They are against arranged marriages and are inclined towards sex freedom. The protagonists are depicted as having the right to education and exercising their rights to have the education of their choice. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists assert themselves in doing what is nearest to their heart. They play a wider role in the social framework than the average woman as teacher, writer, wife, novelist, doctor, journalist and social worker. They are depicted as having the capacity to lead independent lives and making a success in it. In the early stages of their lives, they feel a sense of nostalgia for home, which also proves to be a source of support for them in their difficulties. The home symbolises the ethos from which they cannot entirely cut themselves off, even if they desire to do so. (81)

Deshpande's minor women characters belong to different generations and different social strata. They are neither educated nor wealthy, nor do they have the freedom and independence of the protagonists. They remain as victims of socio-cultural constructions / constraints. They remain examples of Deshpande’s phenomenon to deprivation, socialization, and early conditioning. They live in typical patriarchal families.

The focus in Deshpande's work is not necessarily on the youthful protagonist or narrator; instead, her plots work through parallels and contrasts. If Urmil's mother-in-law (Mira) and stepmother-in-law have had unhappy married lives (Vine), if Akka and Atya
(Shadows) are marginalised and oppressed, if Kalyani's husband is estranged and Gopal walks away from Sumi (Time), there are unhappy, estranged and broken relationships even in the lower classes. The expectations from marriage remain the same even if there is a difference of priorities or qualities: protection, economic security, sexual satisfaction, children, common bond. And problems arise due to estrangement, unemployment, brutal claims of the male or alcoholism. Shakutai (Vine) has had her own share of troubles. Her husband has abandoned her for a mistress. And right from the beginning, it had been a relationship of struggle. Left with her parents after her marriage, she followed him to Bombay on her own where she discovered that he was without a job. Yet, bravely, she continued to work on her marriage, cooked for the men and took up all kinds of available jobs.

The theme of abandoned wives is a tale twice told in Time. It is interlaced with myths from Indian mythology - Ramayana, Shakuntala and the Upanishads. It simultaneously does two things. First, it brings in the gender perspective and breaks the mould of the silent, long-suffering, faithful wife. Further, it goes on to explore their socio-psychological needs, their need for relationships and anchoring. Secondly, these narratives of abandonment also reduce the conventional glory attached to such acts. They also free marriage from patriarchal concerns and place it within a texture of relationships. Marriage, even as it involves two people, stretches itself to encompass much more, including the past and the present. The biological needs of sex, the need for progeny as a continuity of life and an insurance against mortality, present only traditional views of marriage.
Marriage locates itself in romance, sexuality and social environment. Several marriages in the novels of Deshpande are built around the initial principle of attraction and in themselves indicate a rebellion on the part of the women. Some of them are across caste lines and result in long-term breaches with the parental family. Indu in *Roots*, Saru in *Terrors*, Sumi in *Time*, Madhu, Leela and Kaveri in *Remedies* all go in for marriages of their choice. But there are others who accept arranged marriages and decisions taken on their behalf – Mini in *Shadows*, Premi in *Time*, Kalyani and her mother, Manorama, in the same novel, in fact all the women of the older generation, Baijji, Akka, Kaki, all of them. Jaya in *Silence* has also accepted an arranged match. When these two kinds of marriages are juxtaposed, it is the idea of romance that becomes significant.

In Deshpande's novels, several women characters, specially Indu, Jaya and Saru, are compelled to move from the romantic idea of love and marriage to a more realistic view of their relationships. There is, as Indu realises in *Shadows*, an immeasurable distance between the idea and the reality (RS 91). The two people who get married do not lose or dissolve their identities. They remain two individual human beings and thus loneliness, disappointment and disagreement do fall to their lot. Again, marriage is not a plain and simple contract. It is a part of a larger human relationship, which traverses through attraction, love, sex, sexuality, living together and a whole lot of other phases such as parenthood. The sex relationship, too, has its many aspects - there is the relationship which Mira in *Vine* finds intolerable, and one, again in the same novel, which becomes a rape as Kalpana is assaulted by her uncle. Love is also a tender relationship based on the expression of an intensely felt desire for the other as experienced by Indu in *Shadows*, Urmi in *Vine* and Saru in *Terrors*. Sexuality evokes
the innermost emotions of belonging and desire, but in itself it is never enough. There is a whole world of understanding, of living together, arid of tenderness, which goes into its making. It is not enough also, in another way, for there is a life beyond it, a life of emotions, intellectual communication and understanding, a life not necessarily based on sex or sexual relations. Marriage does not fulfil all of an individual's needs. Hence, Deshpande's women go for friendship as is seen between Jaya and Kamat in Silence, Saru and Padmakar in Terrors, Madhu and her colleagues in Remedies or Urmi and Bhaskar in Vine. In Shadows, there is a sexual relationship between Naren and Indu. It is not an expression purely of a physical desire. It becomes a medium of expressing something more than desire, a feeling of understanding, of acceptance and belonging, of a shared experience.

For Deshpande, one aspect of an arranged marriage is the confrontation with the body of an unknown. When a physical union precedes love, the union is likely to bypass the willingness of the subordinate partner. The focus is on the body. The physical relationship results in trauma. In Vine, Urmi has always adored Kishore and has been in love with him from her very girlhood. Yet, when they are married, she experiences a distance. She realizes that Kishore “will never remove his armour, there is something in him I will never reach. I have lived with the hope that some day I will. Each relationship, always imperfect, survives on hope. Am I to give up this hope?” (BV 141). Urmi hungers for Kishore in many ways. When she watches the close marriage of Harish and Vanaa, she knows that it is difficult for Vanaa to understand Urmi's relationship with Kishore. And when he goes away, she is left with unfulfilled passion and bodily hunger for Kishore. The only way out of her constant fantasising seems to be a recognition of her
sexuality. Even when they are together, there is a part of him that is withheld from her. And she also withholds a part of herself despite the physical desire. Both Inni (her mother) and Vanaa (her sister-in-law) are wives who have submitted, but Urmi holds back "I want to submit too. But I know that if I walk the way of submission once, I will walk that way forever" (BV 82). There is an 'ego', a sense of 'self', which leads her to withhold. She recalls how, on her wedding night, she had walked across to her parents' house (BV 80), afraid to yield and unwilling to be absorbed. It is the fear of annihilation that sends her back to her parents' house on the night of the wedding. Deshpande raises some very serious questions when she places Urmi in the shadow of Mira. These questions are related to the separateness of an individual and the existential loneliness, which constitutes a self. Even women who outwardly 'submit' or 'yield' are unable to destroy their will or to do away entirely with their desires. If they resort to half-truths, silences or deceptions, these, too indicate a separateness. It is the myth of a romantic union that is being explored along with the idea of power. Fulfilment through sex and love also gives women a sense of power and a man may be afraid of being absorbed and contained as much as woman. One of the reasons Urmi goes back to her parents on the night of her wedding is the look on Kishore’s face. He looked trapped (BV 137). At one level, there is a conflict in every individual between attachment and detachment, between involvement and distancing, between loving and being loved. Desire has its own traps. Another interesting woman in Vine is Bhaskar's mother. Even Urmi finds her very different from what she had expected her to be. She is untidy, restless and direct and possessive about her son. It is because as observed by P. Ramamoorthi in “’My Life is My Own’ : A Study of Deshpande’s Women” : “The woman in order to achieve her
freedom seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. She resents the role of a daughter and looks forward to the role of a wife with the hope that her new role will help her in winning their (sic) freedom” (43). Marriage fails to give them consolation. Instead, it places them at odds and makes them perplexed at the cross-roads. Rashmi Sahi in “Human Relationship in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande” observes that “Her novels usually begin with an unconventional marriage leading to the problems of alienation, accommodation and adjustment. The conflict in her protagonists is resolved through their desperate unconscious submission to traditional roles” (168).

Sexuality has its repercussions. It stifles the desires experienced and impatient to be expressed. Deshpande’s women characters are conscious of this need. They are repeatedly told that their bodies are not clean. Indu in Shadows recalls how brutally she had been flung into the knowledge of being a woman: “‘You’re a woman now’, Kaki had told me. ‘You can have babies yourself’” (RS 86). Such a knowledge had pushed her into a consciousness of her body and consequently an “immense hatred for it” (RS 87). The fact of being unclean, the need to be singled out and separated had assaulted her. When Naren asks why did she fight so much against her womanhood, she realises that she did feel hedged in by it. A woman has to be passive and express sexual passivity. It is realized by Indu while indulging in sex with Jayant. Indu says:

Jayant, so passionate, so ready, sitting up suddenly and saying ‘No, not now,’ when I had taken the initiative. A crack then. A chasm now? … now I know … it shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I’m like that, he turns away from me. I’ve learnt my lesson now.
And so I pretend I’m passive. And unresponsive. I’m still and dead… So that’s all I am… an anachronism. A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately. (RS 91-92)

Indu’s emotional intensity and her passion find out place in the sexual relationship with her husband. Indu realises that marriage also necessitates a lot of pretention, of keeping up appearances with each other, of responding when response is missing, of passivity when there is passion, of agreement when there is disagreement. Madhu in Remedies learns that an incident from her past, an attachment, when it surfaces, estranges her husband. Even some of the older women, who one considered to have done with the years of active sexual life, find that their lives are built on secrets, repressions, and loneliness. No one has ever bothered to ask Kaki of Shadows what she wants. In Vine, there are several older women, Vanaa’s and Urmi’s mothers, find grandmothers, who have had to live with their unfulfilled wishes and repressed thoughts. The idea of consensual marriage is absent and a woman’s right to her body is not at all recognized. However, Mira’s body rebels and refuses to live. The poetry she writes is no longer enough to sustain her. Akka’s body does not rebel because she has been stopped from dreaming of other worlds. She bears her fate. In this connection, Betty Friedan in The Feminine Mystique observes that “It is my thesis that the core of the problem for women today is not sexual but a problem of identity – a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique” (58).

Sexuality has its own role to play. Love, acceptance, response, yielding or withdrawal, frigidity, aversion, and self-hatred, all come for rest on the point of sexual
relationships within or without marriage. Even the struggle between the claims of freedom and the claims of the body comes to rest on this. In this connection, R.S. Pathak in “Shashi Deshpande : The Making of the Novelist” observes that : “there is in Deshpande’s novels a revulsion to normal physical functions such as menstruation, pregnancy, and procreation” (17). A direct juxtaposition of the romantic love and the realistic frontal attack on sexuality is worked out in Terrors, where Saru, the medical student marries a romantic lover, Manohar, a lecturer of English literature in a college. It is a love poem by him that excites her. She admits :

I was all female and dreamt of being the adores and chosen of a superior, super human male… I saw myself humbly adoring, worshipping and being given the father-lover kind of love that was protective, condescending yet all compassing and satisfying…

After that day, he was the figure I fantasised about the person round whom I wove my foolish dreams…. Always the old age feminine dream of a superior conquering male. (DT 53)

But Manu fails to live up to the dreams. He begins to slide downwards. As Saru climbs the ladder of professional success, he sinks further and further into mediocrity. She also loses the dream of finding happiness through a man. Emotional backgrounds are important in all these roles. Childhood experiences and memories go a long way towards moulding life attitudes and personal relationships. A feeling of rejection, a traumatic memory, tension in the household, sexual discrimination, extramarital interest on the part of a parent-all these influence future relationships. These stress the importance of family
and thus reduce the significance of sex. Deshpande’s heroines are victims of sexual paralysis. Both Saru and Indu experience disillusionment in sex and suffer a silent sexual humiliation. Saru’s extramarital sexual affair with Boozie does not lead her to sexual gratification. Indu’s relationship with Naren has a totally different significance. They experience a kind of sexual autonomy freeing themselves from sexual politics.

In Deshpande’s works the role of a family is an important one. Families have a habit of selecting their own sacrificial victims. Families act like traps in more than one way. They define gender roles through tradition, disapproval or ridicule. They also encourage and shelter parasites. They destroy freedom. They work through hierarchical structures and stifle individual dreams. It is as Indu thinks in Shadows:

“It’s this kind of living… Living too close, too entangled with one another. So that if you move you’re bound to hurt someone else. And if they move, they hurt you. So many diverse pulls, so many conflicting feeling. And yet, surprisingly, it was still a family. (145)"

In Shadows, the older generation passes away. The family is on the point of dissolution with Akka’s passing away. The family is going to be dispersed. But all the families are not like one in Shadows. Deshpande in Silence presents a nuclear family in an official house at Church gate – Mohan and Jaya with their two children, Rati and Rahul. In fact, like Terrors, Silence is a novel in which childhood memories are explored as the individual self is shaped by them.
Gender roles are defined and adopted for reasons of utility and security. That is why women sew buttons and clean floors, cook food and bear and rear children. Behaviour patterns are governed by gender. While men can get angry and be violent, violence for women can only be self-directed. Individuals, in order to fit in, are compelled to chip off their egos, dreams, and aspirations. Nuclear families in themselves are never complete and fulfilling. There are too many silences in them and too much room for squabbling and bickering. Despite hierarchy, duty drills and role models, family relationships also embody a power struggle, when multiple claims for space and authority jostle with each other, often dislocating the rightful heirs. Jaya’s mother returned to her parental home after her husband’s death and ruled the house as an extension of her mother’s authority. But when the mother dies, the tussle between the daughter of the house, Ai, and the daughter-in-law of the house, Vanitamani, begins:

Since other Ajji’s death, Vanitamani had changed. She had become aggressive. It was as founding to see all that pent-up rage escaping. And Ai seemed unable to cope with the metamorphosed Vanitamani. Her twenty-years domination in her brother’s home was being questioned, and she was losing the battle. (LS 104)

Families, even as they act as buffers and refuges, also pull one towards its problems. While they seek to subordinate women into docile positions, they also place a burden on men and locate them in conflictual positions. Women find ways of hitting back, squabbling or conniving for power and men find ways to escape responsibility. Loyalties are fractured and the individual is subjected to several pulls and pressures. One can
perceive a similar struggle in Mohan’s life in *Silence*. He is beset by unpleasant memories of his childhood—his father’s irresponsibility, his mother’s suffering, his own humiliation at being not supported in his education, and required to be a public display of that charity. These are the constant reminders that lead him to push his family towards other norms of respectability and towards material concerns for security.

*Terrors* is reflective of the feminist aspirations. Premila Paul in “The *Dark Holds No Terrors*: A Call for Confrontation” avers: “The *Dark Holds No Terrors* is a feminist novel not on the lone basis of the female centrality in it. The novel focuses on woman’s awareness of her predicament, her wanting to be recognized as a person than as a woman and her wanting to have an independent social image” (37). The discord and the disillusionment of the educated woman in a tradition bound Indian society forms the theme of the novel. However, woman’s quest for fulfilment can be taken as the principal theme of the novel. It is about a woman’s quest and struggle to free herself from the restrictions imposed by the society and its culture. It is a story of a doctor who is disappointed as a daughter and is disappointed as a doctor. She also feels her conflict that she has to face as a doctor and as a wife. During daytime she is a popular lady doctor and in night she is a trapped animal in the hands of her husband, Manohar, who is an English teacher in a small college. Premila Paul in “The *Dark Holds No Terrors*: A Call for Confrontation” admits:

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* by Shashi Deshpande is a totally different novel in the sense that it explodes the myth of man’s unquestionable superiority and the myth of woman being a martyr and a paragon of all
virtues. It is based on the problems faced by a career woman, a refreshing new phenomenon in Indian English Fiction. (30)

The novel **Terrors** begins with Saritha alias Saru returning after fifteen years to her father’s house. She once proclaimed that she would never come back to her father’s house. She returns being unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. Her study in her father’s house gives Saru a chance to review her relationship with her father, husband, and her dead mother. It is the story of Saru, and her convulsions and conflicts. The novel reveals the life of Saru, who is always neglected and ignored in favour of her brother. She is not given any importance; no parental love is showered upon her even on her birthdays. Her brother’s birthdays, however, are celebrated with full enthusiasm including the performance of the religious rituals. When her brother is drowned, she is blamed for it. Her mother, in particular, always scolds her for being responsible for her son’s death: “You killed him. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?” (173) Due to her mother’s accusation, Saru begins to wonder if in reality, she had killed him. It is much later, after rethinking and pondering over the event, after her mother’s death, that she realizes the accidental nature of her brother’s death.

Saru grows up and acquires education against her mother’s will. As an educated young lady, she develops her sense of reasoning and questioning. She can, no more, tolerate inequality between brother and sister. She remembers how her brother was named:
They had named him Dhruva. I can remember, even now vaguely, faintly, a state of joyous excitement that had been his naming day. The smell of flowers, the black grinding stone… (DT 152)

The mother is very attached to her son. Her attitude is a typical one—after all, he is a male child and therefore one who will propagate family lineage. In another sense, also, the male child is considered more important than a girl because he is qualified to give “agni” to his dead parents. The soul of the dead person would otherwise wander in torment. The first thought, when Saru hears the news of her mother's death, is: "who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhruva had been seven when he died." (DT 17)

When Dhruva was alive, her mother’s discrimination between the two had been very apparent to Saru. As she grows up, resentment and hatred drive her to leave home and obsessively seek success in medical college. There she falls in love with a man and marries him against her parents' wishes. Her mother, being an old, traditional, orthodox woman, does not want her daughter to get married to a person who is from a lower caste. She questions her:

“What caste is he?”
“I don't know.”
“A Brahmin?”
“Of course, not.”
“Then, cruelly ... his father keep a cycle shop”. (DT 87)
Saru revolts against her parents and runs away to get married to a person of her own choice. As she always feels insecure in her parents's home, her marriage to Manohar often referred to as Manu, is a means of that love and security which she had always lacked in life. He is the ideal romantic hero who has come to rescue her from the insecure, loveless existence. And she is hungry for love: “I was hungry for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted” (DT 35). She succeeds and emerges as a successful, well-known and reputed doctor. At the same time, her marriage begins to crumble under the burden of success in her profession. She is happy until she begins to establish herself as a doctor. Now, the situation undergoes a change. People visit her for different purposes which widens the gap between them. The financial ascendence of Saru, at the same time, renders Manu impotent. The only way he can regain that potency and masculinity is through sexual assault upon Saru, which, for him, becomes an assertion of his manhood leading to a sort of abnormality at night. He is a cheerful normal human being, a loving husband during day, turning into a rapist at night. It terrifies and humiliates Saru so much that he cannot even speak about them, even to him: "and each time it happened and I don't speak. I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. May be one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death." (DT 88)

Marital life is nothing but a queer combination of several forces acting upon two human beings in different capacities to fulfil the marital ambition and play a vital role in the society. The given roles of these two human beings do undergo a change both at the functional and psychological levels. This is precisely what happens to Saru. With her economic independence, reinforced with the fact that she earns more than Manu, she still
feels stripped of her independence by virtue of being assigned to the job of a housewife, i.e., bringing up children and subserving the interest of her husband. Tired of both the duties, indoors and outdoors, she wants to leave the latter one; “Manu, I want to stop working. I want to give it all up… my practice, the hospital, everything (DT 72). But Manu does not want her to leave her job as they cannot maintain the same standard with only his income: "On my salary? Come on, Saru, don't be silly. You know how much I earn. You think we can live this way on that?" (DT 73).

This burden of double duties is not only a feeling in itself but gradually takes on a force imbalancing the marital balance that normally sustains conjugal relations. With this growing feeling of disenchantment and imbalance, separation becomes inevitable. At this juncture of life, Saru hears the news of her mother’s death and goes back to her parents' home, though emotionless. She does not feel at home at her parents’ place.

Her inability to procure time or herself and her family (husband and children) upsets her family life. Manu, her husband, cannot tolerate people greeting her and ignoring him. He cannot express it openly but says out of irritation: "I am sick of this place. Let's get out of here soon" (DT 37). He does not love her the way he used to earlier. Saru realizes it: "now I know that it was there it began . . . this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage" (DT 37). She starts hating the man-woman relationship which is based on attraction and need and not on love:

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

(DT 65)

This is an awkward situation in which she is placed. At a personal level, she feels a gradual disappearance of love and attachment which she had once developed. It is now replaced by a psychological conflict which is uncalled for but inevitable, given the situation in which both of them have been placed. Most of the solemn duties towards her husband and children are unattended to. The children do not get proper love and care from their mother as she gets late in returning home. The husband sits waiting: “I came home late that night…. When I came home I found him sitting with a brooding expression on his face that made my heart give painful, quivering little jumps” (DT 71). While there is a decline in her conjugal relationship, her status in society rises day by day. It may imply at one level that her rise in importance is inversely proportionate to the fall in the importance of her husband. It creates a conflict between her achieved position and the ascribed position of Manu.

When she comes back to her parents’ house, she appears a totally changed woman. Everything looks strange to her. Her father sounds strange while talking. The absence of affability in the house sets her pendulum rolling between the two houses: "As she drinks her tea ... too sweet and strong. . . he (father) sat gingerly on the edge of his chair like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest. And that, I suppose, is what I really am. What gave me the idea I could come back?” (DT 14). She cannot say all that she wants to. All this happens due largely to a guilt consciousness that she has developed: "there can never be any forgiveness. Never any atonement. My brother died
because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood" (DT 198). She expects sympathy from her father but to no avail. Rather, her father, after listening to all the failures in her life in adjusting with her husband, turns his back on her pretending to put rice on the stove. Under such circumstances, Saru feels that if it had been an arranged marriage, she would have got support from her parents. But now, she suffers from both: suffering as well as guilt consciousness. These feelings remind her of the fate of one of her friends:

If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this? She thought of the girl, the sister of a friend, who had come home on account of a disastrous marriage. She remembered the care and sympathy with which the girl had been surrounded, as if she was an invalid, a convalescent. And the girl's face with its look of passive suffering. There had been only that there, nothing else, neither despair nor shame. For the failure had not been hers, but her parents, and so the guilt had been theirs too, leaving only the suffering for the girl. (DT 199)

Acute confusion prevails upon her. She feels that she has done injustice to her mother, husband, children and everybody else. Saru tries to compromise with the situation and the novel ends with a tiny hope of resettlement. The psychology of a woman placed in such a situation is given a physical revelation. She receives a letter from Manu of his arrival. The bitter emotions strengthen further. It is not the scorn for her husband and a sense of
vengeance that gathers storm, but her sense of guilt that sweeps her off her feet. She reacts to every situation and becomes sensitive to every sound, all the time conscious of Manu reaching and knocking at the door. She asks her father not to open the door when Manu comes, perhaps believing that after being tired of knocking, Manu would depart. At the same time, she waits for someone to come and support her: "If only someone would tell her what to do, she would do it at once, without a second thought. It was strange that after all these years of having been in full control of her life, she now had this great desire to let go. To put herself in another's hands." (DT 88)

Taking into consideration the personal life of a character, one accepts the fact that every individual fantasizes about sex. But in the realm of every fantasy, there is a tinge of reality. This reality is at times gloomy and at times it leads towards the fulfilment of emotions. Saru grows and through the process of growing she inevitably comes across a number of novel situations which she could not have imagined, e.g. her entrance to the college life as a very simple, straightforward and studious girl, but later on, affected by the company of her friends, coming out as a totally changed person; her becoming a woman and all the time being reminded by her mother of the same: "You should be careful now about how you behave. Don't come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it's only your father who's around." (DT 55) And ultimately she starts hating her own womanhood: "I can remember closing my and praying ... oh god, let it not happen to me. Let there be a miracle and let me be the one female to whom it doesn’t happen (DT 55). The agonizing feelings bred by such growth are monstrous. With the physical growth, she is, now, supposed to have passed one phase of life. The barriers of society spread their frightening tentacles over her. She feels abhorrent, but helpless: “A kind of
shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother" (DT 55)

She develops hatred towards her mother who always comes in the way of her progress. Here, Deshpande shows the gap in the mother-daughter relationship. In other words, it is a conflict between the old and the young and the traditional and the modern. The position of woman appears to be a blend of acceptance and rejection; flexibility and rigidity; fantasy and reality; and above all revolt and compromise. All these characteristics are inextricably blended in Saru who represents a section of society which can be termed as middle class in the modern industrial social structure. In her is a trauma that is logically produced by a bitter conflict between the imposed and the willed. She is brought up in a traditional atmosphere but the education she receives makes her a changed person with a rebellious attitude towards tradition. As an educated young woman, she does not accept anything without reason. Her mother almost forces her to stay within the four-walls of the house. She does not give her the permission to take admission to the medical college, but Saru does not even listen to her: "I'm not talking to you… You don't want me to have anything. You don't even want me to live." (DT 128)

In the novel, Terrors Deshpande seeks to expose the problem of masculine ego that makes harmonious conjugal relationship impossible. The events in the novel are focused around the idea that the social roles related to gender ideologies are so deep rooted in human consciousness. The construction of the periphery of life conditions beyond them. It generates only grief and shame. Saru, in spite of her childhood insecurity, makes alternative spaces with her success as a doctor. She enjoys better
economic security and social status than that of her husband. Her success becomes the cause of inferiority in the mind of Manu and it subsequently converts into sexual sadism. The trauma of being the victim of her husband's frustration manifests in the form of sexual sadism. Besides, through the antagonism of the personal relationship of Saru and Manu, Deshpande recreates the horrible effect of the myth of preference of a male child on the psyche of a sensitive young girl. Saru’s life represents the apathy of the parents and the hostility of the husband but these negative pulls inspire her to construct her identity beyond socially accepted images.

*Shadows* is about growing up. It is about power and its relationship with emotion and ruthlessness. It does mark the dispersal of a joint family. It raises several issues. There is the woman’s issue, the dowry problem, the need for marriage, the unhappiness within marriage, and the subordination of women at several levels. Women spend half their lives to live up to social roles and social images realising fully well that many of these roles are contradictory ones.

In the title ‘Roots’ stands for tradition and ‘shadows’ signifies the marginal culture. The dying tradition is soon to become shadows, against a backdrop of apocalyptic change. *Shadows* is a novel which explores the inner struggle of Indu, who represents a set of modern women who are educated and are very much in contact with the society, dealing with the critical problems like love, sex, marriage, settlement, and individuality. The novel deals with a woman’s attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with the male world and the society in general. Indu comes back to her ancestral place where she
against the wishes of her father and the older members of the family had accepted to get married to a person of her own choice. She comes back to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the old rich family tyrant. As the large family is on the threshold of change, the key to their future lies in the hands of Indu. Indu has been a determined girl, who always wanted to be free and independent. She is uncertain about the fact whether she has broken the stranglehold of family and tradition only to be dominated by love for her husband. She realizes that she has accepted Jayant not for love as she used to think but because she wanted to show her family that she was a successful woman. Now, she goes back to her parents’ home to find out the roots but she finds only shadows instead. It becomes a time of reckoning for her. She thinks about her own life, her career, her love, the traditional concept of marriage and her own marriage based on love and so on.

Akka’s marriage and widowhood are at one end of the story and at the other end is Indu who has married Jayant, loves him, but is not quite willing to be trapped by a ‘wifethood’, which may imply total obedience, pretence, and illusion. In between these two ends are the lives of women like Atya, who is a childless widow and comes back to her parental home in search of refuge, and the young Mini, whose father is unable to meet the demands for a dowry and who is not pretty enough or auspicious enough to attract a match and who prefers a much older ugly man to the eccentric and unreliable Naren. Each of these four women view marriage differently. Marriage gave Akka the right to refuse permission to her husband’s mistress, marriage promises Mini security, while Atya and Indu, who, in the end, share a house, are very differently located in marriage. Atya is a widow with a very short lived marriage behind her and a life of subservience in front of her. Indu has married a man she herself has chosen and has every intention of expanding
her space within this relationship. Sunanda, the other daughter of the family, does not want the house to be sold because she can always come back when her husband is unemployed or unsettled. But if the women come back for security, there are those who leave it, abandon it or reject it. Indu herself has rejected her family. Her father Govind is a wanderer. Naren excludes himself. Vithal remains on the periphery caught between belonging and not belonging. Others who have moved out are those who have opted out of family responsibilities.

**Shadows** is the first serious attempt of Deshpande to study the nature of conflict emerging in the life of new woman who makes struggle against the cross currents of tradition and modernity. The novel highlights the mental crisis experienced by the protagonist, Indu. The character of Indu is portrayed as an unconventional woman, who finds herself alienated when she refuses to conform to the rigid codes of life laid down by the society. She resolves to marry a man of her own choice. However, the reality existing behind the illusion of marriage only brings disillusionment and suffocation in her life. She finds that her husband is no way different from average Indian male. However, Indu registers her protest against the meaningless customs and rituals that are closely associated with the idea of male chauvinism.

Deshpande’s **Silence** portrays the irony of a woman writer who is also a young housewife. “Being a writer she is supposed to present her views and ideas before the society but still she remains silent probing into her past, struggling with her present and trying to establish a rapport with her future. She is an intellectual who finds herself out of place in the society meant only for men” (Sandhu, *The Image of Woman* 36).
Silence opens with Jaya and her husband Mohan shifting from their well settled, comfortable home to their old house in Dadar, Bombay, where they had stayed immediately after getting married when their financial condition was not good. They shift into their old apartment to avoid an inquiry related to Mohan’s malpractice in a business deal. In the small, tiny apartment, Jaya becomes an introvert. She sits deep in contemplation, thinking of her childhood and tries to analyse herself. She finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempts to decide who she really is. She recalls her past life, her up-bringing, the environment in which she was brought up and the preachings that were thrust upon her when she was growing up. Anita Singh in “A Voice after the Long Silence : Shashi Deshpande’s Roots and Shadows and That Long Silence” admits that Silence can be read as “Crystalization of memory and catharsis” (85). Seema Sunil in “Emergence of New Woman in Indian Fiction : A Study of Bharati Mukherjee’s Wife, Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence and R.W. Desai’s Frailty, Thy Name is (W)Oman” says : “While exploring man-wife relationship in Indian society, Deshpande in this novel offers readers an intimate and domestic chronicle of the subtle tyrannies suffered by women and the pain of coming to self-knowledge. It is the story of personal journey; the heroine learns as she undergoes the mental torture and suffering at the hands of her husband” (223).

The novel may be taken as the self analysis of Jaya, who passes through a maze of self doubts and fears towards the affirmation of her female self. In her preoccupation to play the role of a successful wife and mother, Jaya realizes that she has lost her hold on her own talent as a writer. Jaya represents the predicament of self-conscious educated woman who in spite of having a realization of the oddity of life, finds herself helpless
against the strong hold of tradition. The unfolding of the narrative in the novel has become a process to catch the conscience beyond self-imposed silence. Jaya, after her marriage with Mohan, follows all his decisions without any choice of her own. She bore two children, Rahul and Rati, and the third child was aborted. When Mohan was found guilty of embezzlement and he was expecting Jaya's implied consent in the whole affair, her inner self revolted. She determined to break that long silence. Jaya in the process of narrating her story unconsciously discovers a voice for her own silence. It is not only the question of the silence of Jaya but also of the silence of entire womankind. Vimala Rama Rao appreciates her efforts and accepts, "Jaya is one of the rare narrative voice in Indian English Fiction who possesses and displays a literary sensibility commensurate with her fictional role as a writer telling her own story, one whose college education and reading habits are in evidence in her speaking voice. This indeed is an achievement" (Rao, “Review” 72).

Vine presents an elaborate thesis on the idea of sexual colonialism both within marital relationship and the relationships outside marriage. Through Urmì, the narrator, Deshpande records the agony and humiliation of woman against male passion. The novel makes a bold attempt to portray the agony of a wife who had witnessed the trauma of marital rape. Urmì reconstructs the pathetic story of a bright and attractive girl Mìra, who wrote poems in order to release her suppressed sensibility. Urmì also tries to represent the voice of another victim, Kalpana, a teenager child, who was brutally raped and tortured. With these two references, Deshpande highlights two contradictory situations-rape committed within marriage and rape committed outside marriage. The novelist proceeds with the vision that sexual harassment is the worst of the calamity in the life of
woman. It ruins the real self of a woman and it is only through the narrators like Urmi that a voice of protest can be registered. There is also an extension of her vision asserting that woman in order to seek her identity is bound to express her rage against the irrational control of tradition.

**Vine** opens with an overwhelming presence of women-Vanaa and Urmi, childhood friends and now sisters-in-law, Urmi’s mother, Inni, the memories of Urmi’s dead daughter, Anusha, for whom Urmi is grieving and the echoes of Mira’s unfulfilled aspirations and unhappy marriage that marginalizes the men. The families in the novel are interrelated through the marriage of Kishore and Urmi. They also have a couple of other offshoots. It is not a single family linked through lineage but a social networking where different generations skip roles and work out new patterns. Urmi has spent her childhood not with her parents but with her grandparents. Her husband has sent away Urmi to his parents’ house without even consulting her, thus displaying a lack of trust in her ability to bring up a daughter. However, Urmi is preoccupied with the suffering of her long-dead mother-in-law subjected to rape in marriage and the unmarried girl Kalpana – also the victim of rape.

While Deshpande’s earlier novels focus on one protagonist and one central man-woman relationship, her novel **Vine** has a much more complex structure. It explores many possible variations on the theme, by portraying different couples having differing power equations established between them. The central character is Urmila, an English lecturer, married to Kishore who was the boy-next-door, whom she had known and played with in childhood, had fallen in love with as an adolescent and had finally married
with the full consent of both families (unlike Indu in *Shadows* and Saru in *Terrors* who marry for love without the consent of their family, and Jaya in *Silence*, who has a conventional arranged marriage with a stranger).

Yet Urmì's relationship with Kishore is far from perfect. She walks out of the bedroom and her husband's house on her wedding night because she saw the fear and the trapped look on his face even as he said flippantly, "The two of us in a closed room and we can't get out. That's marriage" (137). It was perhaps because she wanted to prove that their marriage at least was not a trap with no escape, but a relationship in which each individual retained the option of independent action that she did so. The next morning he just walks through the hedge separating their houses as casually as he had always done, has tea with her family and then they both walk back to his house. There are no recriminations, no explanations. But the memory of the closed look she had seen on his face on their wedding night remains with her, making it impossible for her to speak to him freely of her innermost feelings. She knows that "Kishore will never remove his armour, there is something in him I will never reach" (141) and as long as he is afraid of letting himself go, of baring his soul to another's gaze, their relationship would always be less than perfect. Yet, she finds happiness with him and counts the day to each homecoming of his from his ship. When the novel opens, the memory of her baby daughter who had died recently, still tears her whole being. The intensity of Urmì's response to this tragedy makes others fearful of offering conventional platitudes to console her. Her highly wrought emotional state perhaps makes her even more sensitive to the feelings of others. It is at this juncture that Vanaa's mother, Akka, who is Kishore's stepmother, gives her a box containing the writings of Mira, Kishore's mother.
These writings consist of Mira's diaries and poems. Akka tells Urmi that her husband had fallen in love with Mira when he first saw her at a wedding, was obsessed with her and did not rest until he finally married her. She was then an eighteen-year-old girl doing her B.A. course. Urmi wonders what Mira's feelings were when she became the bride of the very first man who saw her (a triumph for the conventional Indian girl and her family), whether she regretted the abrupt end to her education, and most importantly what were her feelings about the man who married her. Mira's poems are in Kannada, and as Urmi pieces their meanings together with difficulty, she is horrified to find that, running through all her writings, there is a strong, clear thread of an intense physical revulsion for the man she married.

This discovery makes Urmi wonder what it was like to sleep with a man one did not know, even if he was one's husband. She remembers a traditional couple in her native village, after their marriage, sitting side by side on the bridal bed, and how the girl's hands were trembling uncontrollably. Yet, a few days later, when she saw the couple again, the girl looked radiantly happy. But, unfortunately it did not work out that way for Mira. Her journals tell of her pathetic wish that her husband would even be angry with her so that she would not have to put up with his love making. But he constantly forces himself on her, repeating over and over again "I love you, I love you," as he holds her. Mira writes, "Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing" (67).

Deshpande, in almost all her examinations of the man-woman relationship, stresses the fact that the legally, socially and morally sanctioned sexual relationship within marriage can deteriorate into the ugliest form of cruelty unless it grows out of
mutual love, respect and understanding. In Urmi’s own case, Kishore never blamed her for walking out on their wedding night. And when, on the eve of his departure, soon after their daughter’s death, he holds her and finds her unresponsive, he immediately releases her. This sensitivity on his part to her emotional condition holds them together, despite the flaws in their relationship.

A parallel to Mira’s story is introduced in the form of Kalpana, the teenaged girl from a tenement, who is the victim of a gruesome rape and lies unconscious for more than four months (that is, from the beginning of the novel to its end), without any chance of recovery. At first sight, there is nothing in common between Mira, married to a man who is besotted with her, and this girl, cruelly raped and battered by an unknown assailant. But Urmi, who is introduced to Kalpana’s mother, Shakutai, in the hospital, where Vanaa works as a medical social worker instinctively realizes, as she listens to the mother’s lamentations and pieces together Kalpana’s story day by day, that “what has happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too” (63). It is only at the very end of the novel that one could realize how accurate Urmi’s intuition is. While Mira is raped by her own husband, Kalpana’s assailant is none other than her aunt Sulu’s husband Prabhakar. Shakutai, who had been deserted by her husband, looked to Prabhakar, who was “not a drunkard, or a wife beater or a waster” (193) to provide the father role-model to her children. Even when Prabhakar sent word to her through Sulu that he wanted Kalpana as his second wife, since Sulu is childless, and had also developed some skin disease, Shakutai agrees. She is furious with Kalpana for refusing the offer. It is when Prabhakar learns that Kalpana had fallen in love with another boy and wanted to marry him, that he rapes her in frustration. In fact, there is little to choose between Mira’s husband’s lust
and Prabhakar’s. It is felt by Urmi. Both of them had satisfied their lust without taking into consideration the feelings of the object of their desire.

The novel *Time* is a male-centred text. Here, Deshpande focusses her attention on the confusion and uncertainty existing within the mind of Indian males. However, Gur Pyari Jandal in “Towards a New World Order : The Female Self in Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time*” says:

Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time* particularly deals with the theme of the quest for a female identity. The complexities of man-woman relationships specially in the content of marriage, the trauma of a disturbed adolescence, the attempts to break traditional moulds in which women are trapped, sexual discrimination, the rejection of the dependency syndrome and introspection are some of the concerns which give the novel a feminist bent. (50)

In this novel, Deshpande emancipates herself from the narrow confines of women and their world and she tries to investigate human frailty through the metaphysical world of philosophy. The novel is centred round the character of Gopal who leaves his family without any substantial reason. The life of Gopal, the pivot of the novel, is revealed and defined in the context of three women from three generations from the same family. The idea of the quest for individual identity is marked by the conflict between the inner and outer selves of the protagonist. Sumi, the protagonist, appears as a deserted wife and a desperate mother of three young daughters. For Sumi, it is a challenge to face life and society in the absence of her husband. Beneath these chain of events, Deshpande seeks
the solution to the problems related with the responsibility of the parents towards their children. For Sumi, Gopal's desertion is confined to the needs of her own life but it also involves the issue of the mental and social security of her daughters. The philosophical ground of arguments presented in the novel reflects the profundity of thought but it makes the social criticism integrated in text, weak and insignificant. Jasbir Jain in Gendered Realities says:

**A Matter of Time** is a novel more deeply involved in the relationship of husband and wife than any of Deshpande’s other novels. It places the failed marriage of Sumi and Gopal at the centre, a marriage that does not have any of the accusing-the-other and blame-throwing matches, and goes on to frame it with descriptions/narrations of other marriages – Sumi’s sister Premi’s marriage, Gopal’s nephew Ramesh’s marriage, the marriage of Sumi’s mother, Kalyani, and her grandmother, Manorama, her aunt, Doda, and the young love relationship of her own two older daughters, Aru and Charu. (109)

**Remedies** makes experiment with autobiographical fiction. It reflects her strength as a novelist with her deliberate denial of sentimentality and her total control over the diverse issues. To create a novel with the technique of biography within the biography is something new in the history of Indian English novel. Madhu, the central character, appears as a journalist who undertakes the task of constructing the biography of Savitribai Indorekar, then aged but consummate singer of Hindustani Music. She denies the traditional responsibilities of family life to pursue her mission as a musician. She also ignores her commitments in personal relationship as a mother and as a wife. Along with
Savitribai, there are also references of the life of Leela, Bai’s sister. Leela also adopts an unconventional career and arranges a marriage of her own convenience beyond the traditions of her caste and family. At the centre of this sprawling narrative is Madhu, who in the process of revealing the life of Munni, Savitri and Leela, starts making introspection of her own life. From a distant observer, she becomes an insider of the whole affair. The entire fabric of the novel Remedies seems to be an investigation to conclude how far a woman can escape her femininity to construct her identity in a patriarchal social structure. Chandra Holm in “Potent Remedies : Themes and Techniques in Shashi Deshpande’s Small Remedies” says : “In Small Remedies using the stories of two women – Leela, the trade union activist and Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing diva of the Gwalior Gharana – as the background, Shashi Deshpande explores her favourite theme of a woman set on a journey of self-discovery, a journey which will bring past and present within a single pair of brackets, which will heal the wounds even if it does not provide all the answers” (58). Further, Chandra Holm observes : “Small Remedies is a complex novel. It is a novel about myriad feelings – love, courage, honesty, truth, trust, death, the pain associated with death, about music, about the power exerted by time and by words” (59).

Deshpande’s Moving On came out in the year 2004. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande presents the struggle of a woman to find out a meaningful definition of her life. In the texture of this novel, Deshpande has portrayed the underworld through the life of Manjari’s uncle Laxmanmama. Along with her concern with criminal world, Deshpande focuses her attention at the central theme of the crisis of balance in personal relationship. Manjari, the narrator, tries to reconstruct the life of her parents as having
individual identity. Manjari's efforts to discover the past of her parents help her understand the enigma of her own unfathomable self and makes her realize the need to create individual self than being involved in the forced relationship. In this novel, Deshpande through the conflict of Manjari, presents the riddle of mother and daughter relationship, father and daughter relationship, the issue of female sexuality, man's conditioning to social images and man's dependence on gender stereotype.

Deshpande's *Moving on* begins conventionally enough, with Manjari's discovery of her father's diary. She is the rebellious daughter of Vasu, a writer like Indu, Jaya and Madhu. What actually makes Vasu, a new woman is her contribution of romanticised stories for popular Marathi magazines. She gains fame for her novel Manasi which is made into a film. It is interesting to note that she wrote the stuff which she really did not believe in, “[...] living among women who had to be aggressive and strong to survive the endless drudgery and continuous lechery, she wrote of silent, sacrificing women ... An independent woman who hated being questioned, she wrote of women who found happiness in submission, not only to their husbands but to their families as well" (MO 125).

Vasu is one among the host of new women of Deshpande who marries a person out of her caste. Another aspect is her being critical about the state of stereotypical women in her writing. It is Deshpande's strategy to show how her women wish to emerge as new women who choose creative writing as a strategy of resistance. Akka in *Shadows*. Meera in *Vine*, Kalyani of *Time* and Vasu of *Moving On* represent new women though they belong to the older generation.
Manjari is introduced remembering her old home, a young woman, hardly forty, all alone—widowed, parents dead and children away. She is the narrator who is in possession of her father's diary. As she unlocks the past, recollecting old memories and recasting events and responses, the present makes its own demand—a rebellious daughter, devious property sharks, and a sexual partner who threatens to throw her life out of gear again. It becomes difficult for her to unshackle herself from the past and to move on. She challenges her own fate with the very notion of independence; her autonomy becomes problematic. Like all other protagonists of Deshpande, Saru, Indu, Jaya, Madhu, Leela and Savitribai, Manjari is in the process of asserting her identity. Manjari is not only courageous to give up Medicine to marry Shyam but also in facing the crisis of her sister Malu's rape by her husband. She faces a painful struggle after Shyam's suicide but prefers to live on her own and refuses financial assistance from her father. She refuses to remarry in spite of the repeated proposals of her cousin Raja as she loses faith in the institution of marriage. To her, marriage is only a social security which she thinks she does not need. This feeling makes her reject Raja as a protecting male in her life, "I want the brakes under my feet, not someone else's. I don't want a dual control; the control should be mine alone" (MO 88). And she later dismisses the driver, telling him, "I'm quit capable of looking after myself" (MO 191).

Manjari's struggle for freedom is theoretically a challenge to patriarchy. There is no hesitation, on her part, in exercising sexual autonomy by sleeping with her tenant, who is younger than her, "only the body, his body, only my body, and my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensations" (MO 257). She leads her life without being dictated by Raja or anyone. The title of the novel indicates that moving on is both
a journey from within and without. Manjari succeeds in seeking autonomy, selfhood, freedom through retrospection and self-realisation which are integral to the concept of a new woman. Manjari resembles Savitribai of Remedies in not getting remarried in spite of ample chances. Manjari is a new woman who learns to drive her car and even runs it as a taxi. She even, operates computer at home and types manuscripts for others as a means of self-employment when she fails to get a satisfying job. She is bold enough to face strange visitors of her house and anonymous phone calls from the mafia underworld. She refuses to give in to the irrational evil even when she is physically assaulted. She decides to stay and fight, against Raja's concern and advice, and refuses to yield to pressure.

Deshpande's latest novel In The Country of Deceit (2008) focuses on the progressive point of view on life through Sindhu and Devayani. The one topic that recurs in the novel is the physical passion and its relevance to life. Sindhu is of the opinion that life is lived through body (CD 41) and "[... ] the body is important and so are the demands of the body [ ... ]" (CD 42). In recommending Alexander as 'the suitable boy' for Devayani she states, "Our country does not allow women to fulfil these desires without marriage [...]. I want you to think of this. Remember this is a very natural desire and you have a right to expect your life to contain this ananda (sexual pleasure) as well" (CD 42-43).

Sindhu, widowed early in life, marries her second husband Keshav and is a fulfilled woman (though suffering from cancer now). As Devi's paternal aunt, Sindhu is worried about Devayani's spinster status and her continued refusal to marry. Marriage,
Sindhu says, is not the final solution, or even the best. "But at least once you are married you know you are not alone". She admits that marriage is a gamble but it has its own pleasures, "[...] you may be able to do without marriage, but there will come a time when you will long for your own children" (CD 26). Sindhu's letters, thus, dwell on marriage, companionship, children and physical passion.

Devayani at twenty-seven, a spinster law graduate, is an English teacher giving tuitions to graduates mostly aspiring to go to foreign countries in search of green pastures. Well-versed in English literature, like all other Deshpande's protagonists, she is an admirer of Jane Austen. Educated, independent minded, employed, self-sufficient Devayani is attracted to a stranger on the football field. What attracts her to Ashok is the, "energy surging through his body" (CD 24). She sees him, the new District S.P, giving away the trophy to the winning team. A particular gesture haunts her, "I saw it again, the man [...] touching the sky" (CD 24). For her, it is love at first sight. When she meets him at Rani's party, it is love at first sight to him. He tells her that he is a married man with a ten-year-old daughter, but is head over heels in love with her. As he proposes meeting her again, he makes it clear that he promises her nothing. The mutual attraction brings them together. Ashok is not presented as a seducer or a rake but is open in his dealings with Devayani. However, she was fully aware that she was wrong:

I thought of many things. Of how wrong this is and why I was even thinking of it. I was angry with you. I wished you had left me alone. I thought, I still think, you had, you have, no right to put me in this position. Then I thought-I'm not doing anything wrong. It’s you-you are committed, you are [...] you are married. And I thought of marriage and I wondered-
how can you do this? It's so wrong. And then I began thinking—but what about me, how can I do such a thing, am I really going to [...] (CD 130-131). If Ashok was doing wrong, so was I. I would not exculpate myself. (CD 223)

Devi admits her relationship with Ashok. Savi and Shree are horrified to know that she was sleeping with Ashok. Devayani thinks that the thought of her loving a married man was not as horrifying as sleeping with him. Devayani wonders:

But how can you love a man and not sleep with him? How can you not long for the physical union? It's not just sex, it's showing love through your body, it's seeing and feeling his love through his body. It is the desire for union, the most complete union two human beings can achieve (CD 226)

Devayani feels that she is grateful to god for the joy and experience of loving, of being loved, of becoming one with another human being (CD 238). When Savi and Shree suggest that she put an end to this relationship, she tells them that it is asking her to give up her breath (CD 201). She tells them that she hungers for him and she thirsts for him. She says, "Yes, he took me to bed the first time we were together, but I wanted it too, Shree. I was frightened, but my god, I wanted it too" (CD 200). Devayani is forthright in admitting that she was an equal partner in the sexual act with Ashok. She even tells Shree, her brother-in-law, that Ashok loves her as much as a man can love a woman (CD 200). She further says that Ashok is not the wrong man for her. What is wrong is his marriage, she insists:
What is wrong is his marriage. He has never spoken of it, but I know it has to be wrong. Why would he stay in Rajnur otherwise? Why does he never speak of her? When even criminals get a second chance, why can't he have a second chance? Why is it you can correct all mistakes, but not this one? (CD 199)

Nevertheless Devayani gets sentimental at this point to elicit sympathy for Ashok. The question that crops up here in this context is whether Ashok regrets his marriage, in the first place; if he really thinks that his wife is not suitable for him. Ashok never discusses his wife with anybody in the novel. He never mentions that his is a failed marriage. For a womaniser like Ashok happiness or unhappiness in marriage is not the criterion or cause for extramarital relationships. Moreover, he is explicit about his love and affection for his daughter. So, whether Ashok wants a second chance to correct his allegedly failed marriage is a moot point. He could have corrected it if he had willed it. But the thought of divorcing his wife and abandoning his daughter was never on his mind and was even unimaginable for him. Almost at the fag end of the novel Ashok tells in unequivocal terms about his position; "I am sorry Divya, I'm sorry. I can't lose my daughter, I can't let her lose me,” he whispered. It was the only explanation, the only apology he gave me” (CD 254). Ashok, thus emerges as a man who is not a seducer of women, but all the same a womaniser; amoral he might be, but he is not for divorcing his wife and abandoning his daughter. An ideal lover and a responsible father.

Devayani exercises her freedom in shaping her life according to her philosophy of life. She experiments with a live-in relationship with Ashok, the forty-year-old married
Superintendent of Police. Even as she gets into this relationship she starts questioning about the sanctity of this situation (CD 94,95,130). The moral clock within her continues to click. With the passing of time she realises the hard truth that they would never be able to live together (CD 157). And that she has to learn to live with guilt. She wonders if she was really an adulteress. However, she has to admit to herself that adultery remains adultery whoever the couple maybe:

That it is always riddled with guilt and fear, constantly swinging between euphoria and despair. I knew this too, that the main occupation of all adulterous couples is: how do we meet and where? (CD 149)

Adultery of Anna with Vronsky might be beautifully tragic in a fictional work but in real life it is sordid and shameful business. She is conscious that Ashok can never be "an innocent visitor" to his place (CD 165).

The thought that they can never have children comes to her in a sudden pang of grief (CD 183). The tragic part of this affair is that she not only cannot share it with people around but also is forced for life to be dishonest with people whom she loved. She thinks she has entered the country of deceit by entering into this unnatural relationship with Ashok, "I had entered the country of deceit. I could no longer be open and honest with people I loved; I had to deceive them" (CD 147).

Devayani who preferred perennial plants like parijaat, raat rani, sampige to seasonal herbs in her garden finds that everything about her relationship with Ashok was tentative and unsure. It comes to her as a revelation how different her life was from a
married woman's. Both of them never talked about marriage, "He knew there was no need for him to say anything; both of us knew marriage was not possible, that it would not happen" (CD 196). Despite the harmonious relationship they share, things go wrong. When Ashok presents her with a gold chain on her birthday she says, "I feel as if I'm being paid" (CD 210). Though Devayani makes a conscious move to break the traditional norms and go her own way in exercising her right to sexual satisfaction outside the institution of marriage, she fails to overcome the societal stigma such an act entails. Societal values assert in the end. The final conclusion that she comes to is, "Love was not enough, no it was never enough" (CD 210).

This is what marriage means: knowing that the years lie ahead of you, a long stretch of time waiting for you to occupy together. Taking time for granted, disjointed conversation about trifles, casual intimacies. This is what I want. I don't want clandestine meetings, drama, constant fears. The Abhisarika can keep her romance, she can have her excitement. I'll settle for small moments like these. This is what I want, this is what I'll never have (CD 191-192)

Even on their first day together she knew nothing could be right between them. Now she realises, "The word love can't change anything. It is not a detergent that can wash out the stains. The wrong remains a wrong" (CD 236). She tells Ashok, "I have no claim on your life. There is no future for us" (CD 237).

Not withstanding her disillusionment with this relationship she cherishes the time she spent with Ashok; she bemoans the loss of that relationship. She prefers to break free
of this relationship because it has a corrupting influence on her personality, "I am tired of lying and deceiving others" (CD 238).

Driven by physical passion, motivated by progressive ideology Devayani plunges headlong into an unconventional relationship. This seems to work for a time; but soon the faultlines show and the relationship ends. As in her other novels Deshpande makes her protagonist Devayani shun the unconventional relationship in the end. It is to be noted here that even Ashok sacrifices his ideal mistress for the sake of his family.

Thus, Deshpande's latest novel too upholds marriage and discloses the chinks in the armour of live-in relationship. Until now, it is Deshpande's heroines who are shown to sacrifice their satisfying extramarital relationships and return to their husbands and families; however in this latest novel Deshpande's fictional hero Ashok is made to give up fulfilling extramarital relationship with Devayani, a spinster, for the sake of his family. Ultimately, the hold of the family and marital bond proves stronger than love, sexual satisfaction and mutual understanding that prevail in extramarital relationships in Deshpande's novels. The fine balance invariably tilts towards institutions of marriage and family. Though Deshpande is clearly not for disruption of society she makes a conscious effort to demystify the feminine mystique and sensitise men and women to the vice-like grip the outdated, outmoded, inhuman and corrupt social institutions have on the consciousness of an average man. It is this world view that informs her writing all along. To a great extent, Deshpande succeeds in dismantling a number of age-old taboos. Her female protagonists, no wonder, voice unselfconsciously their suppressed innate desires, talk about menstruation, sexual intercourse, the process of childbirth and illicit
relationships. In doing so, they celebrate woman's life and assert that nothing that is related to the physiology of woman's body can be unholy.

Deshpande also made experiments with detective fiction. *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983) and *If I Die Today* (1982) are two detective serials which have been expanded and published in the form of novels. Deshpande's interest in the detective serial first reflected in her review of *Woman's Eye: New Stories* by the Best Women Crime Writers. The chief female characters in *Come Up and Be Dead*, the school-teacher, Kshama and her housekeeper, cousin Devayani are spinsters. In spite of her concern for the world of crime, Deshpande represents the issue that modern woman in spite of her administrative abilities suffers with internal emptiness. Kshama is an efficient administrator but her life reflects her internal complex and insecurities. Devayani seems to be contented with her role but in the company of one of her partners, she realizes the uselessness of her life. With lasciviousness of Mridula, Sonali, Sharmila and Mrs. Raman, Deshpande hints at the different dimensions of female sexuality in the context of the world of crime. In the novel, *If I Die Today*, the narrator, Manju, is quite different from the average Indian woman who regards matrimony and motherhood as the ultimate happiness in their lives. She accepts that children are the barriers in her dream of emancipated life. She is prejudiced about the concept of motherhood and she acknowledges it as "a trap, keeping you in a cage until you lose the desire for freedom until you forget what the word 'freedom' means" (*If I Die Today* 47)

During her fictional career, Deshpande also published several children's books in English and also wrote the script for the Hindi feature film “Drishti”. On the lines of
Enid Blyton, she wrote three detective serials—*A Sum Adventure*, *The Only Witness* and *The Hidden Treasure*. Her fourth novel for children *The Narayanpur Incident* is based on the Quit India Movement. These novels, in spite of being weak in literary excellence, are highly significant to explore new possibilities in the realm of children’s literature.

Deshpande, in spite of her concentrated and confined spectrum of fiction, has created a niche for herself. Her collection of short stories *The Legacy* (1978) is prescribed for the graduate student in Columbia University. *Terrors* has already been translated into German and Russian. Her literary works have been translated into different languages. With her efforts to articulate the voice of women in the world of men, she has been acknowledged as the most celebrated post-colonial writer struggling to establish and to explore the identity and position of woman in the traditional society of India.

Over the years and in between her novels, Deshpande has written several volumes of short stories which run a parallel course to her longer works of fiction. Of the novelists writing in English in India, she is one writer who has kept a constant flow of short stories going, stories that serve as a ground for experimentation of themes and ideas, attitudes and narrative approaches. Five of these volumes have been published by the Writers' Workshop, Calcutta. Of these, *The Legacy* also happens to be her first published book. Three volumes, *It Was Dark*, *It was the Nightingale* and *The Miracle* appeared in 1986 clearly indicating that the writing of the stories spreads over several years. The fifth volume brought out by the Writers' Workshop is *The Stone Women and Other Stories*,

which came out in 2000. In 1993, Penguin (India) brought out a volume of short stories, The Intrusion and Other Stories. Of the nineteen stories in this collection, five had appeared earlier in The Legacy, five in It Was Dark, one in It Was the Nightingale and four were later to be included in The Stone Women (in which the stories have a thematic connectedness). The title story, "The Intrusion", first appeared in The Legacy and the theme is a continuation of the one reflected in "It Was Dark." Deshpande's Collected Stories Vol. 1 has also been recently published by Penguin.

Hence, it is to be apprehended that Deshpande is much concerned with the issues like family, marriage and bereavement which are some of the dominant concerns. Social issues like female infanticide or foeticide and rape also feature in some of her stories. Cultural and social attitudes which have evolved over a period of time are critiqued. Sex and sexuality - aberrations, extramarital involvements, even lesbianism-find a place in her writings. The Stone Women and Other Stories takes up myths from the Mahabharata and and the Ramayana to reinterpret and relate them to the situations of contemporary life.

References


