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CHAPTER- II

LIFE, WORKS AND SCOPE OF SHASHI DEShPANDE AS A NOVELIST

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to find out if Shashi Deshpande's women characters are really empowered women or if they are just wearing a mask of tranquility. The study aims to find out if Shashi Deshpande's women really assert themselves or somewhere in their assertion process conform to endurance. The study wishes to find out if compromise is the key word in Shashi Deshpande's heroines' vocabulary.

For the purpose of this study, six of her novels have been considered, but the thrust of this research is on three of her major novels viz., The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows and That Long Silence. These three novels have won awards and have been translated into a number of foreign languages. In this thesis an attempt is, therefore, made to study Shashi Deshpande's women protagonists, as portrayed by her in her novels, with a view to understand and appreciate their trials and tribulations under the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity. It critically analyses their response to the emerging situation in life so as to fit themselves in the contemporary society. Without probing deeply into the novelist's conviction of what would serve as the ideal panacea for the different kinds of challenges, the study considers the problems of her characters which have had to
contend with the given situations. *Come up and Be Dead* and *If I Die Today*, two detective serials of Shashi Deshpande which have been expanded and published as novels are not included for study as the very nature of their themes seems at variance with the topic chosen for this thesis.

Shashi Deshpande’s stories are about a woman: her travails and privations, tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes. Her stories suggest that compromise is what characterizes the life of the common run of the middle-class women in India. Unable to defy social conventions or traditional morality, the middle-class women themselves are enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, loves and hates, withdrawal and alienation, suppression and oppression, marital discord and male chauvinism.

Indeed, Shashi Deshpande’s chief thematic concern is with a woman’s struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, her effort to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother, and most of all as a human being. And accordingly in her novels the operative sensibility is distinctly female and modern.

Shashi Deshpande feels embarrassed to be called a woman writer and she is not very enthusiastic about the label feminist. She considers herself as a feminist in personal life but not a feminist writer. “I write as a writer but am identified as a woman writer. I am nothing more than a novelist and a short-story writer but people seek more glorified titles to elevate you to stardom.” "If critics and reviewers insist on calling me a woman writer, then ‘man’ should be prefixed to male writers as well."
"Women writers are expected to write for women's magazines and be read by women readers only. Males generally do not want to read women writers."¹

Such statements flowed in abundance, perhaps personifying her womanhood. It made a lot of sense particularly in the run-up to the International Women's Day celebrations.

With much ease Shashi Deshpande debunked myths that overwhelm the Indian intelligentsia. The prickly issues of language and writing, the widening divide between the non-resident Indian authors writing in English and the writers writing in English in India, the importance of readers and a writer's obligation to self-censorship, globalization of literature and the impact of feminism on marginalized women - the rich repertoire of debatable points that have always troubled her and continue to do so.

She laments the divide between writers as a group on the basis of caste, gender and language and this, she says, prevents writers from playing a meaningful role in society and their inability to take on and write on public issues. But the free-spirited Shashi Deshpande is only making her voice more distinctive with every new publication. Writing from the margin is also written with felicity to evoke emotions.²

However much she may deny the influence of feminism in her novels, it is the core of her novels. And it becomes quite obvious, that the women she has created are feminists, even if she is not one.
Unable to defy social conventions or traditional morality, Shashi Deshpande's protagonist finds herself enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, loves and hates, withdrawal and alienation, suppression and oppression, and marital discord and male chauvinism.

2.2.1 SHASHI DESHPANDE'S LIFE AND PERSONALITY

Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, India. She is the second daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Shriranga. At the age of fifteen, she went to Mumbai where she graduated in Economics. She then moved to Bangalore, where she gained a degree in Law. The early years of her marriage were largely given over to the care of her two young sons, but she took a course in journalism and for a time worked on a magazine. Her writing career only began in earnest in 1970. Deshpande began her writing with short stories which later developed into writing novels. Her first collection of short stories *The Legacy* published in 1972 had been prescribed for graduate students in Columbia University.

I never decided that I was going to become a writer, it was never a conscious decision. I got married, I had no definite career, I had two children. I was restless with being just a housewife and mother, I was looking for a job. Then we were in England for a year, my husband was a doctor. I was very isolated there because he was at work all day and I had these two children and no friends, so then we returned and he said 'why don't you write about our year there?'. Then I joined a
journalism course. I loved writing, I felt at home with it...so I think in one way I stumbled into it but I really think of it this way as writing was something which was waiting for me along the line and then I reached that point, and then I knew what my life was going to be about.3 —

Shashi Deshpande now lives in Bangalore with her pathologist husband and has completed her M.A. in English Literature. She is regarded as one of the most accomplished contemporary Indian women writers in English. Her output is by no means inconsiderable – Eight novels viz., The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980); If I Die Today; Come Up and Be Dead (1983); Roots and Shadows (1986); That Long Silence (1987); The Binding Vine (1993); A Matter of Time (1996) and Small Remedies (2000). Shashi Deshpande has written four volumes of short stories, viz., The Legacy (1978); The Miracle (1986); It was Dark (1986), and It was the Nightingale (1986), and books for children too.

Literature was a common fare at her home from her early childhood as her father Adya Rangacharya was an eminent playwright, author and scholar of Sanskrit and Kannada languages. She started her literary career in England by writing short pieces on her stay there, moved on to writing short stories which were published in leading Indian magazines. In 1978, The Legacy, the first collection of short stories was published in India. Since then, she has brought out four other collections of short stories, has written six novels, two crime novels, which makes it altogether
eight novels and four books for children. Her work has been translated into various Indian and European languages.

Deshpande is gifted with an inborn literary bent of mind which matured with her experiences in life. Even her graduation in Economics and Law did not seem to have much impact on her writing. Though she is the daughter of Sriranga, the famous Kannada playwright, who is known as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada theatre, yet she never got any guidance from him in this field. She repents the fact of being detached from her father. In response to a question of Vanamala Vishwanatha, she says:

If I should criticize him, I should say he was somewhat detached from us...never guided us. May be if he had directed us at an early age, I could have done better. He never did that.  

Not many readers of Shashi Deshpande may be aware that her first experiments in writing fiction started with the short story. Over the years, she has published about a hundred stories in literary journals, magazines and newspapers, in between writing her immensely popular novels which are now read all over the world, and taught in universities wherever Indian writing has an audience. Shashi Deshpande is at her best, writing with subtlety and a rare sensitivity about men and women trapped in relationships and situations often not of their making. Some of her themes are: The wife of a successful politician who must look to a long-lost past in order to keep up the pretence of contentment; a little girl who cannot comprehend
why the very fact of her being born is a curse; a young man whose fantasy of love drives him to murder; a newly-wed couple with dramatically differing views on what it means to get to know each other—every one of the characters here is delineated with lucidity and compassion. Written over the past three decades, the stories provide an insight into often forgotten aspects of human feelings and relationships, weaving a magical web of emotions that is testimony to the unusual depth and range of Shashi Deshpande's writing.  

Whether she writes short stories or novels, Deshpande writes mainly about "everyday India. A society in which we breathe, a culture to which we belong. Her major concerns emerge from our own environment, from our immediate world, holding up mirrors to our own lives." She does not simplify India but presents India as it is to her readers. Deshpande herself says, "They (my novels) are just about Indian people and the complexities of our lives." Thus her works, particularly novels, demand undivided attention from the readers, demand that they understand the world that is being presented to them without any embellishment.

Even though her writing is very Indian in its framework, the themes honour no borders. True she writes mainly about women, but it is the human being that lurks behind her characters. And that human being is often a lonely one though not one who is alone. There are myriad facets to loneliness in life, and Deshpande has explored many of these facets in her short story collection, The Intrusion and Other Stories published in 1993 by Penguin. (Currently this is the only collection that is available in print. The Writer's Workshop is to reissue a collection soon)
All within her fragile frame, Shashi Deshpande is a profusion of creativity. Amorphous thoughts and thought-provoking issues, a defying captivity of simple but powerful words with which she strings an effortless prose while writing or speaking is a lesson in learning for all those who come in contact with her.

At a "meet the author" programme organized by the Study Centre for Indian Literature in English & Translation (SCILET) at the American College where she came for the launch of her latest collection of essays titled *Writing from the Margin*, her talk was firmly entrenched in the social realities of daily lives triggering off a barrage of questions from the audience at the end of it. With an unflinching enthusiasm she regaled the audience - majority of whom were her ardent readers too - sharing her troubles and confidentialities, fears and hope, experience and prerogatives.

What she penned down as points, ideas, corrections on the big margin over the decades, she herself never realized would some day get converted into a book with much pushing and prodding by her pathologist husband and a good friend, who teaches English literature in a Delhi college.

"These two people are responsible both for the shortcomings and the highs of the compilation," she said nonchalantly, there again unveiling her ability to speak out her mind. "That is what real empowerment is all about - lack of fear and equality in any relationship," she said, when asked why the protagonist in each of her eight novels so far were the middle class urban working women caught between personal
crisis and compulsions, responsibilities and obligations. And how they all internalized a distorted self-image and finally returned with a new attitude.

"Women are reluctant to talk about themselves. I am not bold either but I am privileged because I do what I want to do, writing fiction and exploring human relationships is my lifeline", she asserted, further underlining her refusal to play by the global rules.

Writing as a politically aware woman makes her uncomfortable but never stops her from articulating on contentious matters like gender, caste, feminism or marginalisation. But she admitted that she was tired of the hostility against Indian English.

"Imagine India in English" - she suddenly stirs you to make one understand that "the language you write in does not bear upon the quality of writing." In fact, language resonates with one's own regional flavour and cultural experience. Though some critics like to call Indian literature a great "linguistic mess", Shashi Deshpande described it as a celebration of mother tongues but at the same time the language of creativity need not necessarily be one's mother tongue. True that the West looks for Indian literary works that are "exotic" but Indian writers writing in English need not alienate themselves by writing in the vernacular.

Her novel That Long Silence received the Sahitya Akademi award. Two of her other novels, The Dark Holds No Terrors and Roots and Shadows have also received major awards. Small Remedies, her latest novel, was released in India on the 16th of March,
2000. We will deal with six novels of Shashi Deshpande in detail in the next part of the study.

2.2.2 SHASHI DESHPANDE’S REPUTATION AS AN ARTIST

Shashi Deshpande is known for creating women characters who are contemporary. Deshpande’s women protagonists are victims of the prevalent gross gender discrimination, first as daughters and later as wives. They are conscious of the great social inequality and injustice towards them, and struggle against the oppressive and unequal nature of the social norms and rules that limit their capability and existence as a wife. Fettered to their roles in the family, they question the subordinate status ordained to them by society. Her works have drawn great critical attention and acclaim for her sensitive and realistic representation of the Indian middle-class women. Her sincere concern for women and their oppressive lot is reflected strongly in all her novels and stories.

Dieter Riemenschneider in *The Story Must Be Told* tries to show that Shashi Deshpande takes us into realms of the female psyche which no writer of the previous generation had dared put into words as candidly. He further affirms that Deshpande’s finely honed sensibility infuses the delicate interplay of human relationships with a realistic ambience which serves to crystallize our thoughts, and all at once we see in her a natural extension of our own cognitive parameters.

What really sets Shashi Deshpande apart is that her writings hold a universal appeal that clearly emanates from her rootedness in everyday India. She has
steadfastly refused to compromise in order to suit the global market, never exoticising India, never 'presenting' it – as she puts it -, and certainly by not playing to the gallery. She is often compared to regional language writers - firmly entrenched in our social realities and grappling with our issues.

One agrees with R.K. Dhawan's remarks that in this era of verbal acrobatics and pretty packaging, her clear lucid prose is starkly real and refreshing. Everything is said as it should be, not a superfluous word to be found anywhere. The aesthetics of her writing is informed by the depth of her content, articulating her thoughts and ideas, transforming the very act of reading into a sharing experience. Readers encounter an intimacy, a kind of secret bonding with her, as if she were speaking to them alone.

Each of Shashi Deshpande's novels is special and offers food for thought on human relationships and emotions. Deshpande is a master writer in the way she articulates human emotions, the fears and feelings experienced by humans, by women. Reading her books is like peeping into the hidden corners of one's own mind. Recognizing oneself in her characters, one does not feel lonely in the world anymore. Reading her novels and stories is thus an immensely satisfying experience, as reading becomes a healing process.

Shashi Deshpande says that all her novels always begin in a moment of crisis. Most of them go on unquestioningly until they are shaken out of the rut by something catastrophic or disastrous. Suddenly all that you have taken for granted becomes doubtful, everything falls apart. You begin then to question everything. And it is
through this questioning, through this thinking that you move on, pick up your life once again. But you are never the same after this. This is true of all human beings, not just women. Her protagonists being women, one of the things they question is the fact of their being females, what it has done to them. But they are also probing the human condition, the human predicament. In this thinking process, humans do discover their own potential.

Shashi Deshpande believes that women have a great strength. All humans do. Actually women have reserves we are often unaware of. But for the woman the situation is made more complex by the fact that they have been told they are weak, they are made to believe in their weakness. And often they learn to hide their own strength, because a woman’s strength seems to weaken a man. She says that women are the main support of the family, though the male is the titular head. Women are better at dealing with emotional traumas. This is because women, unlike men, have never had to suppress their emotional selves, they are more open about these problems - both in articulating them and understanding them.

Shashi Deshpande has dealt very minutely and delicately with the problems of middle-class educated women. She always had in her mind people from the real India to write about, but as she proceeded, spontaneously and involuntarily, woman became the focus of her writings. When interviewed by Vanamala Vishwanatha, Shashi Deshpande makes it clear by saying: “It all starts with people. For example, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* came to me when I saw a couple.”
She is uniquely Indian and her use of Marathi words very evidently presents the customs and traditions of the people belonging to Maharashtra and Karnataka. For example, words such as Kaka, Kaki, Atya, Dada, and so on, are essentially Marathi words and might be a bit difficult to grasp by the readers who do not know the language.

Shashi Deshpande cares more for literary qualities of her creative works. Her language is transparent. It does not draw attention to itself, nor does it come in the way. She is basically Indian and writes for the Indians.

She states that if you try to make everything easy for everyone, then, you end up belonging nowhere. So, I’ve left it at that - characters in their novels, without providing glosses for the western readers...Also literature can be appreciated even without understanding every word of it – one can still respond to the core of it.

2.2.3 SHASHI DESHPANDE’S POSITION

Shashi Deshpande was still unknown to many until her novel That Long Silence got published by the Virago Feminist Press, London. She says:

It’s meaningless that people know me as a person and not know what I’ve written. I feel publicity is not a good thing for a writer. It detracts you from your work. You become more interested in yourself as a person than as a writer. I’d rather be known for my books than for myself.
She writes about the need to write: “I realize that I write what I write because I have to. Because it is within me. It’s one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that I think is my contribution to Indian writing.”

She does not see males as the cause of all troubles as some feminists do, she deals with the inner mind of women. Education and experience in foreign countries sets women writers apart from traditional Indian women. The traditional Indian women suffer, submit and adjust themselves to the circumstances. The women novelists like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala have, in their novels, portrayed this aspect of women’s life without having the first hand experience of it. Shashi Deshpande has projected this aspect of Indian women with more sensitivity and instinctive understanding as she belongs to this category. Unlike other women writers, she is born and brought up on this soil, gained her education in India itself and wrote about India. The projection of the woman’s world in her novels is more authentic, credible and realistic. She knows what Indian women feel. Shashi Deshpande does not want to be categorized with other Indian writers writing in English. She has a unique place among the novelists writing in English. She declares that she is just like any other regional writer but her medium of writing happens to be English, as it is the only language she knows well. Explaining her position, Shashi Deshpande says:

I’m isolated – I’m not part of any movement and not conscious of readers to impress. To get wider recognition here and abroad, you have to be in the university and places
like that with the right contacts. I’m an ordinary woman who
writes sitting at home. None of these things are within my
reach. This has, I believe, done me good. It has given me
great freedom. I’m happy with this anonymity. Once you get
publicity-conscious, your writing becomes affected. I’m truly
happy with this freedom. 16

Shashi Deshpande believes that a writer gives to society a mirror image of itself, so
has she tried to do in her creative writing. Vanamala Vishwanatha points out that
the author has presented in her works “a typical, middle-class housewife’s life....”
The urge to find oneself, to create a space for oneself to grow on one’s own, that
seems to be the major preoccupation. That’s every woman’s problem as well. That’s
where Shashi Deshpande has touched a chord. 17

The study tries to understand and perceive the real dilemma of middle-class
educated women in her novels. Deshpande has not tried to make her women
characters stronger than they are in real life. Rather she has exposed their
transitional state, as pinpointed by Dr. Promilla Kapur. The educated women
demand more sexual freedom and independence but are not very sure about what
they should do with the same, which leads them to a bitter confusion, anxiety and
tension. Their psychology is still wedded – to tradition. They have started
recognizing the need for change, but at the same time they continue to cling to the
old values as they have been brought up with them. The picture of such women has
found place in Shashi Deshpande’s novels:
My characters take their own ways. I've heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are.\textsuperscript{18}

It is not that Shashi Deshpande has deliberately made women the focus in all her novels. She, in fact, wanted to portray the whole society in her writings; but somehow, as the characters took shape, the women characters turned out to be the protagonists. That is the world she knows more closely. The reason may be that being a woman, she felt more for the women characters, could understand the mundane reality, the complex structure of man-woman relationship better. But Deshpande believes that everybody should live within the relationships:\textsuperscript{19} She says:

It's needed. It's necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this or no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing. What I don't agree with is the idealization of motherhood — the false and sentimental notes that accompany it.\textsuperscript{20}

The main themes that have found expression in Shashi Deshpande's novels are: inner conflict and search for identity, parent-child relationship, and concept of marriage and sex. Above all, the theme of silence rooted in the complex relationship between man and woman holds a great fascination for Shashi Deshpande as she deals with the inner working of the female psyche in her works.\textsuperscript{21}
2.3 THE WORKS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

*Roots and Shadows* won for the author the Thirumathi Rangammal Prize for the best novel written and published in India for the year 1982-83. Her collection of short stories, *The Legacy*, has had the single distinction of being used as text-book in Columbia University for a course in Modern Literature. And almost all her books have been well received by the reading public, though seldom acclaimed by academics, or anthologized. For her, writing is a vocation, not a profession, and so she seems to have been untouched by the reception accorded to her work.²²

Shashi Deshpande's novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self; an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonist's place in it. Shashi Deshpande uses irony in the majority of her stories and novels to satirize the morals and manners of our society although she is not an ironist. She employs situational, attitudinal and verbal irony to telling effect. Her language is simple, direct and terse; close to the speaking voice. Sometimes, instead of full and long sentences, she uses words elliptically and minimally and this makes for force.

Six of her major novels, *Roots and Shadows* to *Small Remedies* in the chronological order are chosen for this thesis. The focus in these novels is on heroines or the major women characters. Her heroines are sensitive to the changing times and situations, they revolt against the traditions in their search for freedom. They succeed in
achieving self-identity and independence and choose their partners in life to live with in pursuance of their felt need to lead a family life. They establish the role that they play in the family – a daughter, a wife, a mother and also a career woman. Standing at cross-roads of tradition they do seek a change, but within the cultural norms so as to enable themselves to live with dignity and self-respect.

Indu, the protagonist in *Roots and Shadows*, her first novel, emerges successfully as a woman of determination and does not yield to the dictates of the patriarchal society. She exemplifies a woman in the transitional period that is torn between age-old traditions and individual views. It records how she defies the worn-out traditions, pushes aside all her fears about her imagined inadequacies and asserts herself as an individual.

Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, seeks freedom without impinging on her obligations and responsibilities and achieves harmony in life. It shows how she undergoes a trauma when her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life and how boldly she stands up to the situation and audaciously accepts the challenges of her own protégé.

Jaya of *That Long Silence* gradually emerges as a confident individual fully in control of herself and refuses to be led by nose. A stereotyped housewife initially nervous and needing male help and support all the time, she understands that she also has contributed to her victimization and that she has to fight her own battle and
work out her own strategy. It also shows how with this new confidence Jaya becomes emancipated without rejecting outright the cultural and social background.

Urmila of *The Binding Vine* is depicted as an advanced version over the earlier women protagonists in Shashi Deshpande’s novels as she goes a step further and helps the poor and the downtrodden. She fights for another woman’s cause while the others have fought their own battles. It shows how she exhibits her interest and capacity to purge the society of its evils.

Sumi, a deserted wife in *A Matter of Time* is dauntless in her adversity — she evolves herself from utter desolation and bitterness linked up with invisible chains of patriarchal pressure and other family responsibilities. It records how with courage, dignity, responsibility and independent spirit, even after desertion by her husband, she has reached a stage of self sufficiency and self-fulfillment.

Madhu in *Small Remedies*, her latest novel, writes the biography of Savitribai Indorekar, the aging doyenne of Hindustani music, who avoids marriage and a home to pursue her genius. She has led the most unconventional of lives, and undergoes great mental trauma due to the opposition by a society that practices double standards – one for men and the other for women. Even as a child she was a victim of gross discrimination. Besides, Madhu narrates her own life story and also those of her aunt Leela and Savitribai’s daughter, Munni.
A close analysis of her novels leaves no doubt about her genuine concern for women. Her protagonists are acutely aware of their smothered and fettered existence in an orthodox male-dominated society.

2.4.1 SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

Shashi Deshpande's six novels have been critically analysed with a view to understand and appreciate the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity and the responses to the emerging situations in life in the contemporary society. Different kinds of challenges faced by her characters are studied in detail here. The novels have been analysed individually and commented upon in detail.

2.4.2 ROOTS AND SHADOWS

The woman protagonist in Roots and Shadows is the new woman Indu. Indu, an educated young woman, is highly sensitive. She starts aspiring to become independent and complete in herself. She brushes aside all the age-old beliefs and superstitions prevalent in the society. As a motherless child, she was tended by the members of the joint family who never denied her any amount of care and affection. Old Uncle, Kaka, Atya and other family members always cushioned her position in the family. But now she finds the dominant Akka, a senior member and a mother surrogate in the novel, and even the family to be a hindrance in achieving her goal of attaining independence and completeness. Indu develops an aversion to the
natural biological functions of the female as mother and has apathy towards bearing a child. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her.

Defying the traditional role she is expected to play, Indu seeks fulfillment in education and a career. She works as a journalist for a woman’s magazine but gives it up out of disgust for writing only about women and their problems and starts working for another magazine.

Indu recollects that she has surrendered herself to her husband Jayant step by step, not mainly for love but to avoid conflict. She resorts to deception by putting up a façade of a happy married life which, as she feels, has taken its toll on her personality.

Indu sprang out of the claustrophobic world with courage. She was free. But often to be free is to be lonely. But there is always the beacon light of love. And love leads to the certainty of marriage. But marriage invariably takes you back to the world of women, of trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, of self-abnegation. To love another and to retain yourself intact – is that possible? To assert yourself and not to be aggressive, to escape domination and not to dominate?...Oh yes, you can’t escape the shadows. The clearer the light, the darker the shadows. They follow you everywhere. Such were the feelings and thoughts going through the minds of Shashi Deshpande’s female protagonists.
According to Shashi Deshpande, Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, and many women in her other novels had their roots in the same place. Shashi Deshpande herself says:

> Life as I saw it in a small town as a child, as a growing girl. Life as I saw it in Mumbai as a woman. And I saw it, the sharp, clean line dividing the world of men from the world of women. As a child I could cross over easily from one world into the other. Often I was the bridge. But as I grew up, I realized the bridge wasn’t there any more. I had ceased to be one myself. I was trapped into a world of my own. But, still, for some reason, outside the claustrophobic world of women.²⁵

Indu, motherless and with an absentee father, didn’t belong. She was an outsider because of this, so was Shashi Deshpande because of an agnostic father who had broken from orthodoxy and family. But the women all came to Shashi Deshpande. She watched them from a distance.²⁶

The girl who burnt herself because her mother said she had shamed the family by talking to a boy in public. The clever girl taken out of school because she got engaged and ‘they’ didn’t want her to study any more.

The ugly girl with huge feet and hands and a humble fixed smile listening to her mother telling mine “he has approved, but...” The smile wavering at the “but,” falling off. All these women came to Shashi Deshpande from the society that she watched from a distance.
"The childless widow, the deserted wife, the scheming woman.

I saw these again with Indu. And now, the knowledge shaped itself into words, ideas...The vulnerability of women. The power of women. The deviousness of women. The helplessness of women. The courage of women.

And the thought – was it mine or Indu's? – I won't belong to that world, I won't be like them, my God, I don't want to be like them."  

In *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande portrays an independent woman from contemporary society defying traditional roles and holding her womanhood responsible for closing many adventurous doors to her. This woman Indu came to Shashi Deshpande from the society in which Shashi Deshpande lived.

2.4.3 **THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS**

Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* undergoes a similar trauma like Indu in *Roots and Shadows*. She confronts reality and in the end realises that the dark she feared really holds no terrors. Saru is a 'two-in-one woman.' A doctor in the day time and a trapped animal at night. She wants to be free and have an identity of her own. She longs to break away from the rigid traditional norms. She hates her parental home, yet the novel begins with Saru visiting her father after a gap of fifteen years. On hearing through a friend about her mother's death a month ago, Saru wants to visit her father's house from where she had left as a young woman. Defying her parents to marry the man Manohar (known as diminutive Manu, a name no doubt carrying overtones of the legendary patriarchal law-giver who saw the world from a male
centered perspective) whom she loved. She now returned to it as a well-established
doctor and a mother of two children more out of an urge to escape from the hell of
life she is passing through. She appears to be confused, hopeless, dull almost
thoughtless and a recluse.

Years on Sarita still remembers her mother's bitter words uttered when as a little
girl she was unable to save her younger brother from drowning. Now, her mother is
dead and Sarita returns to the family home, ostensibly to take care of her father, but
in reality to escape the nightmarish brutality her husband inflicts on her every
night. In the quiet of her old father's company Sarita reflects on the events of her
life: her stultifying small town childhood, her domineering mother, her marriage to
the charismatic young poet Manohar (who turns vicious when he realizes his career
is going nowhere and that his wife has overtaken him professionally), her
children...As she struggles with her emotions and anxieties, Sarita gradually
realizes that there is more to life than dependency on marriage, parents and other
such institutions – and she resolves to use her new found truths to make a better life
for herself. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a tremendously powerful portrayal of one
woman's fight to survive in a world that offers no easy outs.

Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has childhood scars. She hates her mother to
such an extent that she says, "If you're a woman, I don't want to be one." Saru's
mother shows gender difference in her treatment of her son Dhruva and daughter.
“He’s different. He’s a boy” – these words establish the traditional Indian mother against whom Saru has to rebel all her life.

The childhood experience of watching her brother sink into water and die gives her a sense of guilt that she is responsible for the death of her brother. It is enhanced by her mother’s words, “You killed your brother...why didn’t you die?” which drive Saru to hate her mother.

Saru rebels against her mother by going to Mumbai to study medicine. The hostel life is a kind of “rebirth” into a totally different world where you don’t have to stay outside for “those three days, you are no longer an ‘untouchable’; you can even talk about it;” When Saru falls in love with Manohar, a boy from a lower caste, again she defies the authority of her mother.

Saru’s marriage is a means to get away from her mother and her home. The departure of the heroine from the mother is the first step towards autonomy; for, the mother is the first pedagogue of the restrictions on the woman. Marriage, the promised end in a traditional society, in feminist fiction becomes only another enclosure that restricts the movement towards autonomy and self-realization.29

There are recurrent images of enclosure in Roots and Shadows as well as in The Dark Holds No Terrors. Indu constantly speaks of the dark room where so many women had given birth. Saru is reminded of a room whose doors are closed
whenever she looks at her daughter, Renu. Saru, even when she comes back home, "felt herself enclosed."

When she enters into her room, she finds male clothes hanging on the wall and realizes that she has no room of her own. The feeling of being enclosed is associated with the mother's house and the protagonist wants to escape from the enclosure, as revealed in Indu's dreams. The image of the enclosed walls suggests the suffocation these women undergo not only in their parental homes but the homes they have chosen as refuge.

The novel is presented in four parts and even in the first part, all the important issues — bitterness towards the mother, insecurity of Manu, Saru's relationship with Manu and children, Dhruva's death — are touched upon. The rest of the three parts elaborate Saru's introspection of and her reaction to different issues touched upon in the first part.

Shashi Deshpande works with a dubious world that falls between reality and unreality. The truth behind Saru being the murderess of Dhruva, Manu being the predator and Saru the prey is a matter that lies in this realm between reality and unreality. The italicized description of Saru's traumatic but dream-like experience when she slowly recognizes the predator to be her own husband defines the dubious area better. It also lays all the cards on the table, takes away the element of shock and the reader is left with nothing to anticipate about the monstrous problem. The
second part too begins with a dream suggestive of the uncertainty of the destination and the inability to know what lies in store as she drifts by. In the course of Part IV there is a reference to another dream that evokes the road image again with "something, somebody awful, frightening" at the end. But she has no way out and has to proceed. The dream suggests the definite need to proceed and confront whatever is at the end.

Though the novel deals with an uncertain situation, Shashi Deshpande makes use of effective concrete images to drive home the reality and gravity of the problem. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* presents the inner drama of Saru that has a lot to do with the past. Hence narration is introspective sliding across the past and the present through effective "quick cuts." Occasionally, Shashi Deshpande sidetracks into a bit of philosophizing on human life, grief, happiness, pain, man's aloneness and so on, and these digressions make the novel a bit too wordy. She never leaves anything unsaid to evoke rich suggestions. Some Indian elements like the son's importance in the family, girls getting importance only during haldi-kumkums, a woman possessed by Devi, find a natural place in the novel that deals with a woman's status and the dichotomy within her personality.

2.4.4 **THAT LONG SILENCE**

*That Long Silence*\(^{31}\), this Sahitya Academy award-winning novel tells a haunting tale of how Jaya, who is disillusioned with her marriage and her life, rediscovers herself.
Who is Jaya? She is Mohan's wife. She is Rahul's and Rati's mother. She was a writer who had given up serious writing, and had taken up writing a weekly column on Seeta, a plump, good-humoured, pea brained but shrewd and devious woman. Deshpande's Jaya was a woman who did not ask questions, because she had learnt early in her life that when women ask questions - particularly questions like, "Why, why this injustice?" they would simply hang heavily around in the air, refusing to go away, causing eyebrows around her to raise at her audacity in asking such questions. Jaya was related to mad Kusum who had killed herself by jumping into a well, and had died not by drowning but of broken neck as there was no water in the well. Jaya was sure of her sanity as long as Kusum had lived, because if Kusum was mad, then Jaya must have been "normal". After Kusum's suicide, Jaya does not know any more who she is. Is she just Mohan's wife who had fragmented herself, who had cut off the bits that had refused to be Mohan's wife? (15-16)

Is she like the sparrow in the bedtime story of the wise sparrow and the foolish crow, which she had heard as a kid? That story goes like this: There was a foolish crow who built his house of dung, and a wise sparrow who built hers of wax.... And when it rained, the house of wax stood firm, while the crow's house was washed away. And so the story goes on, the foolish credulous crow standing out there in the rain, begging to be let in, while Sister Sparrow spins out her excuses...till finally she says, "Come in, you're all wet aren't you, poor fellow?" And she points to the pan on which she has just made the chapatties. "Warm yourself there," she says. And the silly crow hops on to it and is burnt to death.
Deshpande uses this story to paint vividly how the life of a woman like Jaya is. She says that their life's basis can be summarized as, "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out of the rest of the world, and you're safe." For all outside appearances hers was a happy family, her husband was in a top position, they had two children - one boy and one girl - and she was yet another wife and mother whose life centered around her family and her home - nothing more. (15-16)

Jaya's character in this novel is a magnificent creation. Deshpande has portrayed brilliantly the loneliness of a woman living silently in a cage called marriage. Like a film running in reverse, the story of Jaya is unfolded for the readers. It is a film in which blame cannot be pointed at any single character for the despair that seeps through the many layers of the story. If at all there is any blame, it is collective in nature, and all the characters - Jaya's mother, father, uncles, aunts, grand mothers, husband, children, and most significantly Jaya herself - are responsible for the silence that pervades Jaya's life. The reason why this novel is like a breath of fresh air among writings with similar theme is its ending. Contrary to expectation, Jaya, armed with her new knowledge, does not turn her back to her marriage. Instead, she marches ahead with renewed vigour to breathe new life into it. According to Jaya discovering one's self does not mean to stand aloof from the rest of the world. Deshpande says through this novel that the solution to problems within relationships does not lie in walking away from them, but rather in rebuilding the relationships in such a way as to give little place for problems to crop up.
2.4.5 **THE BINDING VINE**

*The Binding Vine* was published in India by Penguin in 1992 (republished in 1998), and nearly a decade later it is published in USA by the Feminist Press.

*The Binding Vine* is the story of Urmi. Urmi the mother who has just lost her baby daughter, Urmi the childhood friend (and sister-in-law) of Vanaa, Urmi the daughter of the beautiful Inni and grand daughter of the beloved Baiajji and Urmi the one comforting light in the life of Shakutai.

The narrator in *The Binding Vine* is the clever, sharp — tongued Urmi, grieving over the death of her baby daughter and surrounded by, but rebuffing, the care of her mother and her childhood friend, Vanaa. Instead, she becomes caught up in the discovery of her long-dead mother — in —law’s poetry, written when she was a young woman subjected to rape in her marriage; and in Kalpana, a young woman hanging between life and death in a hospital ward, also the victim of rape. Yet in this web of loss and despair are the glimmerings of hope. Shashi Deshpande explores with compassion the redemptive powers of love.

The novel begins just after Anu's, Urmi's baby girl's death. Everybody around Urmi tries to help her, yet nobody knows how to. Vanaa, who has been her closest friend, stays at her side constantly, reminding her of many incidences from their common past, hoping to get Urmi out of her despair. It is not that Vanaa thinks that reminding Urmi of her courage when she fell off a bicycle will now give her courage
to face Anu's loss. Vanaa too is desperate, and wants to help Urmi. In fact it is through Vanaa's reminiscencing about Mira that Urmi's healing process begins. Urmi gets Mira's poems out of the trunk, which had sat for decades in the attic, gathering dust, and starts reading them. It is while reading these poems written by a college going teenager Mira, who was married off to a man whom she could not love, that Urmi realises the various facets of pain that many a woman has to bear. Very often silently. Mostly without having any option. 

The healing process which begins by reading Mira's poems continues when Urmi accidentally meets Shakutai in the hospital where Vanaa works as a medical social worker. Shakutai's eldest daughter Kalpana has been brought to the hospital after she was brutally beaten up and raped. Urmi feels compelled to help Shakutai, to listen to her, to keep her company. During the long wait in which Kalpana lies in coma, Urmi makes a bold, modern, and a very humanistic statement in that she tries to convince Shakutai that it was not Kalpana who did anything wrong, it is not that she invited trouble upon herself by dressing up, by painting her lips and nails, but it is Kalpana who is terribly wronged. For a long time Urmi herself does not understand her need to come and sit with Shakutai, whose world is so very different from her own.

It is when Shakutai asks her repeatedly, 'What shall I do, Urmila?' - mirroring her own anguished cry of how she would survive Anu's death - , that Urmi thinks of the awesome courage of the few who tried to find an answer to such questions. She thinks that detachment, love, brotherhood, non-violence - they're just words. We
are absorbed in the daily routine of living, that the main urge is always to survive. And as Mira once wrote: "Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me, I am terrified by the thought of dying, of ceasing to be" the main urge human beings have is always to survive, and in surviving one looks for the spring of life, one constantly searches for love, for support from other human beings.\textsuperscript{34}

As much as \textit{The Binding Vine} is the story of Urmi, it is also the story of Mira, and of Shakutai. Mira is the binding vine between Urmi and Vanaa. Vanaa's father's first wife, she died giving birth to Kishore, Urmi's husband. Writing poetry was for Mira not only a way of finding solace in her life but also a way of protesting against the way society works. When during the marriage, her name is changed to Nirmala, a protest arises in Mira at the loss of her identity.

And then again Mira is the symbol of the relationship between daughters and mothers, all over the world. She has one question she desperately wanted to ask her mother, a question she never asked: "Mother, why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despair of your own?"\textsuperscript{35}

Then we have a sub-plot in the novel. Shakutai, an attendant at a school, is raising her three children all alone. Her elder daughter Kalpana has been raped, brutally beaten up, and is lying in coma in the hospital. Shakutai is torn between her motherly feelings for Kalpana, and at the same time is afraid of the dishonour this incident would bring to the family. Once she says, 'She was a good girl, I swear to you, my Kalpana was a good girl.' At other times she talks as if the girl is to blame for what happened to her. (That) it is her fault, that she was stubborn, she was self-
willed, she dressed up, she painted her lips and nails and so this happened to her. Shakutai mirrors millions of women in India who are torn between genuine love for their children and at the same time are ruled by the ever present scepter of family honour.

Urmila draws society’s attention to her protest, and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. Urmila is seen, at the end of the novel, recollecting the bonds of love that provide the “Springs of Life” (203) for human survival. She is not a rebel against the system because she believes that things are gradually improving though at a slow pace.

For example, with just four lines of Mira’s poetry,

But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too

twist brocade tassels round her fingers

and tremble, fearing the coming

of the dark-clouded, engulfing night?36

Deshpande does not just open up a rich world of Indian traditions and mythology but she also shows the anguish felt by an unwilling wife who knows what the coming of the night inevitably brings for her.

Similar to her other early novels, the world Deshpande depicts here is mainly a women’s world. It is not that men are totally absent, but their presence is primarily
felt by the power they wield over their wives, their daughters. It is a world in which women suffer numerous kinds of losses, and have to learn to cope with these losses.

The Binding Vine occupies a special niche amongst Deshpande's works. It is the only novel in which the author has used poems - beautiful ones - to tell a story of marital discordance, to paint a picture of traditions in India, and to raise a voice of protest against the ways of the society.37

The Binding Vine is a book in which Deshpande opens up new worlds, erects bridges between modern and ancient India, with few lines of poetry.38

2.4.6 A MATTER OF TIME

Women's lives in India, their problems, and the domestic sphere have been consuming themes of most of Deshpande's work. A Matter of Time, first published in India in 1996, re-emphasizes Deshpande's passion for these issues as she weaves a simple, ingenuous tale of the contradictions of male ambivalence and cruelty, female stoicism and shame, and human desire and desertion.

Set in present-day Karnataka, A Matter of Time39 explores the intricate relationships within an extended family, encompassing three generations of men and women. At the heart of the novel is eighteen-year-old Aru, struggling to understand her father's 'desertion' and her mother's 'indifference', and in the course of a few turbulent months, forging entirely unexpected relationships that are destined to change the course of her life...40
Sumi the main woman character of the novel is different from the women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's earlier novels. Sumi is gradually emancipating herself as a new and independent woman who has evolved from utter desolation and bitterness linked with invisible chains of patriarchal pressure and family responsibilities. Gopal's desertion makes her experience the trauma of a deserted wife and the anguish of an isolated partner.

When Gopal walks out on her for reasons even he cannot articulate, Sumi returns with their three daughters, Aru, Charu and Seema, to the shelter of the Big House, where her parents, Kalyani and Shripati, live in a strange silence: they have not spoken to each other in the last thirty-five years. As the mystery of this long silence is unravelled, a horrifying story of loss and agony is laid bare, a story that seems to be repeating itself in Sumi's life...

The lives of three generations of women living in their family home, "the Big House," seem to be ruled by similar patterns of destiny. In fact, destiny is the word of choice of one of the central characters, the grandmother with a loving heart whose sharp tongue masks the pain of past scandals and secrets. Deshpande crafts a suspenseful story about why Kalyani was forced into an arranged marriage with her maternal uncle Shripati, and about the tragedy that led Shripati to desert his wife. Shripati returns to live in an isolated room in the Big House, but ceases talking to Kalyani. No wonder, then, thirty-five years later, Kalyani is devastated by another man's desertion-this time that of her son-in-law, Gopal, who walks out on her
daughter, Sumi, and away from a much-coveted job to find an answer to life's emptiness. 41

This inexplicable act sets in motion a process of change, a fulfillment of destiny, and an unravelling of age-old secrets harboured by the extended family. Sumi returns to the Big House with her three daughters, just as her mother, Kalyani, had done with her own daughters years before. The Big House, the only enduring witness of the ever-turning wheel of karma, is always ready to enfold the "victims" in its cavernous bosom.

Although Deshpande's description of the gardens of the Big House is sensuous, she shies away from letting her characters examine their intimate relationships with each other. They are more comfortable solving psychological conundrums than unravelling the sexual tensions that lurk, underscoring the taboo nature of the subjects of sex and the sensuous in modern Indian society. A Matter of Time, instead, dwells on the seeming vagaries of destiny, or time. Melodrama often interrupts the commonplace, and Deshpande's heroines find ways to support each other in the shifting sands of pain and pleasure, and to re-establish their dominance over domestic terrain. They do not remain victims, despite their unquestioning acceptance of male flight from the family. And the men are transformed from betrayers into objects of self-pity, trapped in a morass of human flaws and psychic distress. 42
Most of Deshpande's heroines, even as they overcome familial obstacles, rarely stray out of the domestic arena. For a while, Sumi seems to be succeeding in gaining a small degree of personal independence. She starts teaching, writes a play that earns plaudits, and even learns to drive a scooter, in a land where few women are seen in the driver's seat. But how far will Sumi's destiny allow her to go? And is it just a matter of time before another generation of women repeats the family history? Deshpande, one of India's critically acclaimed, award-winning writers, deftly lets her characters alternate between the first-person voice when delineating the present, to the third-person narrative when outlining the past. The story is enriched by mythological analogies and words and idioms from the Indian languages of Kannada and Marathi.

Does man's destiny change when he engages in a bewildering search for life's meaning? Can a woman's ambivalent attempt to clear self-doubt transform her destiny? Shashi Deshpande raises these age-old questions in her book *A Matter of Time* about women whose lives are dominated by the shame and guilt caused by the actions of their spouses.

2.4.7 SMALL REMEDIES

*Small Remedies* is another great novel Shashi Deshpande has written since *That Long Silence* for which she won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1988. Each of her novels is special and offers food for thought on human relationships and emotions. Deshpande is a master writer in the way she articulates human emotions, the fears
and feelings experienced by humans, by women. Reading her books is like peeping into the hidden corners of one's own mind. Recognizing oneself in her characters, one does not feel lonely in the world anymore. Reading her novels and stories is thus an immensely satisfying experience, as reading becomes a healing process.  

*Small Remedies* is the story of Madhu, a lonely daughter, a sensitive and capable woman, a very vulnerable wife and mother. It is the story of Madhu, who, faced the terrible vacuum caused by the death of Adit, her only son, sets out on a long and lonely journey in her attempt to come to terms with her loss. Madhu's healing process occurs when she is confronted with the lives of two other women, both brave in their own ways. One is, Savitribai Indorekar, a star singer of the Gwalior gharana, a singer who wrote headlines not only through her music but also through the way she lived her life. The other one is Leela, Madhu's aunt, with whom she had spent her youth and adulthood.

Accepting the offer made by Chandru, a family friend, Madhu takes a brave step out of her desperate situation, and comes to Bhavanipur to write the biography of Savitribai. In talking to Savitribai, she hopes to forget her despair and anguish. She knew Savitribai from her childhood, when the musician had moved into the house next door, with her lover and tabalaji, Ghulam Saab, and their only daughter, Munni. Savitribai, a daughter-in-law from a respected and conservative brahmin family, had given up that life to learn music to devote herself to this art. That Munni rejects the name given to her by her parents and calls herself Meenakshi is just symptomatic of her rejection of the life led by her parents and her yearning for
respectability. Madhu and Munni become friends. Munni enchants and rules Madhu. Later Munni succeeds in breaking the umbilical cord, returns to her grandparents' family, and finally gets a new identity as Shailaja Joshi. Much later when Madhu meets Munni in Mumbai in a bus, Munni does not want to recognize her, and does not want to be recognized as Munni. She had obviously tried to make a clean break from her past. Madhu is perplexed when she is confronted with the fact that it was not just the daughter who denies the mother, the mother too has forgotten about her only daughter, at least apparently. Listening to Bai, Madhu wonders how one can reject one's own child, and one's own mother. She realizes that "Bai lost her daughter, but her life moved on. Even today, sick, old, dying, childless, when everything seems to have ended for her, she's not wholly bereft."

Madhu realized the special sort of woman her aunt Leela was on listening to Hari and Lata, Hari's wife, with whom she is staying in Bhavanipur. Madhu knows that Leela was the black sheep of the family. A widow who remarried. And, what was worse, infinitely worse, married a Christian man, Joe. But she thinks of Leela mainly as a kind and loving aunt, "who took me into her home (after my father died) and was always with me after that." Hari (whose grand mother was one of Leela's sisters) thinks of Leela as an extraordinary woman, as a woman who participated in the '42 Quit India movement, who went underground, who was responsible for many daring deeds. Now Madhu understands that both Savitribai Indorekar, and Leela had tried to break out of the shackles, but they paid the price for their attempts to break out.46
It is trying to unravel the mystery of who the real Savitribai Indorekar is - is she just the star musician, is she the brave brahmin woman who dared to leave her traditional home and go after her dreams? Is she the unfortunate mother who rejected her own daughter and was rejected by the same? Madhu understands that truth is something beyond the words by which one tries to portray it. Her attempt at writing the biography tells her how little the idea of truth is connected with words, how much of it lies in our connections to the unseen world, and that whether we know it or not, we are always conscious of. It is then that she understands how wrong it was of her to tell Som, her husband, what had happened to her as a fifteen year old girl, when an uncontrollable impulse had made her body respond to the comforting hug of a friend of her father. Sharing the memory of this one incident in which she had sex with a man who was old enough to be her father, an incident which drove the man to hang himself, Madhu realises what a blow she had given to Som's image of her as a chaste and untouched person. And she sees her loving, generous and kind husband turn into a savage, haunted and haunting one. It was one such endless scene between them when Som was punishing her (or was it Madhu herself who was punishing herself) that Adit walks into the room trying to find out what was happening between his parents. On being told, "Go away, Adit", he goes away, never to return. It was the time in which Mumbai was rocked with religious violence. A bomb placed in a bus blows up Adit and Munni to smithereens. The pages describing the uncertainty of where her son is, the waiting for him through the violence ridden days, Madhu's search for him on the crowded streets of
the city even when Som tries to tell her that Adit is dead, and her final acceptance of
the inevitable truth are some of the most poignant scenes in Indian literature. 47

Madhu's wound starts healing finally, when she meets a young family celebrating a
upanayanam ceremony in a very simple manner in the Bhavani temple in
Bhavanipur, and later when in the same temple she listens to an all night music
performance by Hasina. On being asked by the mother to bless the small boy,
Madhu thinks:

May you live long. But what blessing can contend against
our mortality? Mustard seeds to protect us from evil,
blessings to confer long life - nothing works. And yet we go
on. Simple remedies? No, they're desperate remedies and
we go on with them because, in truth, there is nothing
else. 48

'Sukhi bhava", she says, finally, to the child. It is as if she realises that all the
remedies one thinks of using are too tiny, minutely small, when confronted with the
enormous size of the diseases they are supposed to cure and to heal.

The healing process is accentuated when Hasina, Bai's student for the past fifteen
years and her lone companion, gives a concert in the temple in Bhavanipur.
Returning home after the concert Madhu finds a letter from Som waiting for her.
Som has said, "Come home. We need to be together at this time." Madhu knows
that this is how it should be. That she should be with Som, that they have to recreate
their son, to invoke his presence and make his existence real. Because, it's not just living children who need to be free, the dead clamour for release as well. Madhu then understands that memory, capricious and unreliable though it is, ultimately carries its own truth within it. That as long as there is memory, there's always the possibility of retrieval, as long as there is memory, loss is never total. It is a great and definite step towards the healing process.49

It is not only in these details, in these meditative moments which heal that Small Remedies carries the unmistakable stamp of being the work of Shashi Deshpande. Like Indu in Roots and Shadows, Jaya in That Long Silence, and Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Madhu also leaves the home in which she has lived since her marriage, and tries to solve her problems on her own. Similar to the earlier novels Roots and Shadows and The Dark Holds No Terrors, here also it is death that draws the final stroke. It reveals the vulnerability of human existence, of human relationships. That final blow comes in a sense as a release from a cozy and foggy existence, and sets Madhu on the search for answers to her eternal questions. It is also the first step towards realizing that any healing process has to start within one's own self, that no keeping of Ganeshas in niches, no waving of clenched fists holding mustard seeds, no muttering of incantations can help to heal the wound, to ward off the evil. The speciality of Deshpande's philosophy is that though each individual has to solve his problems on his own, it does not mean that he has to reject all relationships in life. Her protagonists need to be on their own to come to terms with life, but once they have achieved that, they return to their normal life, fortified by their newly found wisdom. Madhu also returns at the end to her husband, Som.50
There is also a tension in the book, the kind to which one is accustomed to when reading Deshpande. The plot is never revealed at once, and more questions are posed than answered. This lends such tautness to the story line that one can hardly put down the book without finishing it, neither can one read it at a stretch, as there is so much to understand, to digest, to savour.

It is the hallmark of Deshpande's characters that whatever happens in their lives, her protagonists do not lose hope, and learn to survive finally. Against all odds, suffering and pain seem to be the necessary steps one has to take so as to be able to develop one's self, one's individuality. Deshpande's women are no stereotypes, no exotic, dusky Indian women, but they are individuals who have been baptized in fire.

With total control over her unwieldy material, she weaves a fabric of intricate design in this novel in which music forms the organizing strand. At the centre of the sprawling narrative is a woman called Madhu Saptarishi engaged in writing the biography of the singer Savitribai Indorekar, a living legend of the Gwalior gharana.

However, there is a recurring motif in many of her books - death as a factor which finally liberates, or in general, darkness of the unknown which finally transforms itself into light. This liberation comes from within. It was so with Indu in Roots and Shadows, Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Urmi in The Binding Vine, and it is also true of Madhu in Small Remedies. It is as if all of these characters needed a
strong kick to be shaken out of their placid existences to discover the stuff they were actually made of.

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists also change a lot when they marry, losing part of their identity and self-confidence. This happened in the case of all her main protagonists like Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Urmi in *The Binding Vine*, Madhu in *Small Remedies* and Sumi in *A Matter of Time*. But all of them end up becoming complete human beings. In other words, her main characters have an incredible inner strength. None of them give up, none of them are failures at the end. These characters are particularly impressing because they contradict the popular saying that women are weak.

The basic point which all the women protagonists share needs to be highlighted: they all are ultimately appendages to men. Though in the beginning, they question the social mores, yet due to their emotional pull towards the traditions, they finally try their best to conform to their roles.  

2.5 CONCLUSION

The basic theme around which the plots of Shashi Deshpande's novels revolve is a middle-class educated woman caught between the modern trends and the traditional practices. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu, a young ambitious girl, working for women's magazines, is confused about her concept of love, marriage, career and her own life. She marries for love but is herself not sure whether it is real love or just an attempt to show the elder people how correct she was in taking a decision for herself. The
novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* analyzes the complex relationship between a successful doctor, Sarita (Saru), and her professionally frustrated and irritated husband. Just because the wife has a better job, there is a very obvious tension between them, that subsequently leads them to separate from each other. In the novel *That Long Silence*, Jaya, the protagonist, is so much confused about the whole set up and the happenings around that she finds no other way but silence as her means of communication.

In the later three novels, *The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies*, Shashi Deshpande gives an insight into the middle class Indian women who feel oppressed and hemmed in by their patriarchal influence and socialization. Here she tries to provide new ideals for better man-woman relationship, and bring about a balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman. She tries to show through the characters of Sumi in *A Matter of Time* and Urmi in *The Binding Vine*; and the characters of Madhu, Savitribai Indorekar and aunt Leela in *Small Remedies* that modernity is the assertion of the independent individual identity. After having passively played out their socially ordained roles her protagonists move out of their cocooned cloistered selves to assert their individuality as women with empowerment.

In these novels, it is notable that the men characters are not very expressive. Perhaps Shashi Deshpande wanted to highlight the problems of women more than the attitude of the men folk. These men keep silent about the issues and, at the same time, they expect submissiveness from their spouses. Without mentioning and
discussing the matters, they take for granted that the women will follow them. For example, in *That Long Silence*, Mohan, Jaya's husband, takes it for granted that Jaya is going to follow his decision. When caught in malpractice, he makes the wife and children responsible for it, showing that he cares for them so much that he went out of his way to get things done: "I've always put you and the children first." (12) Mohan explains to assume Jaya's company with him but he never looks into her demands and neither does she communicate anything directly to Mohan and hence there always remains a gap between husband and wife and silence prevails in the house. 52

The narration, in all the novels, shifts from present to the past covering the whole life span of the protagonists. All the time they are brooding over their fate, questioning themselves what they really are and ultimately trying to adapt themselves to the surroundings. The novels end with an optimistic note with the hope of some positive action in the future. For example, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* waits for her husband to come to take her back and start their life afresh; Indu in *Roots and Shadows* plans to go back to her husband and tell him everything about herself, and Jaya in *That Long Silence* interprets Mohan's letter in positive terms and hopes for the better. 53

The six women protagonists — Indu, Saru, Jaya, Urmila, Sumi and Madhu — find themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by the society and attempt to assert their individuality.
Chapter II


7. Ibid., p. 20.


11. Ibid., pp. 53 – 64.

12. Ibid., pp. 53 – 64.


15. Ibid., pp. 136 – 152.


18. Ibid., pp. 136 – 240.


21. Ibid., pp. 113 – 120.


23. Shashi Deshpande, Roots and Shadows (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1983), Subsequent page references are parenthesized in this thesis.

24. Ibid., p. 21.


26. Ibid., pp. 27-35.

27. Ibid., pp. 27-40.


30. Ibid., pp. 19-25.


36. Ibid., pp. 66-72.

37. Ibid., pp. 66-72.

38. Ibid., pp. 66-72.


41. Ibid., pp. 13-17.

42. Ibid., pp. 13-17.

44. Shashi Deshpande, Small Remedies (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000),
    subsequent page references to this edition are parenthesized in this thesis.


46. Ibid., Review of, Small Remedies, from the Internet 27 June 2003.

47. Ibid., Review of, Small Remedies, from the Internet 27 June 2003.


50. Ibid., Review of, Small Remedies, from the Internet 27 June 2003.

51. Sarla Palkar, ‘Breaking the Silence: Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence,’
    Indian Women Novelists ed. R.K. Dhawan Set. 1, Vol. V. (New Delhi:

52. Tapan Basu, ‘Review of That Long Silence,’ Joining a Select Club No. 8- 14

53. Sarla Palkar, pp. 169-175.