CHAPTER – IV

Women Characters in the Later Novels of Shashi Deshpande

4.1 The Later Novels of Shashi Deshpande

4.2.1 The Binding Vine

4.2.2 The Character of Urmilla in The Binding Vine

4.2.3 The Image of Woman in The Binding Vine

4.3.1 A Matter of Time

4.3.2 The Character of Sumi in A Matter of Time

4.3.3 The Image of Woman in A Matter of Time

4.4.1 Small Remedies

4.4.2 The Character of Madhu in Small Remedies

4.4.3 The Image of Woman in Small Remedies

4.5 Her Later Novels: Comment
CHAPTER – IV

WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE LATER NOVELS OF

SHASHI DESHPANDE

4.1 THE LATER NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

Shashi Deshpande holds great worth as an Indian English woman novelist. She has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of a woman. In her later novels, she has portrayed her protagonists as actually aware of their smothered and fettered existence in a male dominated society. The realistic delineation of woman as wife, mother and daughter and their search for identity and sexuality as well is revealed.

Her later novels discussed in this chapter are *The Binding Vine*, *A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies*. *The Binding Vine*, her fourth novel, deals with the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmi and focusses attention on victims like Kalpana and Mira – victims of man’s lust and woman’s helplessness. In her novel, *A Matter of Time*, Deshpande for the first time enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. It is about three women from three generations of the same family and the way they cope with the tragedy that overwhelms them. *Small Remedies*, her latest novel, is about Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing classical singer, who avoids marriage and
home to pursue her genius. It also unfolds Madhu’s story and that of her aunt Leela among other women characters.

4.2.1 **THE BINDING VINE**

*The Binding Vine* is about Urmi, an educated middle-class wife who is grieving over the death of her one-year-old daughter Anu, and in the process becomes very sensitive towards the sufferings and sorrows of other people as well. Had she not undergone such a personal loss, perhaps she wouldn’t have had any concern with the others. Thus her narrative comprises three tales – one about herself and the other two about Shakuntala, a rape-victim’s mother, and Urmi’s mother-in-law, Mira, a victim of marital rape.

The novel opens with Urmi grieving over her dead infant daughter. Although she tries to fight the loss, she feels that forgetting this loss would tantamount to betrayal. “This is one battle. I have to win if I am to go on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray.”(21) It is her intense attachment to her daughter that becomes the cause of her suffering.

In such an aggrieved state she happens to meet Shakuntala, mother of a rape-victim, Kalpana. She meets her in the hospital where her sister-in-law, Vanaa works. Kalpana is lying unconscious and her mother thinks that she has met with a car accident, however Kalpana has been brutally raped. Her mother Shakuntala’s reaction is that of a typical Indian mother bred in an oppressive male-dominated society. She tells Vanaa: “It’s not true, you people are trying to blackmail my
daughter’s name.”(58) Most Indian mothers would react in a similar way as they are concerned about their daughter’s marriage. The novelist has evocatively laid bare Shakuntala’s agony, anger, helplessness and fear. The character has been presented so realistically that it leaves a sense of *déjà vu* in the readers.²

Shakutai does not want a report to be lodged with the police. A victim of rape is a loser on two counts. First, she has been raped, secondly the society looks down upon such a victim as a *kulta* (a characterless woman) which leaves the victim in a much miserable plight.

Shashi Deshpande further reveals how the police conduct in such cases. The police officer registers the case as a mere accident to the great shock of Dr. Bhaskar, the doctor in charge.

Urmi wants justice to be done to Kalpana by bringing the culprit to book. She finds herself a lonely crusader in her fight. She gets the case reopened and with this the identity of the rapist is revealed who is no other than Prabhakar, Shakutai’s sister’s husband.

Yet another saga of misery, submission and sorrow is that of Urmi’s late mother-in-law, Mira. The novelist here ventures into a completely untouched subject of marital rape in Indian Writing in English. She has touched upon the subject in her earlier novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. In *The Binding Vine*, Mira has aversion to physical intimacy with her husband and still she has to put up with his obsession for her. She gives voice to her inner self in her poems “in the solitude of an unhappy
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It so happens that many years after her marriage, Urmì receives an old trunk full of books and a few other things from Mira’s husband’s stepmother, referred to as Akka. Among these books Urmì finds Mira’s diary which is “not a daily account of her routine life but a communion with herself.” (51) When Akka hands over Mira’s jewellery to Urmì, she says, “They are Kishore’s mother’s,” but while giving books and diaries to her, she says, “Take this, it’s Mira’s.”(48)

Urmì goes through the poems in Mira’s diary and gets a glimpse of her troubled marriage. She comes to know from Akka how Kishore’s father had pursued and married Mira, a college student. The poems and entries in the diary are proof enough for Urmì to conceive the forced sexual activity Mira had to undergo in an incompatible marriage.

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

Thus, Shashi Deshpande has presented Urmìla as a chaste wife whose sympathy for the less fortunate women is sparked off by her daughter’s death. Despite her longings and frustrations, Urmìla is not a radical feminist but one who, tries to...
make the best of her life by hardening to face the harsh realities of life. Besides Deshpande has taken a bold step forward by exploring the working women’s needs of the head, heart and the anatomy.

4.2.2 THE CHARACTER OF URMILA IN THE BINDING VINE

The long silence that had become the hallmark of woman’s existence is broken by Urmila, the protagonist of The Binding Vine. The earlier women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande have already begun to question their roles, functions, attitudes and even behaviour. They have realized that they have to unshackle themselves from the chains of bondages which have chained these women’s rights for centuries. They are aware that the age-old societal norms and their preordained roles have subjected them to severe suffocation and humiliation. They finally succeed in knowing about themselves but only within the limited purview of their own lives. In a way these women have no interest to raise their feelings as modern feminists do with the capacity to purge society of its evils and blaze forth in a trail of glory.

Urmila of The Binding Vine is one who is ahead of her predecessors by her endeavors to help other women. Often referred to as Urmi, she is an upper middle class career woman. She is also a grieving mother who has recently lost her one year-old baby daughter, Anu, and consequently has become highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. It is this sensitivity which leads her to befriend the helpless Shakutai, whose daughter Kalpana lies in comatose state in a hospital after being brutally raped. The mutual support and sympathy between Urmila and
Shakutai in coming to terms with each other's grief is remarkable. Normally Urmila’s meeting with Shakutai would not have happened as Shakutai belongs to a different strata of society. It is the same sensitivity which also makes her delve into the poems of Mira, her long dead mother-in-law and understand the mind of the young Mira who is subjected to rape in her marriage. In spite of the best efforts made by her friend cum sister-in-law Vanna, and Inni, her own mother, to bring grieving Urmila back to normal life, Urmila seems to be taking her own time to cope with the untimely loss of her daughter all by herself.⁴

Mira’s poems and diaries engage her attention. Through her diaries Urmila establishes a communion with her and tries to reconstruct the tragic tale of a sprightly girl, who suffered and wrote poems. Mira becomes a symbol of female oppression. Urmila understands that Mira was a favorite daughter of her father who was obviously proud of her intelligence and talent which made him present Mira a book of poetry. Urmila also understands that Mira had a deep desire of being recognized as a good creative writer and a poet, but for her fear of being laughed at her creative expression. Her questioning, anxiety and uncertainty are all felt in her heart, and her poems are the true reflections of her latent feelings.

Mira’s writing reflects the extent of forced sexual activity resulting in rape in her marriage. Perhaps her situation reflects the mute suffering of many such unfortunate women. In the words of Adrienne Rich, 'it is not rape of the body alone but rape of the mind as well.'⁵ Mira dies in childbirth after four years of a loveless
Every day and every moment that she spends, there is a cry of rape and anguish. These feelings run all through her writing. To her sex becomes something like the sting of a scorpion to be borne by women in silence. In one of her poems, Mira laments:

But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels round her fingers and tremble, fearing the coming of the dark clouded, engulfing night? (66)

Utterly lonely, Mira lives in that alien house whose inmates treat her as a mad woman. Urmila is confident that she understands Mira, her plight, her suffering and every flicker of her emotion. She confesses:

I've worked hard at knowing Mira, I've read her diaries, gone through her papers, absorbed her poems, painfully, laboriously translated them into English. And now, I tell myself, I know Mira.

(174)

Urmila understands that even as a child Mira has hated the way her mother has been surrendering herself to her husband. She opposes every inch of her mother's advice, who says, "never utter a no; submit and your life will be a paradise." (83) Urmila knows that the life which seems terrible to Mira is normal to most women of her time. But Mira is not an ordinary woman. Urmila wonders how Mira could survive a life denied of choices and freedom and living with a man whom she could
not love and other people with whom she had nothing in common to share with. She thinks that "perhaps it was her writing that kept her going that kept her alive."(127)

Even in the midst of vulnerable pain and fear of being trapped forever, Mira is aware of the new-found love for her unborn child. But Mira is unfortunate even in this – she dies in childbirth "...having bled to death within an hour after her child was born."(136)

Thus Mira stands as a classic example of the multitude of unfortunate women who are forced into a loveless marriage and finally succumb to the lust of their husbands. Urmila’s involvement with Shakutai, her sister and daughter bring to light the manner in which the stamp of the traditional culture is operative in the sexual disparities between men and women of the lower class.6

Urmila, to her surprise, realizes how social approval undermines the sympathy of the mother for her daughter. The mother like the rest of the society blames her daughter for her hopeless state. Shakutai has been abandoned by her husband for another woman yet, she is extremely anxious to get Kalpana settled. Mira too was a victim of physical abuse years ago, but the mother did not dare to defy the norms of society. Mira’s mother too kept silent and stood helpless at the misery of her daughter.7
Shakutai hovers over the family name. If a girl is raped, for no fault of hers, she alone is censured, and victimized. Urmila is shocked to find that every one wants to hush up a rape case, and in the process the rapist is able to get away scot free.

Though Urmila is filled with all sympathies for Kalpana, she is unable to do anything. In a way, she remains a mute spectator. Shakutai even wishes for her daughter’s death. She says “but sometimes I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is death.”(178)

Urmila’s crusade for helping Kalpana does not receive the approval even at her home. So far the protagonists in the earlier novels of Shashi Deshpande have fought their own battles. Urmila is Shashi Deshpande’s first protagonist who decides to fight another woman’s battle. She succeeds in annulling the transfer of Kalpana to another hospital. Back at her home, Urmila’s friend Vanaa and her mother Inni cannot understand her deep involvement with the girl. Finally, Urmila presents Kalpana’s case in the press. Initially resentful, Shakutai now seems to be slowly realizing the enormity of the situation.⁸

Shakutai’s morality is overwhelmed at the demonstration and tides of protest from women folk. Later, the police investigation reveals the rapist to be Kalpana’s uncle Prabhakar. If marriage is the only means of security for people like Shakutai, Mira and Sulu are women who are physically vulnerable even within the secure structure of marriage. Urmila learns from Shakutai that Sulu always lived in constant terror
of being thrown out of her house because she cannot have children. Urmila’s accusation of her mother for leaving her with her grandparents in her childhood shows how Indian women are subjected to domination by their husbands. Urmila’s mother explains to her daughter that it was her father and not she who had sent her away, for he did not trust his wife in matters relating to childcare.

Urmila is aware that women at different levels irrespective of their social backgrounds are given a raw deal. Urmila is furious at the way even educated women submit themselves to safeguard their marriage. Vanaa’s constant repetition of “Harish says” irritates Urmila and she reprimands Vanaa “Assert yourself; you don’t have to crawl before him, do you”? (80)

As Urmila observes, the common idea of holding the mother to be solely responsible for taking care of the children has remained the same without any new signs of change. The unfairness deep-rooted in Indian society towards women is revealed when Akka is made to marry a widower with a child, only to give his son a mother. Stories like this are only a tip of an iceberg that describe the fate of many women who are made to accept marriage under the pressure of societal norms. To those women, marriage is the only goal in the life of a girl and the most difficult task on earth is to find a groom.
Acquaintance with Shakutai provides an opportunity for Urmila to have a glimpse at the lives of women living in the slums. In spite of her doing all kinds of work to support her family, her husband deceives her for another woman.

Inspite of bearing the burden of such a worthless husband and struggling all alone to find a good life for her children, Shakutai’s name is always mentioned if something in the family goes wrong.

As Urmila understands from the lives of Shakutai and Sulu, absence of security in marriage haunts them. Urmila understands how self-confidence of a vivacious girl can be shattered by the institution of marriage which transforms her into a nervous woman. Shanthi Sivaraman observes, “Urmi is different,...wants to assert herself and not crawl before a man.”

Urmila is of the opinion that marriage is a necessity for women and especially for women like Shakutai, marriage means security. At the same time Urmi’s own marriage to a man of choice whom she knew from childhood has incompatibility springing mainly from Kishore’s withdrawing nature. When Vanaa her sister-in-law advises her to be more careful about her relationship with Dr. Bhasker, Urmila thinks: 12

But how can Vanaa, secure in the fortress of her marriage to Harish, understand, what it is like-marriage with a man who flits into my life
a few months in a year and flits out again, leaving nothing of himself behind? (164)

Long separation from her husband gives her an opportunity to think of another relationship and sometimes she overcomes a longing for physical gratification during her husband’s long absence from her. Dr. Bhasker has declared his love for her, and though Urmila perilously comes close to respond to Bhasker, she just holds back and thinks: “It’s so much easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue and chastity and being a good wife.”(166)

To Urmila, happiness in her marriage was magical, while to her mother it meant a constant pre-occupation with her husband’s feelings. It is this marital bond that makes Urmila reject Bhasker’s overtures – a decision which could not be taken so firmly by Shashi Deshpande’s other protagonists like Indu, Saru and Jaya. Urmila never dares to overstep the boundaries chalked out in the system of marriage. Whether this virtue will be ever acknowledged by the husband or not, it goes unsaid. Urmila loves her husband so dearly that when Dr. Bhasker asks her whether she loves him, Urmila confesses, “I love my husband and therefore, I am an inviolate.”13 (165)

Urmila may be educated and exposed to Western ideas but nowhere does she show that she agrees with Simone De Beauvoir’s belief that marriage diminishes man but almost always it annihilates woman. Besides, Urmila is able to see the contrast
between her life and the terrible life that these other women have been forced to lead.\textsuperscript{14}

While Kalpana’s mother moans, “Why does God give us daughters...?”\textsuperscript{(60)} To Urmila, who is mourning the recent death of her infant daughter Anu, the thought is jarring: “We dream so much more for our daughters than we do for our sons, we want to give then the world we dreamt of for ourselves.”\textsuperscript{(124)}

When he was dying of cancer Urmi’s father begs for her forgiveness for leaving her at Ranidurg when she was young. Having lost her daughter, Urmila now realizes that she too is not free from the pangs of guilty conscience of whether or not she had been a good mother to Anu. Urmila is practical unlike her pseudo feminist friend Preeti who is over enthusiastic to fight for equal rights for women. To her, Preeti is a symbol of the shallow female opportunist without integrity.\textsuperscript{15} Preeti excitedly tells Urmila that a judge had delivered his judgment stating that a wife could not be forced to have physical relationship with her husband against her will. Soberly, Urmila reminds Preeti that one judgement by a single judge will not make any difference to all the womankind. As there are not many women who can appeal or file in a court of law in such matters. Preeti’s request for Mira’s story to make a film out of it is turned down by Urmila and this perhaps brings out Urmi’s moderation even in her feminism. She values the sanctity of womanhood and marriage.\textsuperscript{16}
Urmila does not exhibit male-hatredness. She has no desire to seek a world without men. She only wishes for a world where women are treated equal to men. Luckily for her, she finds like-minded male friends, one is Dr. Bhasker to whom Urmila is not just a wife of somebody but an individual with an identity of her own. He even falls in love with her impressed by her passion for truth and justice.17

Urmila understands that the relationship between her Papa and Inni, Vanaa and Harish, Vanaa and her daughters, Shakutai and Kalpana are all filled with love and compassion, but it does not prevent them from being cruel to each other, ignited by clashes of egos. Relationships can be wholesome only when the people themselves are whole. When the fates of Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu are considered, Urmila regains her courage. She decides to be content with her life with a hope that her husband Kishore will remove his armour of withdrawal one day and thus he could facilitate her to reach him.

Anu has gone but she still has her son Kartik. Urmila realizes that, however burdensome our ties are, however painful our experiences are, one can never give up.

Shashi Deshpande seems to be engaged in a constructive process of consciousness raising. Her object is to enable the more affluent women to share awareness of sexist’s experiences that create co-operation and pave the way for uniting people to find themselves with a strong cord of sisterhood. Urmila and Vanaa help each other
in their distress and suffering. Vanaa helps Urmila to come out of her emotional crisis. This novel is remarkable as it introduces the concept of female bonding. It depicts a woman who helps another woman who is less fortunate. This is a positive development for Urmila unlike the other protagonists. Urmila strongly believes that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society fearlessly. She is indignant at their uncomplaining attitude in the name of family honour.\textsuperscript{18}

The need to express one’s feelings and the need to be heard by the society is an all-pervading urge for the present day women. If Indu of \textit{Roots and Shadows} and Jaya of \textit{That Long Silence} are fulfilled individuals, it is because both of them attempt to write, face resistance and find the strength to decide what they want to write. Unlike them, 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.\textsuperscript{19}

\subsection*{4.2.2 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE BINDING VINE}

This moving and exquisitely crafted novel renders visible the lives of three women who are haunted by fears, secrets, and deep grief but are bound together by strands
of life and hope of a binding vine of love, concern, and connection that spreads across chasms of time, social class, and even death.

Deshpande does not want to be seen as someone who writes about issues and problems - she is keen to point out that she is a writer of fiction. Her characters’ struggles are those of ordinary women fighting to be themselves rather than conforming to stereotypes - to a fixed idea of how women should be.

Urmı had spent her own childhood living with her grandparents and does not have a close relationship with her mother, nor with her husband who is often away. She is traumatized by the loss of her daughter and seems to be searching for love. 20

*The Binding Vine* deals with the multi-facetedness of its protagonist Urmı. Her one-year-old daughter has died and she is unable to forget her. She also realizes her responsibility to her living son Kartık who needs her love and watches her anxiously. It is not that she takes every death of her kith and kin in this way. When her father died she could bear the shock easily. She says that “Papa is only a memory, a gentle memory.” But Anu is different. When Inni wants to have a framed photograph of Anu on the wall, she reacts bitterly saying she does not need a picture to remember her daughter.

But when her friend Lalita asks how many kids she has, she replies, “Only one. A Son.” And soon she realizes that she has done injustice to Anu.
Obsessed with the memories of her daughter, she comes across a photograph of her mother-in-law Mira which is introduced as "Kishore’s mother, Kartik’s grandmother." Akka tells her that her brother saw Mira at a wedding and fell in love with her. Since then he had "single-minded pursuit of an object: marrying Mira". He was suggested as a good match for Mira and in this way the marriage was arranged. She died while giving birth to Kishore.21

Urmi notices the difference in handing over of Mira’s property to her. Little bits of Mira’s jewellery are given saying, "They are Kishore’s mother’s...." This shows that a woman loses her identity after marriage. She is seen either as a wife or mother which in a way erases her real self and imposes another alien self on her. When the books and diaries of Mira are given, Akka says,” Take this, it’s Mira’s.”(48) She did not mention Kishore at all. The difference made by Akka symbolizes that the poems and diaries are self-actualizing, whose identities are not dependent on husbands or any men.

After reading the poems, Urmi realizes the suffering of Mira. For the time-being she forgets her own suffering and tries to probe into Mira’s poetry to visualize the kind of troubled life she had lived. Taken together, the poems and the diary entries connote molestation in marriage.
Mira's loneliness was a part of her being. When she came to her in-law's house, she was christened Nirmala- the first estrangement from her identity, her own self. One of her poems is written in reaction to this horrible incident:

A glittering ring gliding on the rice
Carefully traced a name 'Nirmala'.....
Can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira. (101)

But this strong assertion remains a private experience, it never becomes public in her lifetime.22

Mira's diary also mentions her meeting with the rising poet Venu. When Mira gave some of her poems to read, he said, "Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men."(127) It shows the attitude of a male poet. It can also be seen as a kind of brutality, because "even to force your will upon another is to be brutal."(133) This reflects the agony of a creative woman in an androcentric world. It connotes the handicaps of women writers in a male chauvinist society.

Mira uses her pen as a weapon to save herself from abuse, anonymity and mutilation in the prison house of her husband. The poems of Mira haunt Urmi so much that she decides to resurrect her by publishing them. But Vanna is enraged. "It is as if the knowledge of what her father did, of what he was, has threatened something." (181) In fact, male-oriented societies nourish women in such a way that
they start looking at the world and interpreting it from male point of view. Urmi shares the anguish of not only her mother-in-law but also of Kalpana - a girl who becomes a prey to her own relative who molests her.

Though Urmi is accused of being a “traitor” to Mira and Kalpana by other women, she is resolute to break the silence of women which comes in different forms – sometimes in the name of social taboos, sometimes in the name of the family honour. She justifies her stand because she sees these mishaps from the female point of view.

Shashi Deshpande acts as a moderate Indian feminist writer who does not go to extremes. She knows that the “wails of anguish or thunder of curses or growls of anger do not by themselves turn into great literature.” It is significant that in the creative female world of Deshpande all men are not villains. For example, the husband of the protagonist Urmi is good to her and she is fully satisfied with him. But she realizes the responsibility to her own caste- the Stri Jati – and struggles to bring its truth before the society. This embodies the depth of the dimensions of personality of Deshpande’s heroine. Contrasted with the earlier protagonists Urmi is concerned with the redemption of her own caste.

Urmi’s effort to publicize the gruesome reality of Kalpana’s life is an effort to oppose a ‘culture in which such feminist dreams have been replaced by fundamental patriarchy that divides women into rigid categories based on function.’ Though not
free from the dangers of being treated as a propaganda literature, The Binding Vine occupies a significant place in the Indian feminist fiction. It succeeds in deconstructing the interior colonialism of which women have been victims.²⁵

4.3.1 A MATTER OF TIME

A Matter of Time deals with the human predicament of three women representing three generations of the same family. For the first time Deshpande makes a man the protagonist of the novel, but this has not led her to focusing entirely on the man. As usual she has given expression to women's pain, suffering and endurance in marriage.

The novel veers round an urban, middle-class family of Gopal and Sumi with their three daughters – Aru, Charu and Seema. It begins with Gopal entering the house and telling Sumi that he is leaving the house for good. Sumi is unable to react verbally. The next morning she tells it to her daughter, repeating Gopal's words in toto. She is so shocked with Gopal's action that she lapses into complete silence, trying simultaneously to keep things normal for her daughters. But they feel restless as "Sumi, despite her façade of normality, has about her – a kind of blankness – that makes them uneasy."(10-11)

Gopal's walking out on the family comes as a shock to the readers as well. They feel why Gopal married Sumi in the first place. Theirs is not an arranged one but a love marriage. Gopal asks himself: "Why did I marry Sumi? Because I met her – it's as simple as that."(65-66) Thus, the marriage is devoid of any initial romance, but is
the inevitable outcome of a matter-of-fact relationship. The contract was easy and its breach even easier. But their marriage cannot be said to be incompatible as their first physical consummation is fulfilling and gratifying to both. No tenable reason is assigned for Gopal’s desertion and the readers remain in the dark as to his motive behind his mindless act.

Kalyani, Sumi’s mother, decides to plead with Gopal to return home. Gopal assures her that Sumi is not at all responsible for his decision, but does not offer any other reason for the act. But Sumi feels hurt when her daughters blame her for Gopal’s act of desertion. Sumi, in fact, is trying to come to terms with the hard, painful reality, and expects her daughters also to do the same. Sumi’s sister, Premi, tries to elicit a tenable reason from Gopal, which proves futile. Later Premi comes to know from Aru and Charu that his students at the college had humiliated their father, which could have been the plausible reason for his resignation from his job. But it seems to be so facile an answer that the same is unacceptable to the readers. Perhaps, Gopal himself is not sure about the reasons behind his decisive act.26

Gopal’s sense of alienation and loneliness since his father’s unholy marriage to his brother’s wife remain so even after his marriage. Earlier also he felt himself like an outsider and even after marriage the feeling does not leave him:

I saw it when Sumi put the baby to her breast. […] when I looked at them, that they belonged together as I never did. […] they were together in a magic circle. Woman and child. And I was outside. A man is always an outsider (68).
The mother-son bond is so deep-rooted in a man’s psyche that it is nearly impossible to extricate oneself from it. When Shankar expresses his inability to protect his wife from his mother’s sharp tongue saying, “She gave me birth, she brought me up, she looked after me”, (216) Gopal reflects: “That’s a debt we can never repay, it’s a burden we can never lay down.”(216)

Gopal’s desertion is cause for great worry to Sumi’s mother, sister and cousin, but this sudden crisis in life brings out Sumi’s great inner strength and self-respecting, strong character. She stoically accepts the humiliation and disgrace of a deserted wife. She raises no fuss over it and lapses into a stone-like silence. Her self-respecting nature makes her refuse all monetary help from close relatives. She takes up a temporary teaching job to fend for herself and her daughters. Sumi proves that she is made of different stuff as she harbours no grudge against Gopal by setting him completely free to pursue his own purposes by asking Aru not to sue her father for maintainence. She even decides against putting pressure on Gopal to return home for her and for her daughters. Her daughters are also anxious if their father is dead or alive, but Sumi is sure about his being alive and pursuing his own goal.

The reunion of Gopal and Sumi is an unusual one. When he returns she neither cries to him nor abuses him nor does she ask him for any explanations. Everything is normal as Sumi enters the room and finds him having lunch and reading poems.

After lunch also she finds him in a happy mood, laughing and talking to the children. His presence does make difference to others and her daughters, but for herself she realizes that they can “never be together again” (88).
Thus she has come to terms with her present with an understanding to move ahead in life without bitterness for the man who had been the cause of her humiliation and suffering. Now she is a new woman with a new understanding and consciousness, all set to begin her life confidently anew as a teacher and creative writer. But this was not to be. Sumi and her father, Shripati, meet their tragic end in a road accident. 27

Unlike the earlier novels, Deshpande gives voice to the man’s point of view. Gopal’s thoughts and feelings are laid bare before us. Motherhood has been given a prominent a place in literature and society.

4.3.2 THE CHARACTER OF SUMI IN A MATTER OF TIME

Sumi of *A Matter of Time* gradually emancipates herself as a new independent woman from being a deserted wife. At the age of forty, she stands alone and helpless along with her three teenaged daughters. But she is not emotionally shattered as is common with housewives without economic independence. She demonstrates strength and maturity even in adversity. She displays rare courage and self-confidence. Unlike any other in her place, she has the generosity to gracefully free her husband from marital bonds without venting ill-feelings. Her desertion has brought out the real, hidden strength in her. She desires to be economically independent, asserts her identity and revives her creativity. She, thus, comes a long way from the other women for whom marriage is mostly the be-all and end-all of their existence. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent
spirit displayed by her proves that she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment.

Sumi evolves herself from the invisible chains of patriarchal pressure and other family responsibilities. She is seen gradually emancipating as a new and independent woman experiencing the anguish of an isolated partner. Sumi helps her children to get on with their lives.

Sumi also comes to her parental house like the other protagonists did earlier. If others submit themselves to introspection and rumination, Sumi straightaway decides to face the facts squarely. After 23 years of her marriage, in a very casual way Gopal walks out and unburdens his responsibilities as husband and father of three grown up children leaving Sumi in a shocked silence. Describing the whole scene of Gopal's casual desertion, Keerthi Ramachandra says:

He waits for Sumi's reaction, but within moments both realize that there's nothing more to be said and he leaves as quietly as he had entered.28

Sumi too wants to fight her own battle and assert her individuality. Though deserted, Sumi does not contemplate a divorce as she considers this to be of no use to her. Divorce frees a woman legally but the memories attached to the marriage cannot be erased easily. The divorcee has to further bear the onslaughters of a harsh society which does not allow her to be free and happy. Sumi, has the full support
and sympathy of her parents, sister, cousins and others. This has helped her to a
great extent to withstand the shock, pain, humiliation and the trauma of desertion.  

Sumi and Gopal enjoyed a harmonious relationship during the early years of their
marriage. Their joyous intimate love, physical as well as mental, leads one to
understand their conjugal bliss especially in the early years of their marriage.
Thinking of their first union, Gopal thinks “And I knew then that it was for this,
this losing yourself in another human being that men give up their dreams of
freedom.” (223)

However, this happiness seems destined to drift as there is a basic incompatibility, a
dissimilarity of temperaments. The fear of being unable to fulfill his obligations as a
husband and a father coupled with an intense loneliness and a feeling of isolation
from his wife and daughters has compelled him to choose what could easily be
termed a coward’s way out. This is the only plausible explanation for his mindless
act.

Gopal’s character is closely linked to Sumi’s character. Therefore an analysis of his
character is necessary while dealing with Sumi’s image. Gopal’s inward thoughts
always remain unsaid to anybody. He is not able to explain even to his wife Sumi,
the reason that compelled him to isolate himself from the family. He only assures
them that Sumi is in no way responsible for that decision and therefore she need not
be blamed. Kalyani, Sumi’s mother, has vague suspicion that Gopal has done this
for the sake of money which is not true. She pathetically implores him, “what have you done to my daughter, Gopala don’t do this, don’t let it happen to my daughter…” (46)

Sumi knows that Gopal believes that “Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes – a lifetime of commitment – is not possible for all of us.” (69) She remembers that when they had decided to get married, Gopal proposed that if either of the two wanted to be free, he or she would be left to go. Reminding Gopal about this, Sumi tells him: “How can you think of separating of wanting to be apart, when you are eighteen in love?...I thought we would always be together.” (221) Like Deshpande’s earlier protagonists, Sumi too was craving for love and acceptance from her husband.

She is, however, not unconscious of the developments taking place in him. Sumi does not seek any explanation from Gopal. She knows well that “...the reason lies inside him, the reason is him.” (24) However, she desires to ask him only one question, which however remains unasked.

What is it, Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns?.... Will you be able to give me an answer to this? (27)
Gopal is grateful to Sumi for not asking any questions and thus saving him mortification of voicing half truths. Sumi does not even wish to talk about Gopal’s act of desertion with anyone.

Gopal, the idealist, realizes the futility of existence and he says, “I stopped believing in the life I was leading, suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I knew I could not go on.” (41)

His own inner emptiness is thus explained adequately. The existential alienation which Gopal experiences can be offered as one of the most possible reasons for his transformation leading to his inexplicable desertion of the family.

Sumi views the desertion as ‘sanyasa’ and says, “I’ve begun to think that what Gopal has really done is to take sanyas.” (123)

Gopal’s childhood has not been normal, because his father had taken his brother’s widow for marriage and he was born of that union. He struggles within himself and undergoes severe inner conflict. His predicament seems to parallel that of Hamlet’s. What ruins his peace is his painful realization that even his sister Sudha and he do not share the same father. Isolated and abandoned, Gopal for long has been nurturing the same feeling of loneliness and desolation.31
Perhaps his insecure childhood, his lack of understanding of the true concept of happiness and ignorance of the quality of joy could have prompted Gopal to renounce his grihasthashrama. Gopal can be compared to the protagonist of Hermann Hessie’s Siddhartha who also deserts his wife and son. However, unlike him, Gopal is yet to find solution to his loneliness and achieve peace. Gopal’s desertion fails to convince any one and the least of all of them is Aru, his daughter. To her, it is “...not just a tragedy, it is both a shame and a disgrace”. (13) She does not want him to get away scot-free while they have to face the disgrace, shame and humiliation the desertion brings. Her demand for family maintenance is not approved by Sumi who endures the pain with patience, self-respect and magnanimity. 32

Gopal’s desertion upsets everyone. But, surprisingly, it has brought out Sumi’s real hidden strength. Right from her marriage, Sumi has been a contented wife and mother and has willingly subordinated herself to her husband and daughters. Though disappointed and frustrated, Sumi seeks to cope with the disgrace and humiliation of desertion in an admirable way. She surrounds herself with a death-like silence which can convey her pain more effectively than words can express. The only person to meet Gopal without rancor is his wife, Sumi, who recognizes the essential loneliness of all human beings and so sets him free. This cannot be called passivity. She deliberately plays cool and maintains her matter-of-fact attitude. Her patience, tolerance, sense of equanimity and stoicism makes her an ‘enigma’. As Shashi Deshpande observes:
Sumi’s acceptance is not passive. She blocks out the unpleasantness. She has a good opinion of herself; she is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity; she would do anything for pride....

Sumi dislikes to unlock her heart and lay bare her emotions to Gopal. Her pride prevents her to show her grief to him. Nor does she request him to come back to her. She controls her feelings and looks composed and equanimous to the outside world. She tries to show the world that it is important for women like her to retain her feelings and maintain their self-respect.

Revealing an independent and individualistic spirit, Sumi refuses to accept any kind of economic assistance either from her parents or from Premi, her doctor sister or from Ramesh, Gopal’s doctor nephew. Working as a teacher, though on a temporary post, she wants to stand on her own legs and assert her identity. Sumi picks up her heart and prepares for the future.

She looks for a permanent job, and with great determination learns to ride a two-wheeler at her age. With stoicism, Sumi meets the disapproving comments from women like Shankar’s mother, who says:

Go back to your husband, he’s a good man. If you’ve done wrong, he’ll forgive you. And if he has – woman shouldn’t have any pride.

(161)
Sumi wonders how the fate of women is being measured only through their marital status. A woman gets respect only if she has her husband, irrespective of the number of wives or mistresses he has. They have to live together under the same roof because ‘what is a woman without a husband?’ (167) Sumi thinks of her parents, Kalyani and Shripati, who live like strangers under the same roof and have not spoken for years. “But her kumkum is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife.” (167) Sumi feels that this is no existence in the true sense.

It is not that easy for a woman, separated or divorced from her husband to begin a new life. On the contrary, Sumi, after Gopal’s walk-out, revives her creativity. She writes a play which becomes a success. Inspired by this success, she now desires to rewrite the story of Surpanakha in the Ramayana from a different perspective, from Surpanakha’s viewpoint.35

This reflects Sumi’s modern progressive outlook. She is anxious that man-woman relationships should be sound, equal and non-partisan. Sumi stands for responsibility, motherly love, care and concern. Every moment she is seen worried about her grown-up daughters. She desires that her daughter’s life should be easy and comfortable. She fervently hopes: “I want her to enjoy the good things in life, I want her to taste life, I want her to relish it and not spit it out because she finds it bitter.” (220)
It is a pity that Sumi dies when she is taking up a job to support herself and her daughters. Perhaps, through Aru, the novelist looks hopefully at the younger generation to penetrate the silence, make women realize their situation and speak up for themselves. Inheriting her mother’s pride and dignity, courage and confidence, Aru assures her father that they will be all right. “We’ll be quite alright, don’t worry about us” (246) This was a very important dimension that Shashi Deshpande could give to the character of Sumi.

4.3.3 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN A MATTER OF TIME

While dealing with Sumi’s character in the novel, Shashi Deshpande has expressed her ideas about women in general. She raises questions such as: 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. 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, Kalyani, the grandmother. Deshpande crafts a suspenseful story about Kalyani. She was forced into an arranged marriage with her maternal uncle Shripati, and the tragedy of their life occurs when he initially deserts her and then returns to live in an isolated room in the Big House. He ceases talking to Kalyani. 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.\textsuperscript{36}

Sumi is confident of her capabilities to make choices and assumes control over her life. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit displayed by her proves that she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment. She proves that women like her are capable of ushering in a positive change in the social structure.\textsuperscript{37}

Deshpande's characters develop in her works. The inner workings of a family are examined clearly. The book is also a mirror of a society in transition. The change in Indian society is skillfully elaborated through the different generations in this book; the grandmother Kalyani who is not really educated, Sumi who is educated but doesn't work outside the home, Sumi's sister Premi, who is a successful doctor, and the young girls Aru, Charu and Seema, who all aspire for careers and independence. The old and the new co-exist in a family that is modern, but with certain old values.

With a style that is lilting and gentle, Deshpande draws us into an intricate web of family relationships, without passing judgment on any other characters' deeds. For the reader, however, there is no escaping the clutches of emotion or feeling, when reading about the trials and tribulations these women undergo because of their relationships.\textsuperscript{38}
One agrees with the view that women do not remain victims, despite their unquestioning acceptance of male flight from the family in Shashi Deshpande's novels. And the men are transformed betrayers into objects of self-pity, trapped in a morass of human flaws and psychic distress.  

4.4 SMALL REMEDIES

Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande's latest novel was published in the year 2000. Here she adopts the structure of a biography within a biography. Madhu Saptarishi, the protagonist is an urban, middle-aged, educated woman who has been commissioned by a publisher to write a biography on a famous classical singer, Savitribai Indorekar, doyenne of Gwalior Gharana.

Madhu has been asked to write Savitribai's biography wherein she was to be presented as a heroine. But she refuses to present her as such since the latter had been a victim of gender discrimination prevalent in our patriarchal social set-up. Imposing the current concept of heroinism on an old woman seemed not only impractical but out of place to Madhu. Instead, she presents her as a young woman who had led a sheltered life not only as a child in her parental home but also as a daughter-in-law in an affluent Brahmin family. It is her daring independent nature that makes her seek her own identity and elope with a Muslim tabla player to live in a strange town. Although born in a tradition-bound orthodox Brahmin family, she makes a name for herself as a great classical singer. Madhu records how Savitribai felt hurt when her grandmother asked her to stop singing immediately during her performance at a family gathering.
Savitribai’s father with his unconventional ways stood out from society. He was a widower, bringing up a daughter on his own with a male servant at home. He would observe no rituals or religious rites and would openly indulge in a drink or two every evening. But all his unorthodox behaviour never invited any censure or disapproval from society. But when it came to Savitribai, it was a different story: “Being a man he could get away with much. He could live the way he wanted without disapproval.”(139) People are shocked and disapprove of Savitribai’s action as she elopes with a tabla player to some other town and also begets a child from him.

Even Savitribai’s father-in-law is no different. He too could get away with his way of life without any censure or disapproval from society. He had a mistress who was a well-known Thumri singer. He visited her regularly and the people around knew this. It was not much of a secret affair and the women gossiped about it. His choosing a wife from his own class and mistress from another was quite acceptable, but for a daughter-in-law pursuing a career in classical music was scandalous.

The gossip surrounding Savitribai in Neemgaon was that a Station Director who had helped her get many contracts with the radio was her lover. He was a regular visitor to her place. In course of time a daughter Munni is born to her from him. As the child grows up, Madhu recalls how children would tease her by calling the Station Director her mama, a euphemism for mother’s lover. Savitribai, while narrating her life story to Madhu, conceals the fact that she had any lover, but the small town knew that the Station Director was her lover. In a patriarchal set-up, as
Savitribai was "A woman who had left her husband's home" (222), she was considered an immoral woman. Like her father and father-in-law, she too had led a most unorthodox life and had also paid a price for it as a woman. To society, her way of life was inexorable, while her father's or, for that matter, her father-in-law's was connived at.

Savitribai is ashamed of her youthful indiscretions as while relating her life-story to Madhu, she conceals her intimate association with Ghulam Saab and also hides the fact that she had a daughter from him. This shows Savitribai's anxiety over her past's reckless action, which she considers a blemish on her character and respectability. She keeps herself aloof from her illegal daughter Munni, lest it should tarnish her image. But this dissociation of hers from her daughter is too much for Madhu as she herself is a devoted and loving mother, grieving over her son's death.

Madhu cannot stomach the fact that Savitribai has kept herself dissociated with her daughter born out of wedlock and has kept it a most guarded secret. She also gave Munni her name "Indorekar" which she had adopted as her very own identity as singer and which comprises neither her maiden name nor her married one; all this smacks of her possessiveness as she claims her as exclusively her own child, neither her husband's nor her lover's. In her quest for identity she has become overly selfish and possessive, for she gives the child her own identity for her own sake, but disowns her when it comes to sacrificing her hard-earned name for her only child. She loves the child till her own emotional needs get fulfilled but when it comes to Munni's own identity and happiness, she selfishly keeps her out of her life, recoiling
under the guise of respectability and a good name. Madhu wonders as to why a woman who had the daring to walk out on her marriage and family, feared to make public the fact that she had borne a child out of wedlock.

Meenakshi Indorekar, her daughter, is no exception. She leads the life of a disowned child and is unhappy and ashamed of her existence, as she is a child born of her mother’s association with another man. She dissociates herself from Ghulam Saab, rejecting him as her father and later does the same to her mother. Madhu recalls how as a child Munni had concocted stories of a lawyer-father living in Pune, and also underwent great mental torture when the neighbourhood girls teased her by asking her about the identity of her real father – was it Ghulam Saab, the Station Director or the man “who lives with your [Munni’s] mother?” (77). She was desperate for a new identity that would cut her off from her past.

In her desperate quest for a new identity cut off from her past she has not only given up her mother’s identity but refused to acknowledge any familiarity with her past connections or acquaintances.

Then there is a story of Leela and Joe in the novel. After the death of her first husband, Vasantha, Madhu’s aunt Leela takes up a job to become economically independent and also to educate her brother-in-law. Living in the crowded chawls among cotton mills she would work for women suffering from TB. This led to coming into contact with Joe, her second husband, who had set up a clinic for TB patients. He was a widower with two children, spoke flawless English and was well-
versed with Literature. Besides medicine, his other loves were literature and music. On the other hand, Leela neither spoke nor knew anything on literature and music.

Though Leela belongs to a different caste, Joe falls head over heels in love with her. She did not believe in caste and the two are married. Despite the vast difference in their inherent natures, to Madhu, the two had a wonderful relationship.

The narrator of the novel Madhu, her life story is different. Madhu, waking up after a nightmare, discloses to her husband Som a secret that she had slept with another man when she was fifteen. Som is unable to come to terms with her act. The relationship between the two begins to disintegrate. Madhu fails to comprehend Som.  

With his typical male psychology Som holds on to this lone act of sex forgetting the fact that he himself has had a full-fledged relation with a married woman before marriage. She reflects: “Purity, chastity and intact hymen – these are the things Som is thinking of; these are the truths that matter.”(262) This incident brings a rift in their relationship which is later patched up after the death of their son.

Compared to the earlier novels, Small Remedies has been wrought on a wider canvas. Taking into account the Indian composite culture, the structure of the novel encompasses the plurality and diversity of this culture. In this particular novel her characters – male and female – are drawn from different communities and professions. She gives an honest and realistic portrayal of a Maharashtrian
Brahmin family. Here, an Anthony Gonsalves, a Hamidabai and Joe are all, in a sense, part of Madhu's extended family.

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 center 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.

Deshpande's main concern is not the Hindustani classical music, but the gross gender discrimination prevailing not only in society but in the field of classical music as well.

4.4.2 THE CHARACTER OF MADHU IN SMALL REMEDIES

"To achieve something... you have got to be hard and ruthless...There is no other way of being a saint. Or a painter. A Writer." This unexpected first paragraph of That Long Silence (1988) is the voice of the narrator, but it also gives us a clue to the author's approach to writing. Small Remedies, Deshpande's recent novel, is the most confident assertion of this strength and a deliberate denial of sentimentality.

Right from childhood Madhu had sensed the gross discrimination women had to undergo in a society that had one law for men, another for women. She remembers how men could lead a life of their choice with impunity, while women were jeered at and looked down upon if they showed any deviation from the assigned roles set up by society for them.
For Madhu, writing Savitribai’s biography is not voluntary labour undertaken for love or admiration, it is an assignment she has been asked to do. With the biographer’s detachment from her subject she makes clear-eyed inquiries into the larger problems of writing a life— anyone’s life, even one’s own. Madhu realizes that a chronological account will not do because we see our lives through memories and memories are fragmented, almost always cutting across time. Madhu is overwhelmed by her own omnipotence because she can create an infinite range of Savitribais— ‘a great rebel who defies the conventions of her time. The feminist who lived her life on her own terms. The great artist who sacrificed everything for the cause of her art’ or the impetuous lover who abandoned a secure married life in a Brahmin household to live with her Muslim accompanist. Madhu’s publishers want a trendy feminist biography. They tell her that victim stories are out of fashion, heroines are in. But Madhu cannot impose the new concept of ‘heroinism’ on an old fashioned woman who whitewashes her life through selective amnesia. Each session with the Bai (as the great singer is called) triggers off Madhu’s own memories, some of them connected with Munni, Bai’s daughter by her Muslim partner. Munni was Madhu’s playmate once. Madhu has some memories entirely unconnected with Bai and they sometimes refer to her own troubled life. We do not know the exact nature of her problems until quite late in the novel, but we do know that Madhu’s friends feel that working on this assignment may be a therapy, helping her to come to terms with her own personal trauma. The author is in no great hurry to get on with the story. The narrative unfolds leisurely ‘like a raga, beginning with aalap, continuing
with vistaar, gradually gaining momentum in a quickening spiral of suspense eventually to achieve a cathartic calm.\textsuperscript{43}

Deshpande seems to do the same here as she has always done in the past while conveying with seemingly effortless ease the sense of loose, yet precise, networking of extended families and their convoluted hierarchies and equations. In \textit{Small Remedies}, the motherless Madhu is at first overwhelmed by the inclusive warmth of her husband’s family. Immediately after this comes an ironical comment deflating this euphoria.\textsuperscript{44}

Although Madhu refuses to get emotional about music, there is precision in her descriptions, as in the recounting of the first big concert she attended as a child where Munni’s mother sang, accompanied on the tabla by a man Munni refused to accept as father.\textsuperscript{45} Madhu is motherless and had been brought up by her father and a male servant. However though motherless as a child, she on her part is a very caring mother, conscious of every little need of her son Aditya. The motherless Madhu is at first overwhelmed by the inclusive warmth of her husband’s family but later on her feeling of euphoria gives way to dissatisfaction.

In \textit{Small Remedies}, Deshpande is attempting much more than she did in her earlier novels. \textit{Small Remedies} has gathered up, in one large sweep, the plurality, diversity and contradictions of our contemporary culture where an Anthony Gonsalves, a Hamidbhai and Joe can all be part of Madhu’s extended family, and the daughter of Ghulam Saab can opt, though not very easily, to get accepted as Shailaja Joshi.
4.4.3 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN SMALL REMEDIES

Small Remedies is a saga of women emancipation. The novel is about the ‘making’ of a writer and a social worker. Here, Deshpande envisages a hopeful future for women in their “shared experienced as women.” Madhu, Savitri Bai Indorekar, and Leela learn to know themselves and in the company of female folks they achieve their social as well as spiritual identities. These women attain solicitude and ‘sense of self’ through their occupations and skills and continue to defy the servility imposed on them by men.46

For Savitri Bai Indorekar, in her music lies the aesthetic dimension of the erotic as well as her spiritual salvation. Extremely devoted to her practice she left her in-laws’ house and moved to Bhavanipur with her lover and Tabala master Ghulam Saab. Savitri Bai rearranges her domestic life without her kith and kin and confronts dilemmas in life of her own. Madhu writes about Savitri Bai:

I can make Bai the rebel who rejected the conventions of her times.
The feminist who lived her life at her terms...The woman who gave up everything – a comfortable home, a husband and a family – for love (166).

Madhu’s aunt Leela is another non-conformist who participated in the ’42 Quit India Movement, and was responsible for daring deeds. Leela is a widow, who marries a Christian man and works for the upliftment of the women of the lower
strata. Madhu narrates Leela’s suffering and angst in her effort to create a space in a male stratified system:

I know that Leela was, certainly, a person who accepted wholly the consequences of her actions – Therefore, no complaints. In her work, too, though she was sidelined after years of working for the party, though she never reached the top of the hierarchy, while men who’d worked under her got there, she never complained....

Munni, the daughter of this famous mother, professed to hate music. Ruthlessly, discarded by Savitribai in her subsequent climb to respectability, this girl is the most vivid character in the novel.

Twelve-year-old Munni could enact entire Hindi films, repeating songs, dances and dialogues exactly, fabricated stories about herself and did things forbidden to other children. Looking back, Madhu now sees Munni’s unashamed lies as an attempt to make sense of her insecure existence, to create a life-story to suit her dream, as Savitribai is now doing for the benefit of her biographer.

If Small Remedies is a book about writing a book, on the reflections of the impossibility of ever capturing in words the truth about any life, it is also about how the enterprise can take on a life of its own.

This book shows societal ambivalence towards women’s changing roles. Madhu’s desire to write an honest and true biography of Bai helps her in overcoming her
sense of loss after the death of her son Aditya and her husband’s distrust for yielding to a stranger in a moment of strong impulse. Arduous mental upheaval reveals her weakness and her strengths. Madhu leaves her home to come to terms with her identity and desire.\textsuperscript{48}

It is true that Deshpande presents a very conventional idea of feminism. Within the four walls of domesticity, she presents a certain image of middle class ethos, still one can read here the theme of resistance. Deshpande recognizes the importance of interaction among different generations of women. She emphasizes that women’s strength lies in their acknowledgement of their desires not only sexual but creative as well. Deshpande’s work exemplifies that women need to be assertive in order to regain their mental equipoise and individuality.

\textbf{4.5 \ HER LATER NOVELS: COMMENT}

Shashi Deshpande in her later novels keeps her narratives female-centred and gives an intimate insight into the psyche of the middle-class Indian women who feel oppressed and hemmed in by their patriarchal socialization. She provides new ideals for a better man-woman relationship, thereby broadening the scope of woman’s existence. She not only presents a feminist insight into patriarchal values, but also prescribes a balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman. To her, traditions are the values of harmony and coexistence that symbolize the Indian way of life, and modernity is the assertion of the independent, individual identity. After having passively played out
their socially ordained roles, her protagonists move out of their cloistered selves to assert their individuality as human beings. Deshpande feels that the woman must be true to her own self if she wants to realize herself. The straitjacketed role imposed on woman only bogs her down in mire of negation and suppression. She must venture out of the familial framework to give full expression of her individuality and identity.

Shashi Deshpande's novels reveal her deep insight into the plight of Indian women, who feel smothered and fettered, in a tradition-bound, male-dominated society. She delineates her women characters in the light of their hopes, fears, aspirations and frustrations. They are aware of their strengths and limitations, but find themselves thwarted by the opposition and pressure from a society conditioned overwhelmingly by the patriarchal mind-set. Deshpande highlights their inferior position and the subsequent degradation in a male-dominated society.
Chapter – IV


4. Indira S., p. 22.


7. Ibid., p.140.


9. Ibid., p. 76.

10. Indira S., p. 40.

12. Ibid., p. 140.


15. Ibid., p. 24.


17. Ibid., p. 60.

18. Ibid., pp. 65-70.

19. Ibid., pp. 65-70.


21. Ibid., pp. 78-83.


24. Ibid., pp. 130-140.

25. Ibid., pp. 150-160.


30. Ibid., pp. 16-20.


34. R.S. Pathak, pp. 160-170.

35. Ibid., pp. 160-170.


38. N. Poovalingam, pp. 180-185.


40. Siddharta Sharma, Shashi Deshpande’s Novels: A Feminist Study (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2005)

41. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, p. 132.


43. Small Remedies, Reviewed by Ranjani Nellore (google.com)

44. Ibid., Reviewed by Ranjani Nellore (google.com)

45. Ibid., Reviewed by Ranjani Nellore (google.com)


48. Ibid., p. 318.