CHAPTER – V


Ratan Rathor in The Apprentice takes almost a lifetime to reject the ‘Petrified and frozen’ world of civilization for he is the child of a double inheritance: the patriotic and courageous world of his father is matched by the worldly wisdom of his mother who tells him:

It was not patriotism but money … that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws … but money was a law unto itself.

"TA 20"

Ratan acquires these things by learning to keep up appearances and by discarding the world of ordinary decency and friendships. He succumbs totally to the needs of his job and accepts a bribe along with security and promotion. In short he becomes a whore in the pursuit of his career and ends up ultimately by accepting a bribe when he least needs money. At every stage he puts up an initial resistance only to discover the futility of his effort like so many others of his kind for no one seemed sure whether:

What was right was practicable. That was where the rub lay. In the practicability of things. That was where I saw the best of them buckle. Because very often the best did not have the daring or the greed of the
charlatans. Thus the charlatans won. And when they saw the charlatans winning the best became even less sure of themselves.

And at times they turned charlatans. (TA 64)

And when he visits a temple in order to draw courage from the world of religion, he discovers that even religion is not free from corruption and no succour can be drawn from here. Ratan Rathor is shaken out of his moral inertia only by the faceless head of the dead Brigadier and the outspokenness of Himmat Singh who in his pitiless way contrasts their two lives: “My father he said was a revolutionary, his mother a whore” (TA 144). Though their lives were empty and barren yet there was a difference, he was ever going through the loss of his mother’s honour, while Ratan was selling himself. Even if life lacked a purpose, it need not lack a sense of satisfaction. Ratan realizes that life may well be a zero, but it need not be negative. It is now that he learns the lesson of humility:

I never enter the temple. I can concerned with what goes on in there.

I stand at the doorstep and I fold my hands, my hands smelling of leather and I say things. Be good, I tell myself. Be good.

Be decent. Be of use. (TA 148)

And being of use means doing the best one can ‘without vanity, without expectations and also without cleverness’. Thus, Joshi’s foreigners turn inwards to resolve their sense of futility, to become integrated in some degree and to find a meaning in life, however, limited in their path of life. Ratan finds himself a misfit in the modern world. All his education and intelligence did not help him. He had to abdicate his true self to fit in the corrupt society and eke out a living. He is alienated from his true self and his ideals. In his feverish pursuit of careerism, he submits himself to all sorts of corruption that the modern world offers. In spite of all the
material comforts available to him, discontentment becomes a way of life. He leads a frustrated and exhausted family life. His corrupt deal at the end costs the life of the Brigadier, his closest friend. He realizes the gravity of his sin. At last his alert consciousness alienates him from the degenerated society, Ratan himself describes his own aberrations with a sense of self-awareness and objectivity:

Twenty years and nothing gained. An empty lifetime. What had I learned? Pushing files? manoeuvring? At fortyfive all that I knew was to manoeuvre. A trickster, that was what I had felt life make of me. Did I know the meaning of honour, friendship?

Did I ever know it? Would I ever know it again? (TA 139)

He learns the lessons of humility. He seeks his fulfillment in this symbolic act of cleaning the dirt of the sandals of devotees. He earnestly pleads with the young that there is nothing wrong to make a second start: “One must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any cost to despair” (TA 149).

The sense of alienation in Ratan Rathor makes him understand that a combination of humanism and religion can be the saving grace of mankind that is steeped in corruption. It also depicts, though less exhaustively, the plight of the contemporary man, who is “sailing about in a confused society without norms, without direction, without even, perhaps a purpose” (TA 74). Ratan’s humiliating experience of job-hunting makes him realize the cruelty of the human lot. He himself becomes “at the age of twenty-one, a hypocrite and a liar; in short, a sham” (TA 28). As a clerk he works “harder than almost anybody in the department except the superintendent himself” (TA 37). Ratan is nevertheless always haunted by the morbid fear of losing his job and suffers from a keen desire for getting promotion and an intense preoccupation with work. He is almost invariably in a high strange mental
condition, which threatens to ravage his soul and deprive him of his personality and identity. Ultimately he succumbs inescapably to the needs of the job and, rewarded with security and promotion, ends up by accepting a bribe when he needs money.

Set in Indian scenerio familiar to the urban middle-class, Ratan Rathor is both the hero as well as the anti-hero of the novel. Though he does not feel at home in society, he does not abandon it as Billy Biswas had done. Interestingly, he embodies the very world of material values which his predecessors Sindi Oberoi and Billy Biswas had rejected. He is neither a rebel nor a dissident; he is a victim. After feeling alienated from society, he adopts himself to the ways of the world. He has a powerful instinct for survival. He knows that some people survive through defiance while others do through their ability. And there are still others who survive by sycophancy and by being servile to those in power. Ratan fully succumbs to the worldly pleasures. At every stage he puts up an initial resistance only to discover the futility of his endeavour like so many of his kind did not seem to know: “What was right? What was wrong? ….that was where the rub lay” (TA 64).

Ratan is a child of double inheritance; the idealhood of his father is matched by the pragmatism of his mother. He is greatly inspired by his father’s active participation in the country’s freedom movement. He was only ten years old when his father, responding to the call of Mahatma Gandhi, abandoned his practice as a lawyer and gave away most of his wealth to join the revolutionaries. Once as he stood at the head of procession of freedom fighters, he was gunned down by a British Sergeant. The incident which Ratan had witnessed made an indelible impression on his mind.

Though Ratan progresses upward in rank, he becomes increasingly fraudulent and unscrupulous: “The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied and the more I was determined to ‘enjoy’ life” (TA 35). He confesses that he had become a
‘master faker’. He has added a new dimension to his life, and he has become, at the age of twenty-one, a hypocrite and a liar. He acquires a sense of docility and obedience. He readily accepts bribes and owns a car, a flat, a refrigerator and also has twenty thousand rupees in the bank. The most striking change in Ratan is his sudden interest in wine and women what so far he had lacked the courage to give vent to his desires. But now he ogles at the women around: “I felt bold, unfettered. I started at them, the women. Openly, willfully” (TA 77). He has gained confidence to visit prostitutes. In short Ratan is “at the peak of the dung heap that I(he) had been climbing all my(his) life” (TA 85). Ratan’s morality is so completely eroded that he cannot bring himself to confess before the authorities.

Without anyone to look after him after his mother’s death, Ratan has fallen on evil days. As a youth without any grip to hold on, he wants to have a respectable life. This is the greatest expectation or this expectation is the common goal for all youth. To gain respect or to be respected, Ratan belonging to the pre-independent era of India left with no option except to join the national freedom movement. He saw before him how his father renounced his lucrative career as a lawyer and earned the name of a martyr in the struggle stood before him to imbibe the same spirit of Mahatma and achieve the much on the cherished goal of freedom by means of offering his little might. His mother stood in his way. The advice of her created a tremour in him. His wish to join in the national army of Subash Chandra Bose remained only a dream. He wrote poetry expressing his heroic ideals of valour and honour and in reality he was expecting someone to knock at his door taking him up on the material ladder.

Two persons did appear in his life who evinced on him the hope of climbing the ladder of success. One happened to be a government engineer, a person hailing
from his own home town. He gave him all tall promises but finally brushed him aside through his nonchalant behaviour. The strain of walking to his place and the return from his home was the only reward he got out of his futile exercise. Another gentleman happened to be a lawyer who showed initial concern, care and attention but finally dismayed him by means of saying to be at his own place without troubling to exert five miles walking and he would be in touch as and when matters developed in his favour. No matter yet fruited and no touch reached so far. He was made to feel sad for his loss of hope in life. His stay with other working men in the city further augmented his sin of being unemployed. He lived with a turner, two brothers working in a printing shop, a goldsmith’s assistant and a stenographer.

It was during his stay with him, though a nincompoop, he put on a fake face of a worker in order to boost up his self-esteem among them. He invented lies after lies and finally became “a master faker” (TA 27). After becoming a sham and a fake he realized the essence of a life’s pattern. “If you seek a favour, you must have something to offer in return. If not immediately, at least in the future” (TA 28). With that hope he knocked at his preferment’s door at various places. Examination, interviews, interrogation and finally rejections pushed him to the wall and made him fall down with illness. It was only his five roommates attended on him by turns and got him life back. All expenses of his illness were paid mostly by the turner. With the help of the stenographer he got a temporary clerk’s post in the department for war purchases. As chance would have it, his boss liked him for his quick grasp, docility and sense of obedience. Further he was attracted towards him because “he belonged to the middle class so blindly follow its masters” (TA 31). He was made permanent. His middle class morality stood in his way that resisted to him to see his well wishers in life. As any practical minded person would do, he too used his inmates of the inn
during his hour of crisis and forgot them coolly after going up in his material ladder. This was what he himself called, “Bourgeois filth” (TA 32).

His superintendent was a conscientious man and reminded one a school headmaster. It was his docility that won him his favour. His docility “Just as completely effortless and natural as was my Father’s rebellion” (TA 34) and this character of him got him to complete the task of attender. This character further pushed him to its edge of success since the notes he prepared “were mostly on obscure or complicated issues, requiring integration of material from several sources” (TA 35). This complicated writing of such notes on tender created dread among “officers for fear of any slip upon any one fact might lead to serious mistakes” (TA 35). Everyone heaved a sigh of relief that a nincompoop like him as a clerk shifted from their shoulders a heavy burden “without blowing his own trumpet!” (TA 35).

Further his success in the official ladder visited him for his hard tireless work that any job assigned to him. He did it without taking rest till it got completed. This was the reason why the superintendent started favouring him among his other fifty clerks. He used to see the superintendent shouting at the lapses of the clerks who all bore it with down cast eyes but brushed it aside after the heat of the reprimand got subsided. Ratan thought about their value of self respect and their responsibilities shown to their career were all sham matters.

It was this thought about career that triggered him to ruminate about all possible angles he had felt, heard and discussed with himself, his father and his brigadier friend. He felt the career a synonymous to cycle career in his early days. His father, though admonished by the rice merchant for his lack of interest in his lawyer career did not take such threats a serious one. With his brigadiers’ friend, he used to discuss making a career as a doctor, engineer, or lawyer.
Now a chance appeared in the life of Ratan for bringing him a full fledged career. It was the period of war. At his office, files started piling up. He was teamed with a clerk at close of his retirement and another in his middle age. Both had many children at home. Both found war days difficult to make both ends meet. They had a natural feeling that the extra work all the three did after evening should be paid with an allowance. Even the age old clerks took courage to meet the higher-ups and ventilate their on monetary desire. But his efforts proved to be in vain. It was at this time the superintendent called Ratan aside and gave him his piece of mind that a workaholic alone would be favoured and not a meek clerk complaining always work. Ratan realized the worth of work and gave his consent to meet the higher officer in connection with this matter. Having developed a liking in him already the superintendent presented the complaint of over work in such a manner before his higher officers. As according to the heavy demands of pending work the department needs an assistant. Such an assistant would be of much help in promoting pending work cleared within allotted time. Creation of such a post would be beneficial and it should not be viewed as an additional expenditure to the exchequer. His higher officer realized the fact behind his statement and was ready to sanction the post. The superintendent clinched the post as well as his higher-up nod to appoint Ratan to this post. It was at this juncture Ratan knew the ability of the superintendent to turn the table in his favour without causing any friction. It is this administrative knack Ratan imbibes out of his association with the superintendent. Other two clerks lack this merit. They have to wallow in the misery of their clerk world whereas Ratan gets a leap from his official position.

The superintendent influences Ratan on matters of corruption that God Himself is ever ready to accept gifts in cash or kind when one goes wrong from His
moral tenets has made him dilute all moral standards and lead a life without any compunction as if what he thinks and doer are not deviated from the moral norms but only the best means of serving himself better, serving country better and serving God better.

This philosophy of the Superintendent had its effect on him. The war was drawing close. Ratan’s position appeared to be precarious. After having tasted the power of the post, he felt dreaded to walk in wilderness after the aftermath effect of war. War gave him life, peace, comfort, prosperity, reputation and status. After war what would have been his heraldry of station…? A great question. But as chance could have it, his Superintendent enquired about his mother thus paving the way for his marriage with his cousin’s daughter. He also hinted no son-in-law of his family was without a job. Because of his marriage with one of his cousin’s daughter his stay in the office continued. He sincerely practiced all adages of the Superintendent ‘Keep your ears open’, had been one of his maxims, “but never let them know that you know. And don’t take to heart what you hear. Never forget. Strike, if you must strike, at the moment of your choosing. Above all, don’t take things to heart” (TA 47). Whether Ratan offers prayer, chanting to God, he practices these platitudes of his mentor sincerely and reap the benefit of conducting himself cool, calculated, ambition of a hardened man or an administrator with an eye on money.

On the Republic day for which his father fought and died, he was made an officer. After getting independence, the country celebrated its fifteenth Republic day parade. For him, the external republic parade celebrating the victory of freedom on the path of dharma appeared to be a hoax. He has made his department to work for an additional half-an hour. He used all journalistic parlances to express his patriotic fervour. He even wrote articles to newspaper under the caption ‘crisis in character’.
that article, he praised the nation’s hoary past starting from Harappa civilization. As a poet, he soared high on the peak of imagination and scaled the deep-rooted corruption found prevalent from all animate and inanimate matters of past glory. It was this corruption that was found among Indian masses that was a crisis of character. Ironically he too fell on the thorns of corruption and took a huge bribe. Thus he himself became a ‘crisis of character’.

Arun Joshi clearly brought out the degraded and decadent state of post-independent era. Independence brought only emptiness at that time. Even after sixty-three years of independence sixty percent Indians cast their votes and elect their leaders out of their immense faith that moneyed men and their muscle strength are might factors essential to guard and guide them on the right path. Ironically such a response of their faith on such mighty leaders of power and money expecting relief and redemption for their untold miseries from them gets them only more philosophical emptiness within and without that instead of selecting a watch dog they are made to realize they have selected a ferocious tiger everready to attack, loot, plunder, devastate and tear them to piece beyond recognition. Such a state of democracy is existed in India. People elect leaders to find a remedy for their miseries. Leaders gloat over money and power ditching their elected franchise into a status of offering bribe for the work for which they elected the leaders. With tall promises, leaders wag their tails before the people as if they serve them like dogs if elected to power. Such wagging and their waxing eloquence fooled the franchise till date and still people believed in democracy hoping manna from heaven would be got out of such system.

Allowed to live one among them, Ratan had to sail along with the current trend of his nation and he had no heroic strength to struggle and sail across the
onslaught of a surging stream of power and money. He called himself a nobody, whether in office or at home or in the midst of a crowd. He threw the blame of his existence on the election and electoral procedures that were built on promises of lies. “They wanted this. They wanted that. Did they ever stop to think what I wanted? What right had they to claim my loyalties, take me for granted? What right?” (TA 71).

Thus he reflected the anger of many conscientious officials who knew the value of honour, self-respect and sacrifice but were made to serve under a system, under masters who cared for money and power for which they speak out loudly their promises of lies and made people hear them slavishly and cast their franchise once in five years for their self-aggrandizement ironically cheating the people a heaven on earth out of such foul lies but appeared to be a fair practice for their much avowed and much cherished freedom.

He confided his secret fear to Himmat Singh who brought a deal in connection with sales of certain spurious spare parts of military mechanisms. For selling these items he would get a huge sum. He was not afraid of, since he was born to such a freedom fighter now reduced to level of a beggar accepting bribe for such foul act wherein the honour of the country is at stake during the period of war. He did not care for his family nor he cared for his job which would become a matter of jeopardy had he taken the unlawful bribe. But philosophy of God who watched such a foul act if used for a fair and good purpose would pardon. This belief of godly pardon reinforced his moral strength to accept bribe. Still he had an inkling of threat on moral ground. Whether the bribe would bring prosperity or disaster to him. For this, his friend comforted him that the bribe was not prescribed in the Holy text of God and that was the unwritten law prescribed by society for amassing money through which achieving
power with money, power strengthens the morale of the individual that would make him stand the test of any challenges of law in future.

The strength he got from the assurance of Sheikh (Himmat Singh) made him meet the dealer of the contract who was none other than Himmat Singh himself. He was an old man who happened to have in him no trace of yougness. He had a cleft foot. He was made to feel that deeds were not a matter to be bothered but only the consequence of getting caught out of such foul deeds was a grave matter. Many laughed merrily and were found to be in their natural self until their crimes surfaced to get themselves caught. Even here if such antisocials had money there were bright patches of escape from their dark deeds. “In Money’s kingdom, my friend, only Money is king all others are slaves” (TA 73). Falling into the trap of money, he was made to enter into other foul practices of life… That is… money got him drink, money got him do foul deeds, money got him whores, money got him all forbidden pleasures. Thus the boy born to a revolutionary freedom fighter fell deeply into an obnoxious aberration leaving no stone of sinful deed unturned. His friend Himmant singh became hard hearted being on account of his fallen on the thorns of life at an early age. He faced insurmountable sufferings at that young age, all due to lack of money. Out of his close association with men and matters he found out that money and money alone, an ideal substitute for God to lead a happy life. He also learnt to earn money. One could take any illegal paths however unlawful, merciless and blood stained paths that might be. He also saw all he had interacted with were hypocrites, hollow and practioners of sham moral philosophy. He introduced himself to minister and senior government officials as a man from Singapore. He promised them heavens. There came a trade union strike at that time that posed a dreadful threat on officials. It was he who sought their help out of bribing the union leader. This help
for them cemented his friendship with them. He became a pastmaster in buying men
and selling. Ministers, their secretaries and the government machinery needed his
support to deal with many more money rackets. Slowly but steadily he grew an
indispensable pillar in all shady matters of them. He taught Ratan all the values of
money and the nuances to get it with ease. Thereby paving Ratan the way to amass
wealth without any compunction.

At one stage Himmant Singh’s closeness with the ministers and officials
developed in them hatredness. Thought he was the fool for them to grow rich, his
immense sense of indispensability affected their noses something stink in him.
Thereby they slowly showed signs of ousting him from their coterie. This tendency
of sidelining him made him develop hatredness towards them. This hatredness
developed in him hard heartedness. This hard heartedness developed in him double-
crossing. This double-crossing earned him many yester friends slowly becoming
today’s enemies. His grip on them loosened. Their faith on him slowly got away.
Mutual indispensability gave room to mutual mistrust, loss of confidence, hatredness
and emptiness. He passed on this feeling of emptiness to Ratan who argued taking
bribe a desensitised matter practising in the degraded society and thereby his act of
taking bribe, no wonder, an expression of day to day matter.

If I had taken a bribe I belonged rather to the rule than the exception.

Peons were frequently taking bribes. So were government officials and
traffic policemen and railway conductors. Doctors had a fee to give
false certificates, magistrates for false judgments. For a sum of money
politicians changed sides. For a larger sum they declared wars. Bribery
was accepted by factory inspectors, bank agents and college
professors; by nurses, priests and chartered accountants; by all those
who acted in the public interest. All this I knew and had known for twenty years. All now if I had happened to have accidentally indulged in a little slip-up, the sky was not going to fall. *(TA 108)*

Sacrificing lower officials like Ratan for such military expediency and make them scapegoats has its own implications. It not only gives false impressions about top class officials function as shams but also blots out that such officials alone in the government, in such a high rank shall get monetary gains without caring one’s status. Thus he became desensitised with his bribe and became a paw in their hands. It was the secretary and the minister and Singh responsible for getting the foul consignments cleared and it was not the idea of Singh alone. All the three ran the country. To carry out their deeds they needed a paw. It was he who had to do all signing matters and Singh slated a fool proof system by which his trucks were covered ingeniously. Anything went wrong, it was the paw to be chopped off. Something went wrong. It was the idea of the Secretary to tip off the police himself “So that there would be no question what so ever of his coming under suspicion” *(TA 130)*. Through this act he would save his reputation and at the right moment he would even denounce him. So his doom was not the resultant product of Singh but the Secretary. His attempt to kill him was a waste. Further the reason he had said to him for his choice of a paw was that he a “spineless flunkey” *(TA 131)*. He even accused there were many like him in the country.

During the course of conversation, he also mentioned him that the Superintendent of police who put him behind bars extracted from him details of wrong consignments in killing hundreds of soldiers and also responsible for his friend brigadier’s deserting the army front and in the process got wounded, became mad, got treated mysteriously and finally shot himself for all the ignominy he was subjected to.
It was his thirst for big money that got his friend commit suicide that also got him to be a prisoner for sometime in prison and that also made him realize in the corrupt machinery of administration he was caught up as a cog in the wheel and earned a bad name as a sham, an accusation leveled against him by an anti-social demon like Himmat Singh. He was left with no thresholds to escape from hellish degradation and he wanted to do some good that would touch someone somewhere. The fitting atonement of all sins he considered the best one was to polish shoes of worshippers who visited the temple. He visited the temple everyday before going to the office. Left his car, sat on the pavement, collected the chapels and started polishing them for sometime. Though for his status, this act appeared to be an act of degradation but in reality for all his dungs of degradations he had committed in his life, he believed this act of awful daring of this timely surrender would get him retreated to the former glory of his tradition, clan, culture and creed.

Joshi’s *The Apprentice* also depicts, though less exhaustively, the plight of the contemporary man, who is “sailing about in a confused society without norms, without direction, without even, perhaps, a purpose” (*TA* 74). He naturally, faces tension and resentment precisely because he has to put up with totally divergent social norms and expectations. He is convinced that life is characterized by chaos, absurdity, brutality, disorganization and insensitivity. Faced with the dehumanizing materialism of today, an unfortunately circumsized person like Ratan, who is endowed with a heightened sensibility, feels crushed under the growing weight of meaninglessness and isolation from his innermost nature and surroundings.

He is almost invariably in a high strung mental condition that threatens to ravage his soul and deprive him of his personality and identity. Ultimately he succumbs inescapably to the needs of his job, gets rewarded with security and
promotion and ends up by accepting a bribe when he needs money. Ratan undergoes thus a profound change. The man who grew violent and rebellious even at the thought of “careers and bourgeois filth,” \((TA 41)\) becomes in due course “a thick-skin and a washout.” \((TA 41)\). While he tries to seek “solace from the annals of corruption,” \((TA 112)\) his dying conscience keeps on pricking him. At every stage he puts up an initial resistance only to discover the futility of his efforts.

The whole business of living in a muddle confuses him all the more and he fails to differentiate between right and wrong: “The feeling generated in me a great confusion. What had I done, what had I done, which I should not have done? What was right, what was wrong? What was the measure for doing things or not doing them?” \((TA 72)\). Ratan’s dilemma is typical of an average product of this highly sophisticated civilization. With a troubled conscience Ratan goes from place to place without finding any peace or solace. Ratan is keen on finding out the ‘purpose’ of life and all its activities. But he takes almost a life-time to free himself from the shackles of the valueless urban civilization. In his eagerness, he visits the temple to derive courage from the world of religion. To his horror, however, he discovers that even religion is not free from corruption. It is also corrupt and can hardly be expected to provide any solutions to various problems of this meaningless world. He is shaken out of his moral inertia when he sees the faceless head of his friend, the Brigadier. He tries to restore his mental peace by undergoing, finally, the most difficult penance in the world; every morning on his way to the office, he wipes outside the temple the shoes of the congregation.

Ratan realizes that his life has been a great waste. He is not sure what matter precisely corrupted the atmosphere of the society. He feels the need of doing something for changing the prevailing situation. But he is full of doubts about the
way to rid the society of this pestilence. Ratan finally realizes that one cannot live for oneself because no human act is performed in isolation and without consequence. Therefore each act should be performed with a sense of responsibility. Hence out of an acute sense of alienation and a quest to understand the meaning of life, Ratan undergoes the sternest apprenticeship in the world. Symbolically he starts at the lowest-dusting the shoes of the congregation outside the temple every morning on his way to the office. Thus he would like to expiate his sins of cowardice, dishonesty and even indirect murder. He learns the lesson of humility. He seeks his fulfillment in this symbolic act. He feels that the only sustaining basis for action is to be of some use to others, “without vanity and without expectations and also without cleverness” (*TA 149*). He earnestly pleads with the young that there is nothing wrong to make a second start: “one must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any cost, to despair” (*TA 149*). Ratan, standing at the doorstep of the temple that offers a deserted look, “frozen, petrified, like our civilization itself,” (*TA 150*) hopes that the young can turn the tide in future.

If Ratan takes up the task of dusting the dirt of others sandals kept outside of a temple as an act of his expiation and atonement for the sins he has committed in his life, Gopal, husband to the heroine of *A Matter of Time* of Deshpande’s novel wants to desert the family after giving birth to three female children and finds a meaning for his existence in this chaotic world. Ratan realizes from his quest that in this chaotic world some kind of selfless service to humanity whether it be meaningful or meaningless alone shall bring some inner spiritual solace and that is why he has chosen a stance of sacrifice- cleaning the dirt of devotees sandals. But Gopals’s desertion has no roots in giving controlling and sacrificing stances that alone provide any one the much needed balm of solace and comfort for one’s tormented soul.
It is only the cosmic time responsible for the inner change of men. So far leading a life of emptiness, and corruption, Ratan realizes all of a sudden that for all his answers for meaningful existence lies in sacrifice— in his case sacrificing his ego and serving the humanity out of cleaning the dirt of the devotees sandals with dirt on sandals they enter the temple to come out with all purity and piety. For such a changed mental attitude of the devotees after their glimpse of divinity in the temple. The act of Ratan is very suitable in cleaning their sandals since there should not be for such pure and purged devotees coming out of the temple, a dirt ridden sandal is to contaminate them out of their wearing. Pure devotees after their visit from the temple have to go and mingle purely in the society on their dirtless sandals. Ratan’s service is to make them holier, sacred and beings of purity to the world. In the case of Gopal, the linear time operates on him in a negative manner that service to his family as a husband and father does not get him any solution for his quest of identity— finding a meaning for his existence. If Ratan’s quest for identity gets him an answer for all his problems out of sacrificing his pride that is found expressed in his act of cleaning the dirt of the sandals, this he has realized out of the influence of the cosmic time. But Gopal is not ready to sacrifice his pride. He takes umbrage on all moral and philosophical Hindu Vedantic thought. He is only a dreamer and not a performer. He has deserted everything physically on account of the influence of the linear time but only after the death of his wife Sumi, the cosmic time teaches him that desertion does not bring any solution but interpreting the role of a father stemming on sacrifice shall alone get him the meaning of his existence.

In A Matter of Time, Shashi Deshpande comes closer to her avowed mission of foregrounding not the men versus women issue, but the predicament of human existence. In the earlier novels women characters are not only at the centre, but also
they throw the male characters into the background. They are intelligent, courageous and strong, while the male characters are mediocre and shadowy. In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Saru overshadows her average husband who tortures her under the cover of darkness, trying in vain to prove his manliness to her. The same is the case with Saru’s parents. Again, Indu in *Roots and shadows* is more perceptive and forceful than her materialistic husband. Indu’s aunt, Akka, who rules the family with an iron hand, is more interesting and strong than her puppet-like brothers. Likewise, in *That Long Silence*, Jays’s urge for self-fulfilment, her commitment to the call of her conscience and her firm aim to break that long silence elevate her to great heights. Her husband and other male characters are important only for analyzing and understanding her soul-searching and frustrations. *A Matter of Time* is Deshpande’s first novel which is not only ‘her story’ but ‘his story’ too; it is about women and men, bonds of human relationships, alienation, renunciation and Fate or Time. Inevitably, it is the high watermark of contemporary fiction by women writers. Importantly, it focuses on feminism and gender politics, but then transcends all that and reaches the metaphysical plane, to concentrate on the full range of human experience which involves women as well as men.

The book is divided into three sections—‘The House,’ ‘The family’ and ‘The River’—and each of these sections is preceded by a philosophical quotation drawn from the Upanishads. To Gopal, the house is a bondage and trap, and so he moves out of it to a kind of vanaprastha or renunciation. Though Sumi is rooted firmly in the family (not only to her daughters, but also to her parents, sister, cousins, every member of her extended family and even to the history of the family), she learns the bitter truth that individuals are like two parallel rivers that do not converge but only diverge and move separately in different streams. She accepts stoically what Gopal
once said to her: “Sa-hriday in the sense of oneness is an impossible concept. Then abruptly he had pulled her close to himself and said, ‘Listen, can you hear? It’s two hearts beating. They can never beat in such unison that there is only one sound. Hear that?’ (AMT 24). Following the seemingly unreasonable desertion of the family by her husband, Sumi examines and re-examines the details of their married life and comes to the sad conclusion: “Two hearts two sounds. Gopal is right. Sa-hriday—there is no such thing” (AMT 24). Togetherness of beating of heart—impossible factor.

Interrogated by his mother-in-law Kalyani, cornered by his adolescent daughter who is out and out a feminist, and faced by his uncomplaining wife Sumi, Gopal goes through a brutally honest soul-searching: “I was frightened, Aru, frightened of the emptiness within me, I was frightened of what I could do to us, to all of you, with that emptiness inside me. That is the real reason why I walked away from Sumi” (AMT 50).

Gopal always feels that togetherness in life between husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants, family and society, is a lie. “All human ties are only a masquerade. Some day, some time, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth” (AMT 52). To Sumi’s sister Premi, who comes to reprimand him and remind him of his duty and responsibility towards his children, as a father Gopal says: “Well, let me put it this way. I could no longer believe that there is a meaning to my life, a happy culmination waiting for me at the end of it. Can you imagine what living with such a person would be for my children? For Sumi?” (AMT 134). Gopal finds no reason why he should think that children are the sole concern of parents. But when he thinks about his own parents whom he lost in an accident, he shows a kind, ambivalent attitude. The life of parents, he now feels, is inextricably entwined with the life of their children.
He felt that his parents left him in lurch and he himself grew up well without their support. Similarly had he left his children in the middle would not cause any damage to their growth. In the hands of time and nature everything and every person would receive their dividend for which there is no need for any intermediary custodians like parents boost or boast for the growth of children that they alone are solely responsible. Time and nature alone are primary factors for children’s growth and the roles of parents at this endeavour are only of secondary importance. He believes his parent’s desertion has shaped him well. So also his desertion shall shape his children, thanks to the real parental care and concern not by humans but by Time and Nature. This belief that we all born to be shaped by Time and Nature and there need not be any human attempt to shape us all is reason for his distancing and deserting practice of escapism. “It is a fool’s game trying to escape. But if I cannot escape my past, how will my children ever be free of me? I thought I had snapped the thread when I had walked out, I thought there was nothing left to connect us” (AMT 218). Sumi also shows an ambivalent attitude in her philosophical musings. Though she accepts Gopal’s unreasonable, quaint behaviour, at another occasion she says that she would like to get an answer from him. She plans to ask him the question: “How then can you, in this age, a part of the society, turn your back on every thing in your life?” (AMT 27). Likewise, Aru even in her youth comes out with perceptive philosophical statements. When she learns about the unfortunate marriage of her grandparents and the subsequent tragedy in which they lose their mentally handicapped son Madhav, she is totally distraught. Though she disapproves of Sripati’s eccentric silence and his deliberate alienation from the rest of the family, she cannot condemn him. Apparently, even she evinces ambivalence in her changing attitudes to her parents and grandparents.
The novel records the reaction and future moves of these affected women. Kalyani, Sumi and Aru react in different ways to Gopal’s desertion. Kalayani uses a mono-syllable “fate” (AMT 17) to describe the situation; Sumi handles the crisis with indifference, “I don’t care” (AMT 21), She states. She is neither crushed like Kalyani nor is interested in fighting back. It is her daughter Aru who despite her initial break down, “I want my home back, I want my father back” (AMT 21), decides to punish her erring father.

Apparently, Kalyani, like Goddess Durga is not empowered to destroy the demons of society. But the text does not permit the reader to imagine that she is weak. One wonders with Aru, if she lost her retarded child ‘deliberately’ because as “a retarded child she could not cope with” (AMT 142). A burden that soon could become too heavy either for her or her daughters to bear. Son- obsessed Shripati would have willingly sacrificed his daughters. The drastic step is taken to secure the future of her daughters. Deshpande rejects the spirit of sacrifice expected of women and offers more revolutionary options.

This is the story of a hoary house Vishwas built on endurance, trust and solidity. This is the spectacle of many persons. There is no house in the city resembling its stoic splendour and traditional glitter. This house has a history. It is in this house the grandmother Kalyani lives with her lawyer husband Sripathi. It is in this house Sumi now living with her daughter Aru, Charu and Sumi along with her history lecturer husband Gopal. Sumi’s elder sister Preti is in Bombay practicing as a doctor. She is wedded to a rich lawyer and leads a very happy life. But the thought of living only in this world and that too in the same house from birth to death created in her a sense of void that was further intensified out of hearing the song Mukesh singing “Jeena Yahan, Marna Yaheen” (AMT 9), the same routine repetitive cyclic
birth of life and death. The same voidness, nothingness also got the grip of Gopal
who suddenly disappeared from the house. Sumi came to realize the fact only in the
morning when she saw the bed of her husband never received any stain of a person
having slept on it. He had hinted to Sumi that the sense of loneliness took his better
half that he had lost interest in keeping himself as a partner shouldering the family
responsibility. His first daughter Aru is in the college. His second daughter Charu is
in pre university class. His last daughter Susi is in high school. For Aru, her father’s
missing is a matter unable to stomach. She searches for reason for his leaving. She
believes there must be a solid reason for his disappearance when her mother explains
to her that her father has left them because he is fed up with such life. He is fed up
with grown up children. He is fed up with family responsibilities. He is fed up with
his profession. He is fed up with such routine humdrum life. Aru as a modern girl
searches reason in all aspects of life. In her father’s disappearance the reason she got
from her mother is inadequate. She believes her father a coward. She believes her
father a rogue deserting the family at the prime time of holding the reign of economic
aspects and steer the domestic ship to reach safe shores of providing security, safety
and protection to his grown up daughters thereby proving himself a courageous man
weathering the turbulent sea of life and paving ways of solid future to his wife and
three daughters.

In Hindu community males are bread winners. They have to go out of their
house to eke out their existence and with the subsistence he gets he has to tend his
family and provide his femalewards safety on the bed rock of marriage. Her two
daughters Aru and Charu have attained their marriageable age and he suddenly
disappears with his vacant promise of his sudden feeling for nothingness in life. What
the job he is entrusted to negotiate with as a husband, a father of three female children
of his age, he simply relinquishes them. On the pretext of his vague and dull experience, he got out of his dull life. Infact, he is not a useless father ditching them to street gutter. “On Aru’s seventeenth birthday, Gopal her father has walked out on them” (AMT 10). It was really a matter of panic for her, her next sister Charu and her last sister. But their mother Sumi remained calm and created an impression that was the normal domestic quarrel alone was his departure. But after a few days alone they all realized the gravity of the situation. They all waited for Sumi, their mother to take up a lead but she did not show any sign of it. Aru knows her grandfather’s authoritative temperament. In the absence of her father, she could not tolerate his authority. Without him, she felt her stay there in that big house was none other than a stay in jail. She felt like a rebel to get away, but she was forced to remain calm on account of her mother, sister and her grandmother Kalyani.

It was Kalyani who experienced desolation once again after Gopal’s sudden disappearance. Doing scores of routine things with a heavy heart of a father’s loss of support and help was a challenging matter that Aru could not bear. She even enquired her next sister Charu whether he would be dead. But she silenced her that if that was such a serious matter their mother Sumi would have come to know about it. Aru had a plan of giving an advertisement in the newspaper for his immediate return and how much they all miss his presence.

People around them would soon ask them about Gopal. It was very strange matter that none of the family had visited them, not even Goda, shares of Kalyani’s joys and sorrows, or her daughter Devai, Sumi’s specially or even Ramesh so close to Gopal and such a constant visitor to the house. It was Nage, one of the oldest servants of Kalyani shared the grief of her daughter’s Lakshimi’s husband leaving her after an interval of ten years. She comforts them that such things fated to happen to some
people and they had to eat it with a grain of salt and continue their domestic duties. Making much about such worst matters was none other than ado of nothing. The impending doom of his disappearance created in them a dog in the manger situation—if he is alive or dead. Such a creaking suspense they could not tolerate. Finally they phoned up Premi, Sumi’s elder sister, a doctor practicing in Bombay. Premi was practical and a matter of fact woman. She probes deep into the causes of his disappearance. It is really ununderstandable for Gopal to leave his secured University lectureship. No sane man would do it. There happened in the university that some students took strong exception to his treatment of them. They all demanded an excuse. But he did not budge. The other strong reason was Sumi as a wife did not care him as any Indian wife was expected to care. But this was the remotest possibility. She spent twenty years of marriage life with him while Premi thought of his disappearance from all possible reason and her mother believed it a matter of ‘fate’.

Premi is now a successful doctor, a mother of seven year old son, wife of a prosperous lawyer but all these sense of independence of her got combed whenever she visited her father’s place. “My father never spoke to me until I was ten” (AMT 18). There was no endearment in the domestic atmosphere. But while comparing the dead authority of Premi’s father, Gopal treats his daughters on equal footing. It is really strange to see Gopal’s daughters talking with Gopal on friendly terms. On seeing him, a lovable husband, caring father, dutiful lecturer and honest person, Premi is unable to come to grips with the realities of his disappearance. After giving them a strong assurance for her help if needed at any time, she would show her presence and sort out things for them amicably. She is also a caring mother for children, affectionate sister to Sumi and loveble daughter to Kalyani. But she cannot afford to
stay for days in her mother’s home without getting a signal of Gopal’s stay away from home.

Goda and Kalyani are “the children of a brother and sister” (*AMT* 25). They are beings brought up in the same house. Kalyani’s mother expected a son. But Kalyani was born. Through Kalyani’s marriage with Sripathi, her mother’s younger brother, Kalyani’s mother expected a male child. Ironically she gave birth to two daughters - Sumi and Premi. Once again for her elder daughter Sumi, there are three daughters Aru, Charu and Seema. It is only for Premi there is a son by name Nikhil. Thereby Kalyani’s mother Manorama suffered a lot in her in-law’s house who were very rich and steeply tradition bound. They tried their level best to arrange for a remarriage for Kalyani’s father to get a son through her. It is Manorama who fought like a brave lady against her in-law’s wish. It was she who brought in her last younger brother Sripathi and made him her son-in-law. She used to hear from her mother Kalyani that for all happenings fate alone was responsible. This sense of her resignation calmed her spirit, weathered her fight against odds, kept her buoyancy. Adding fuel to fire, she gave birth to a male mentally retarded child whom she missed in a railway station while she was on her way back from Bangalore to join her husband Sripathi at Bombay who worked in Premi’s husband’s grandfather’s house as a lawyer. Sripathi thought the disappearance of the boy a deliberate matter, all due to Kalyani’s hatredness for the boy. Thereby he left her at Bangalore station and started searching the boy for many years. It was from this incident that he did not care her, touch her, consider her as his life partner. He took up a room in the upstairs and with an electric bell contacted people downstairs and continued his existence. He did not even allow his daughter Sumi and Premi neither near him, share his joys and sorrows
nor conduct himself as their father. He was for ever for them an erupting volcano
torturing them with his unbearable heat of aloneness.

Against this background Sumi and Premi led their lives. Gopal as a lecturer
stayed in their out house and in due course of time captured the heart of Sumi as well
as Kalyani. As he was an eligible bachelor, Kalyani gave her consent for his marriage
with Sumi. Sripathi too did not object to it. Gopal was a decent person in all aspects
but he was sensitive to the ‘authority’ exercised by students on him. In the domestic
front his father- in- law did not care to take him into confidence and share with him
all family problems. His wife Sumi though gave him births to three daughters, did not
know how to satisfy his intellectual hunger. It was his mother- in- law Kalyani who
was all concern with him. All the three daughters born to him were affectionate with
him. Still Gopal felt his life boring and empty. He did not like to get himself further
more entangled in the cycle of life and death. After a month of his departure, Sumi
does not want to stay any longer in her mother’s house. She wants to vacate. For Aru
it is a ridiculous matter. So far their stay in the house the hope of Gopal’s return is
possible. Leaving that house means pronouncing ‘the death sentence of that hope’.
For Sumi, leaving the house is a psychological need. She no longer liked to remain in
that house like a ‘stunned bird’. “There is a frenzy of movement, a tremendous flurry
of activity, a frenetic shaking of feathers. Sumi cannot be still” (AMT 28). She is
well assisted by Devaki and Hrishi- Goda daughter and son.

The three daughters of Sumi- Aru, Charu and Seema are known for their
“Sternness, plumpness and curious blankness” (AMT 35). Winning out of
togetherness-a factor for achieving has got its own relevance in the attitude of these
daughters. But among them Aru, “in one of her rare skittish moods, she feels ….
More like Ray’s heroine, moving suddenly, unexpectedly from a somber gravity to a
childlike playfulness. Now, there moods are a thing of the past and Aru is wholly steeped in earnestness” (*AMT 36*). Sensing the imbalance set in the domestic duties, she takes up on her shoulder ‘many of the chores at home’ thereby allowing Charu to concentrate on her studies whose aspiration is to get a seat in medical course. Similarly when Sumi wants to consult dentist “she insists on accompanying her mother to the dentist. She wants to be the man of the family, Sumi thinks, when Aru insists on accompanying her mother to the dentist. She wants to take Gopal’s place, she wants to fill the blank Gopal” (*AMT 36*). Out of the emptiness created by Gopal it is Aru who tries to fill up the gap in order “to steer her mother and sister through the stormy passage of change” (*AMT 36*). When Aru tries to enter into the kitchen, a dominating domain of her grandmother Kalyani in order to relieve her mother Sumi from that chores, Kalyani could not bear her intrusion and she came out with her vehement opposition that Aru should devote her time on her studies and should not waste time on “the mustard seed of domestic life” (*AMT 36*). Further Kalyani did not want Aru to be overburdened. Sumi calmed her mother that for getting along well in the domestic front everybody out of their spirit of togetherness has to help conduct the family chores in a harmonious manner if not “it is going to be hard to all of them (us)” (*AMT 37*) in future. Sumi happened to be an old student of Gopal. He went away from his home and stayed in the house of Sankar, an old student of him. He is running a printing press what Gopal expected a place of retreat offering him peace and calm but he is forced to live in the midst of “jangle of noises” (*AMT 40*). This place is known to his relative Ramesh. He went to meet him where he told him in the following manner “I stopped believing in the life I was leading suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I know I could not go on” (*AMT 41*). Since his coming to this place he dreamt about his father. His father died when he was eight. It was because of his
sister Sudha who got married to P.K. and he forgot about the faces of his parents. But now as he was alone, he dreamt about his father. His father got married to his sick brother’s wife. It was at the behest of his dying brother his father gave his widowed wife a protection out of the social knot of marriage. She had already a daughter, by name Sudha born to his father’s brother. This action of his father created in him a void in his early days.

The facts, of course, few as they are, spell out a different story:

Sudha’s father died of typhoid and I was born two years after my parents were married. But that was how it was for me - my father was never a father to me-not after I knew their story. He was my mother’s guilty partner he was Sudha’s uncle, her stepfather, he was my mother’s husband….. And now I dream of this kindly man, as if we have, through the years, achieved a kind of peace in our relationship, as if, like any son with a living father, we have finally, after a long struggle, achieved a harmonious relationship. (AMT 42)

Thus Sudha happened to be his stepsister. When Gopal served in Shivpur he developed a relation with a person called Girija that “threatened to complicate his life” (AMT 44). That was why he came to Sumi’s place and stayed at Kalyani’s house. Thus Gopal’s history was really complicated with a father got married to his brother’s widow, a stepsister to take care of and an affair with Girija entangled him beyond means of any possible solution. When Ramesh paid him a visit, he told him that he left his house in search of truth. Ramesh happened to be the son of Sudha. He was chummy with Gopal. He could not digest his desertion.

It was Kalyani who visited him at Sankar’s place. She was kind and considerate. She enquired him whether his desertion was due to his care for money.
She gave him assurance that all property she had, would be to Sumi since her other daughter Premi now a doctor, wedded to a wealthy lawyer at Bombay, leading a comfortable life. She did not care to expect any share. She also comforted him that her mother suffered a lot out of her birth but “She didn’t want to leave her (me) and go” (*AMT 47*). She tried to put reason into him that his act of leaving would be a great danger for his upcoming daughters. Gopal did not budge to all her requests but soothed her that he had taken this decision only after careful scrutiny. Kalyani’s grand daughter Charu, who accompanied her to her father’s place, did not wish to meet him. Gopal watching her moving away felt the pain only ‘physically’ but did not have any sense of compunction for his dastardly act.

Next Aru visited him. She became emotional at the sight of him remaining in the press like a prisoner in the jail. She enquired him “Is it because of some thing Sumi did, something she said? Is it because of us, because of me? Is it because I was rude to you, because I always argued with you? Is it because of what I said to you when you decided to resign? Is it money?” (*AMT 50*). Even these poignant questions from Aru did not create any dint in him, who remained in his stoic silence. He simply told her that he experienced “emptiness within him” (*AMT 50*) and with that emptiness he felt he would be of no use to them. Further he was frightened of this emptiness. The same kind of emptiness was found in his step-sister Sudha. Her husband P.K. died suddenly. She was given all comfort and happiness out of her marriage with P.K. A son Ramesh and a daughter Neena were born to her. Before her marriage she did not experience any happiness. Suddenly the provider of her happiness, that is her husband, plucked off from her permanently. Happiness of togetherness was suddenly snapped. Suddenly she was trapped in the enclosure of loneliness. At one stage or other it will engulf all.
And so it’s a lie, it means nothing, it’s just deceiving ourselves when we say we are not alone. It is the desperation of a drowning person that makes us cling to other humans. All human ties are only a masquerade. Some day, some time, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth. Like Sudha did. And I. (*AMT* 52)

Sumi’s plight of hunting for a suitable house is tough, tiresome, taxing and also tantalizing. While on one of her house hunting missions, she met her husband Gopal. Sumi tells him that Aru is bent on taking legal action against him. Gopal affirms her statement that she has come to his place and informs her piece of mind.

On seeing Sumi, Gopal got into his reflective mood and contemplated the present status of Sumi. For him, she was in a sense of distress but it did not mean that she was not thoroughly changed as estimated by Kalyani, Aru, Devaki and Ramesh. For him she changed herself to suit the changed situation. When Draupadi had to become Sairandheri, the queen’s maid she had to get changed to the new set up. Though she was a queen, circumstances changed her to become a maid of another queen. He also ruminated that Sumi longed “to be by herself to sleep alone, to be free, for a while” (*AMT* 85) like Draupadi. Now Sumi has a chance to look deep within and identify her inner potentialities in order to fight with worldly challenges. Similarly for him this separation gets him scope to get identified with the meaning of life and the purpose of existence. It is only in one’s meaningful loneliness one realizes salvation for their purpose of life. As Sairainhderi Draupadi knows the value of service of a true maid for a queen, thereby after the days incognito she will come to grips with the merits of maid servants and mark them as beings born for sincere service to their mistress queens. Similarly for Sumi, this separation makes her know what are the essential duties for a mother like to be taken care in the absence of a
husband. For him the separation does not create in him any void but offers him to move on a path so far untrodden, thereby giving him scope for adventures and challenges, so far factors found missing in his routine trodden path.

Thus the reversal of values became an eye opener for him that for both, the present separation got them to know more about the intricacies of husband-wife, man-woman relationship. Sumi’s face indicated Ananda when she paid him a visit which he found in her face when they had their first visit after marriage to his friend Hegde’s bachelor house. He saw Ananda in her face after their first act of copulation and the same Ananda he saw now in her face after their separation. Thus getting Ananda is not a matter of physical union alone but out of total realization of one’s complete union with one’s own soul of Govinda as sung by Jayadeva out of his spiritual experience of his soul’s union with Lord Govinda- a union holding love and joy within forever. Sumi does not complain Gopal’s desertion a moral departure ditching his responsibilities as a husband and father. She fully realizes the essence of his happiness in his total love and joy got out of his soul’s surrender to supreme one. She herself experiences such Ananda. For her joy and love is not a matter of physical union, nor a matter of social, marital meaning nor a matter of moral honour of protecting the family. Just because of becoming a husband to her and father to their children, Ananda cannot be realized. For her everyone is born independent, and then he or she is to live independently. Interdependence is a matter of convenience, a safety measure. It is for joy and love alone that life is to be lived. If marriage provides Ananda, then it is fine. If not one has to seek this Ananda in one’s own independent efforts. Having a shelter for her own and her daughter is an off shoot of her providing them this joy and love. In her parents home whatever may be their care and attention, whatever may be their concern and kindness, they do not enjoy
independence. It is on this bedrock of independence, love and joy shall prosper.

Parent’s home is not their home. Parent’s home without Gopal is totally different. Parent’s home without a male to look after is still more worse. All the daughters have to face challenges in life. They are not to be brought up in cozy, rosy and comfortable life. They have to experience the raw natures of Jungle. It is only in such a world they have to live. Circumstances may turn at any time throwing them into throes of life. They should not blink and get blighted. They should face challenges. They should establish victory against odds. All these things are possible only when they stand on their legs independently. That is why Sumi is mad after searching a house of their own to experience love and joy independently and share the same with others independently.

The association of Gopal and Kalyani was based on their preoccupation of the past. Kalyani’s attitude to all aspects of human life and their attendant actions are ‘preordained’ and “human beings are only the instruments” (\textit{AMT 93}). “For Gopal whatever may be man’s may be man’s magnificent act of human determination it is nothing but man’s playing out his role” (\textit{AMT 93}). In his view “it is the human will that sets things in motion” (\textit{AMT 93}). He also believes “human history, according to him, is fired by human desire” (\textit{AMT 93}). Thus for Kalyani man is only an instrument in the hands of destiny and for Gopal it is his will born out of his desire develops a pattern of man’s lives that sets things in motion. In the history of Kalyani family- the two theories “collide criss-cross one another” (\textit{AMT 93}). Gopal has no belief in the philosophy of objective forces responsible in operating in one’s lives and shape the design where as for Kalyani does not believe in the subjective desire alone, a factor of motivation of one’s actions. For Gopal, motivation of action is subjective desire whereas Kalyani objective preordained patterns alone responsible for one’s action and
reaction, both realize that there exists a third factor “that proves the general rule” \((AMT\ 93)\).

As a student of History, Gopal wrangles with ideals of philosophy that creates in him a sense of nothingness and he fails to look into the kaleidoscopic aspects of life and its material comforts which would give him a pep in life. Had he tasted this pep he would have transmitted it to Sumi. Neither he had the taste nor grooming nor knowledge got out of his studies. Thereby, he felt himself and caused vacuum to his family. Though a devoted husband, dutiful in nature showed all concern for Sumi for her hoary tradition, respected her feelings, never tried to lacerete her through words and actions, could not provide her any room for independence. Already born in a traditional family, enjoying all cosy comforts, Sumi does not know the value of independence. All that is taught to her are to be dutiful to her husband. She has no such wife’s domestic service of any modest Indian woman ought to have had at home like cleaning vessels, washing clothes, cooking in the kitchen and helping all at home with all domesticities. She had no work except to bear three female children. She is not treated by anyone in an authoritative manner though she is afraid of her father who could exercise authority on her. Had any of them, her mother, her husband or even her father shown authority, she would have sought for independence. Now her husband’s desertion gave her that scope to taste the fruit of independence.

Now Sumi realizes that time is not only a destroyer and also a creator. The money and property, Kalyani and Sripathi now enjoy is to be shared with Kalyani’s father Vithalarao’s elder sister’s family too. But Manorama stood in the way. She allowed her husband to do everything for her brother Sripathi and finally made him her son-in-law. For Manorama there were no sons. For Kalyani too there were no sons. For Sumi too there were no sons. The maneuvering capacity of Manorama in
handling the finance of the family deprived her for not having sons in the family. The only son born to Kalyani was lost. Kalyani’s son-in-law Gopal deserted the family. Preethi was married off to a distance place, escaped from the grip of the family sin, not blessed with a son but had a son Hirish. Ramesh came to help Sumi. He wanted to give the flat at Bombay to her since his grand mother intended to give it to him alone. It was the property of her mother through her father but she wanted it to give it to Gopal and not to him. Gopal is born to her, her second mother through her husband’s brother and she considers it essential to make Gopal bequeath this property. Ramesh is a son born to her out of traditional bondage. Gopal is a son born to her out of pure love. The birth of Gopal is to be reckoned stronger in filial bondage of love than traditional bondage of rituals. Ramesh realizes the worth of her mother and her Sudha’s gesture and is ready to offer it to Sumi. “This isn’t charity we’re offering you. We are not giving you even half the value of the flat, we can’t do that. It’s only a token” (AMT 123). Sumi compares her father’s token of love and Ramesh’s. In her father’s love token, there is an element of power and authority. In the love token of Ramesh, there is absolute love and love alone.

When Premi enquired whether he was tired of Sumi, Gopal answered her vaguely that he was under the grip of loneliness that haunted him to shed all impermanent aspects of life in which his relation to Sumi is one of them. He feels his emptiness will provide nothing for Sumi. When Premi told him that she is unable to understand his replies “let me (him) put it this way. I could no longer believe that there is a meaning to my life, a happy culmination waiting for me at the end of it. Can you imagine what living with such a person would be for my children? for Sumi?” (AMT 134). He says that in his living with them has no meaning when enquired how about his responsibility as a father to his children, he further explained
his position “For you, it is Nikhil. Isn’t it? But not for me, to think of being the purpose of my parents, life would have been too heavy a burden for me to carry. Can I then burden my children with that load?” (AMT 134). He considered himself a load without having any desire to be of any use for his children therefore they alone would feel him a burden. Premi wants to do something to Nikhil, her son. Thereby Nikhil too would do something for her. In the case of Gopal he has no feeling of parental mood in him to do something for his children’s betterment therefore he wished to remain away without making them feel for any expectation from him as their father nor he has any fatherly feeling to discharge his duties for their welfare.

This temperament of Gopal draws a comparison about him with her husband Anil. He became affectionate after this engagement but Gopal did not show any such affection on Sumi even after marriage - The affection of Anil after Nikhil’s birth is double folded. Since he considers himself to be his father. In the case of Gopal he neither shows love for Sumi after marriage and the same attitude continues even after giving birth to three children. Premi pleaded him that he should not behave like her father Sripathi. Her father never talked to them as any other father ought to have talked to his daughters. In her younger days when others complained about their parents love and quarrel, she usually felt like a ‘leper’. Premi did not want Gopal’s children to experience emotional voidness whenever they felt their relation with him as she used to feel about Sripathi even today. Gopal is of the opinion that Sumi hasn’t lost her confidence out of his walking out of her since she is ready to go for a job and shoulder the responsibility. When enquired how could he desert her if he is in deep love with her. He answers that it is an irrelevant question. Finally before her parting she informs him that Aru sought legal opinion from her husband. He coolly replies let Aru go her own way for which he is not responsible.
Premi left him after saying that their family was a cursed family, that her mother Kalyani did not lead a happy life with Sripathi, so now Sumi too experiencing similar tragedy. Her grandmother Manorama did not have a son. The son born to Kalyani happened to be a cripple. He was lost by her in Bombay railway station. Sripathi considered her responsible for such a mis-happening. He started leading a life of recluse exercising his authority from his stay on upstairs and never coming down for any social participation. Now Sumi, her sister, has to lead a life without a husband with three grown up daughters on her shoulders to be taken care of. After her return from Gopal’s place, Aru enquired Premi about him. She is given to understand that her father escapes also from her through his evasive answers. But she is not ready to allow him go scotfree. She also asks her if Anil has sent any positive reply on legal line suitable to get any legal remedy. But Premi replies that Anil wants to inform her that there is no legal remedy in this case. Aru then answers her that she has lost her faith on the marriage system. In her grandmother’s case, marriage does not bring any harmony. Similarly even after many years of married life Goda and her husband are still quarrelling on minor matters thereby tearing domestic harmony to pieces.

Manorama had taken charge of her own and her husband’s life. She had given it a shape that was to dazzle everyone. She had an immense pride in moulding her husband’s position and her own public activities. This included with her husband’s help, running a school for girls. “The Yamunabai pawar school for girls” *(AMT 154).* But her daughter Kalyani a weak, feeble creature defeated all this. When she returned home, a deserted wife and as Manorama saw it ,a disgrace to the family, Manorama gave up everything, she never took part in any public activities again. Manorama’s longing for a son was fulfilled through Kalyani. Ironically she gave birth to a retarded
male child. While waiting at V.T. station Bombay for her return to Bangalore she lost the child. Sripathi searched for the child. He was not successful. He did not return to Bangalore, his sister Manorama’s place. Kalyani with her two daughters Sumi and Premi came back home and devoted her time in looking after her parents. Vithalarao, a man known for his scientific temper, became a believer of god and started hunting for astrologer to come to know about the possible union of his daughter with Sripathi. In that connection alone he made the Ganesh idol and kept it at the front of the house. He was down with stroke and totally paralysed. He was kept on bench which he slowly hated to rest on. Slowly he hated Manorama who alone was responsible for her daughter’s marriage with his younger brother Sripathi. He did not allow her to nurse him. It was Kalyani who looked him after like a child. After knowing his agony, he experienced out of his lying on the bench she made his bedding on the floor. Ironically with a sign of relief, he heaved his last sigh. Manorama started cursing her that she was responsible for her husband’s death. She also cursed her that she alone was responsible for her grandson’s disappearance. She did not allow her pet daughter Goda to look her after. She with vengeance extracted all work from Kalyani who did all odds for her mother patiently. It was Manorama who pleaded with her brother to come and stay at her husband’s place. He too came to Bangalore and started leading a lonely life in her wife’s place only exercising his authority and never sharing the feeling of togetherness. All the dreams of Manorama are blasted to pieces by her daughter Kalyani who gave up everything and never took part in any public activities. Thus the house known for its glitter, gaiety and glamour was paled into insignificance all due to ‘fate’ as Kalyani used to say.

Sumi finds in her own daughter (Aru) all her resemblances of her great grandmother Yamunabai. She has in her all the traits of her, thereby she is the most
suitable person in the family to hold the regins of domesticities. This great grandmother of Sumi, Yamunabai conducted a school. She crawled and inched her way up on the task of providing class instructions to wards. She never relented from this uphill task and never showed signs of remorse and despair. Even for getting the basic amenity like chalk she has to go begging from the neighbours around her. “I some times think we moved forward crawling on our knees, begging for things” (AMT 187). This spirit of tenacity, assiduousness and unswerving nature of Yamunabai that she was born to work as a teacher was her assigned path of duty from which course she should not deviate. This spirit of her and its tough physical manifestations were the offshoot of Lord Krishna’s tenet ‘Nimitamatram bhava’ that is the awful during the surrender of body and spirit to the oneness of duty assigned to perform.

For this she develops the stoic bent of mind that is responsible for running a school. The same stoic spirit Aru is to identity for deriving joy of her existence not once in finding self liberation of her own self but also finding these ways and means for getting the same joy of liberation for all members of her family wallowing in misery of leading a life without any responsible male member. Yamunabai as a woman, steers the course of family ship without getting any male support, so also Aru, in the absence of her father and grandfather as male supporters, she has to bear the entire family responsibilities and conduct the course of the family on smooth line. So the curse of the family that women alone have to shoulder the responsibilities of the family and males under the pretext of filmsy reasons like loss of child (Shripati) and irresponsible clinging to philosophical pursuits, in finding meaning for one’s existence (Gopal). Male members are after illusory pursuits and female members grapple with realities of life. In so doing she realizes that she only is an instrument or
a cog in the wheel of time or destiny that alone is responsible in giving her strength to fight against odds for which she develops such a bent of mind that in that inch by inch progress of achieving her goal she has to patiently suffer in the physical pain of crawling on knees as well as emotional pain of begging things from others for the successful conduct of the school. Yamunabai is stern in her achieving goal for which her success lies in her stoic nature of bearing physical and emotional pain caused out of running the school. Aru is to identify such a definite goal, imbibe Yamunabai’s stoic spirit in order to achieve joy of her self liberation as well as finding the same liberation of joy for others wallowing-bent of mind.

The lawyer Surekha meets Gopal. Aru is left in the car. She meets him all alone. Initially Gopal appreciates the appearance of Sumi about which “She has no vanity at all” (AMT 212). From this comment Surekha laughingly replies that he appeared to be a doting husband but still he left her. For this Gopal thus replied that he lost his parents in an accident at a very early age. Both died together. It was an impossible matter. For him each one’s journey is separate; journeying together is only a ‘coincidence’. From this expression he has made it clear that togetherness for him is an alien matter and a matter of coincidence-an imposition and at any given point of time he would withdraw himself from the tangle of togetherness. Then she enquired him whether he was cruel or any other woman entered in between them that might be a reason why he had left her. She was very particular about this since these matters were valid from legal point of view. In the case of Gopal there were no such proofs as evidences to be shown for his desertion. The lawyer considers these things, irrespective of their bad or noble reason but they are essential factors to fulfill his legal responsibility of maintaining his wife and children. If human emotions damage someone, then law takes account of that. Here in Gopal’s case there is no such human
emotion responsible for causing damage to his family members. She also informs him that it is because of his daughter she is before him. His daughter sends her excuses for calling him coward - “something to do with an article you wrote, and then retracted” (AMT 213). Gopal accepted the fact of getting back the article out of his fear for obvious reasons of getting bruised out of waiting for long and the scar appeared on such injured parts. He then came forward to share with her Aru’s temperament suitable to her age.

Gopal’s fear emanated out of his waiting so long a period for a tragic happening at his family front that will linger in his memory till his death as an indelible scar in his emotional attachment in the family. The fear of uncertainty and instability in life as well as in one’s family that torments Gopal, urges him to break his filial tie and give his family members scope to lead an independent life without any male partner support. It is quite ironic that he thinks that as a male he has to take up the role of bread winner and in his absence he fears his family becomes a rudderless ship. Expecting doom out of his absence, a factor that his family members had to face at any given point of time gave him a calculated hoax move of deserting his family and paving them way to experience the hard realities at the event of his real and permanent separation of them. This expected doom had happened. But he did not leave from the family permanently. It was Sumi who otherwise was given to understand by him as a pillar of support for the rest of family.

What matters is time. Gopal proposes his desertion. But time disposes Sumi; so far considered to be the anchor of the family. It is not in man’s proposal that things in the world happen. Things happen for which no reason can be assigned. Things happen for which no scheming is possible. Things happen for which no verbal explanation has been given vent to. In the transactional world wrongs are performed
without getting any permanent remedy. Gopal’s desertion is one of such things. If one wrong is set right another one will spring up. This is the order of the world. It is foolish to expect a world free from all wrongs. Therefore he is not a tool to say these words but a feminist of exception. As all feminists find fault with patriarchy responsible for all ills and wrongs then they have to come forward “to reject all these things based on patriarchy too” (AMT 215). As Aru fighting for all ills based on patriarchy has to develop in her the temperament and mood to face the world, meet the challenges, stand on her own legs and establish herself as a strong being of honour without caring for wealth. In Hindu tradition “the desire for sons is the desire for wealth and the desire for wealth is the desire for the worlds” (AMT 214) whereas Aru being born as a female, as a daughter, Aru has “to manage to survive the most terrible things” (AMT 215). It is this answer of Gopal to Aru that prevents him permanently to lead a role of a father, a benefactor, a protector, a bread winner and there will be no second chance given to him on this score.

When Sumi meets him next, he is given to understand that Aru spends most of her time with Surekha, “as if she’s an Oracle” (AMT 220). Gopal admits the view that Aru’s association with Surekha will embolden her to fight against all odds. Sumi’s life is an easy way of life. Expecting the same for her daughter Aru, is her mother’s selfish attitude. Each is having a life to tread on. She now feels in Aru there will be aims and motives that she may not see eye to eye whatever may be the life. Aru has to develop a temperament “to taste life, I want her to relish it and not spit it out because she finds it bitter” (AMT 220). Sumi reminded her that at the night when she entered into his first time after their marriage that he had told her that “If either of us wanted to be free, the other would let go. We are not going to be tied together no handcuffs, you said” (AMT 221). When he told this to her, he was twenty six and she
was eighteen. He replied that he thought about it only after Seema’s death that he would surely die as “men most often die first” (AMT 221). At the time of marriage he thought of life of togetherness but Seema’s birth changed him. But for Sumi it was not like that. Now that he was afraid of death that would separate him permanently and before his wish to know the truth of existence took his better half he wanted to free himself from the fetters of family bondage and make them lead a life of freedom without him. Death for him is a matter of separation. Before death, he has to realize the essence of life. Family bondage is his handcuffs. To break the cuffs, he has to desert them. This desertion is painful for them. But the pain got out of death is more painful for him and others. The pain of separation is only temporary. They may know to lead a life without him. He will be on his pursuit of realizing the worth of his existence. But for Sumi, it is not so. She has daughters to be looked after, parents to be taken care of. For him as a male the duty is in his pursuit of self-realization. For her, as a female the duty is in her pursuit of self-sacrifice for getting happiness for her family. His pursuit borders on individual effort of sacrificing the relation of kith and kin for his spiritual attainment. Her pursuit borders on her effort of sacrificing her own desire for the welfare of the family. If his sacrifice is for his salvation of birth then her sacrifice is for bringing solution of happiness, comfort and peace for her family. He cares for his spiritual attainment for which the family is a burden. She cares for the material advancement for the family in order to provide them all a life of joy. What joy he is to achieve out of his quest for spiritual seeking, one may not gauge. But one will definitely know how much joy the family is subjected too out of Sumi’s sacrifice can be well gauged.

But ironically Sumi’s attempt of provider of joy is nipped in the bud. She dies in an accident along with her father leaving the family in utter desolation. It is Gopal
who takes up his mission to sink her urn in the Ganges. It is neither the wish of Sumi as joy giver for her family got realized nor the wish of Gopal to get to realize the essence of life bore any fruit. Wish of individuals has to be blessed by Time. Before human beings wishes get fulfilled for which time plays a major role whether their wishes remain as castles built in air or become matters of solid reality. At any given change of time all our wishes, plans, schemes, dreams of achievement and faith on our attempts bearing fruits—all blasted to pieces. Of course Aru in the family totally groomed to support the family after the vacuum created after the death of Sumi now rests with responsibility of looking after the family. Charu has gone with Premi to continue her medicine studies. She has emphasized the experience of motherhood as the experience of woman yet the institution of motherhood is controlled by man and this physical quality conditions her entire life. Deshpande makes her readers ponder over the problem through the lives of three mothers: Manorama; the mother of Kalyani, Kalyani and Sumi. Manorama was fortunate; she never had to suffer as a wife, mother and daughter though she did make her daughter’s life miserable by marrying her to her own unwilling brother Shripati. Kalyani’s education was curtailed and a feeling of inferiority was infused into her because she was a girl-child when her mother ‘wanted a son’. Against all odds Kalyani survives. “Kalyani who has survived intact, in spite of what Shripati did to her, Kalyani who has survived Manorama’s myriad acts of cruelty” (AMT 151) is a miracle. Manorama had attempted to kill her metaphorically, and Kalyani probably has killed a retarded son to give life to her daughters. Their crimes are the same but not the punishment. Her role in Gopal-Sumi’s marriage may be condemned by patriarchy but from the human point of view Kalyani’s deed is applaudable. She emerges as a worthy mother. Sumi, the third mother in question, is very different from Manorama and Kalyani. Though
she has inherited the qualities of her mother and grandmother yet she keeps a space for herself. Her decision to take up a job is not welcomed by Aru who selfishly objects to the idea. But sumi’s calm reply is, “Be happy for me Aru. This is the first thing in my life, I think that I’ve got for myself” (AMT 230). Claiming something for the ‘self’ despite the demands of motherhood is a revolutionary step taken by Sumi. The creator of the new world emphasizes the change, continuity and the nature of freedom not as an abstract ideal but as possibilities in given life and time. None can doubt the relevance of sumi’s determination.

Indian mythology depicts women more as an absence than a presence. Woman’s sacrifice, surrender and effacement are approved because of the heroic failures of the females ensure the victory of the males. Deshpande very interestingly manipulates the Indian myths to create a space for women to challenge the traditions of subservience and circumscription. Her re- vision of the myth of Sairandhri/Draupadi of the Mahabharata uncovers new truths and possibilities related to female psychology. Conventionally, it is believed that a married woman sans her husband is unhappy and incomplete. But Sumi’s interpretation of Sairandhri’s psychology is an eye- opener;

Don’t you think this was something she (Sairandhri) had often wanted, to be herself to sleep alone, to be free, for a while, of her five husbands? … To have the pleasure, the liberty of being alone, her own mistress, not to have to share her bed every night with a husband – yes she must have longed for it.” (AMT 85)

Ideologies of imperialism find expression through the roles of the colonizer and the colonized. Sumi was never colonized either by her husband or her father. She had challenged the colonizer by marrying the man of her choice and later
unscathed by the colonizer/husband’s treatment, neither begs him to return to the
family life nor dumbly accepts the ‘crushed’ position. Immediately, she begins to
build for herself and her daughters and finally emerges as a woman of substance. Aru
discards the concept of marriage and decides to become a self-aware, confident,
autonomous social worker-cum-lawyer. Imperialism had failed to control the central
female characters of a Matter of Time though we have references of women being
treated as slaves. Doctor Premi, the younger sister of Sumi, recalls the story of an
AIDS patient who had married just to have someone to look after him at the terminal
stage. This episode projects “new dimension of betrayal and cruelty in the woman-
man relationship” (*AMT* 145).

Time as the greatest healer finds its way to release the marginalized status of
women out of making them concentrate on four major issues that are indispensable
for the liberation of women; education, financial independence, control over her
sexuality and the moral choice. She does not believe in the necessity of a brave new
world parallel to the present one. What she insists upon, is a ‘space’ for women. If
the ‘self’ of woman is disregarded, through the ‘unwritten story’, women will record
her protest and create characters in real life like Kalyani, Sumi and Aru to oust the
stereotyped images of women’s subservence.

In *The Apprentice* the linear time operating on Ratan has made him, a
degenerated being for which he alone is not responsible but the period in which he
lives is also greatly responsible. But his sudden realization of his degenerated
existence gets shaped into meaningful gesture of sacrifice due to the cosmic influence.
For which his quest for a meaningful life in the disorderly world of his period
suddenly dawned on him in the form of sacrifice out of cosmic time. His choice of
sacrifice and the cosmic movement of time gets interacted with each other to make
him a man leading a life of essence. In *A Matter of Time* everything depends on linear
time which contributes for all the values especially the values of women ever
dependent on men and never deviate from the authority of men. Gopal wants to give
freedom to his wife and children and in so doing he also wishes to find a meaning for
his existence. He believes deserting the family shall offer freedom for his wards. At
the same time, he also believes out of snapping such filial ties, he can go in search of
his identity of his existence. In his case the quest for his meaning of existence
becomes impossible on account of his lack of sense of sacrifice. Deserting the family
is not a sacrifice but an irresponsible act. The linear time operating on him in all his
deeds shows him only as a being of escapist but not a being of sacrifice. His non-
realization of sacrifice within and the awful daring of moment surrender of cosmic
time never touches him to find a meaning for his existence. The moments surrender of
cosmic time and his lack of sacrificing everything to grapple such a situation is his
tragedy for which the matter of time is responsible. He is not ready to sacrifice the
influence of linear time and catch up with the cosmic time for which sacrifice is the
only vehicle for getting liberated from the ties of the world.

Remaining in the family, Ratan sacrifices his pride got out of power and
money in his choice of sacrifice- that is sitting outside the temple and cleaning the
cheppals of the devotees. In the case of Gopal, the pride of a protector as a husband
and father gains its importance out of shouldering the family responsibility for which
he has to sacrifice many things. Instead of sacrificing, he chooses the path of escapism
leaving all his members of family in utter misery. He believes that such a desertion
shall give them freedom to face the challenges of life out of his absence. In that
choice of him neither he nor his wards get any benefit. The time to elevate him as a
being providing happiness to all out of sacrifice comes only after his wife’s death. In
that context, time becomes a matter that never makes Gopal realize sacrifice as a only 
source of happiness for him or for others. In the case of Ratan, he realizes the essence 
of sacrifice without any damage caused out of domestic tragedy- a factor of bliss due 
to time. In the case of Gopal, the essence of sacrifice becomes meaningful only after 
the death of his wife Sumi and death of his father - in- law Shripathi.

There is no tragedy of time for achieving a meaningful existence for Ratan out 
of sacrifice. It is due to time. There is the element of tragedy of time for getting a 
meaningful existence as a father and husband bordering on the element of sacrifice 
comes to Gopal only after his wife’s and his father- in- law’s death. It is also due to 
time. For some, time brings meaning and significance of existence out of happy 
ending but for some it brings the same factor out of sorrow and separation. This is due 
to matter of time. That is given expression in the novel of *The Apprentice and A 
Matter of Time.*