(i) **Theme of Career Woman’s Predicament**

(ii) **Rage of Impotence.**

Ruskin is solicitous to warn women away from accomplishment. They may get a smattering of information, but they are given orders to halt at the point of difficulty; understanding the meaning, the inevitableness of natural laws and follow at least one of them as far as to the threshold of that bitter valley of humiliation, into which only the wisest and bravest of men can descend.¹

THE predicament of a working or career woman is as old as mankind itself; man digs the clod and woman carries a basket load of it to some place; the irony is that the amount of labour being equal, the earning is not the same; the woman is paid half the wage that a man earns; man is free to burn candle at both ends, while woman has to nurture the entire family and is expected to save something against the rainy day; when it comes to the middle class of the society, the sky changes as there is a clash of ego; man seldom succumbs to humiliation, but a woman is destined to life long subordination; whenever she tries to come head and shoulders above to claim her individual entity, she has to make compromise for the futures of her little children.

During the last fifty years, India has witnessed profound changes in almost every aspect of her life. Since the advent of independence in August 1947, the pace of change has been accelerated to a great extent; the processes of change operating throughout the country has been emancipation of women from their tradition-bound ethos. In independent India women have been entering the field of salaried jobs; the numerical
growth of women taking up employment in various capacities can be witnessed in a busy area of any of the metropolitan towns in India. Women from the lower strata of society have always worked for wages in this country but those upper classes were mostly confined to their homes, for they were blessed with God’s plenty: “In independent India they have started coming out of their seclusion and are entering vocations that were largely the preserves of men. This is a significant development and is characteristic of India of a free nation.”

Several factors and forces have contributed to this grown of the newly emerging middle-class women in India. The emancipation of Indian women on socio-economic level has itself been a product of and an instrument in, the changes in their lives; in an investigation of the socio-economic condition of educated Indian women by Hate, it was observed that, “a deep and vital changes has taken place in their economic condition and personal status.” Her findings are suggestive of the fact that the change in their attitude towards various issues of life has, in its turn, affected their behaviour patterns in various walks of life. Desai, pointing out the change in the outlook towards women’s status, writes:

Now woman is no longer looked upon as a child-bearing machine and a harlot in the home. She has acquired a new status and a new social stature.

Dube, to quote yet another authority says,

There are unmistakable signs that the traditional conceptions regarding the place and role of women are slowly changing in the contemporary Indian society... Increasing opportunities for modern education, greater geographical and occupational mobility, and the emergence of new economic patterns are in the main responsible for this trend.

This neo economic cosmos has bifurcated the path to be followed by Indian women. During the first phase the educated women had to choose
between career and marriage, a majority of those who chose to take up
jobs had to forego the pleasures and responsibilities of marriage and
family life. In the second phase, the question of either profession or
marriage was abandoned and a combination of the two roles—job and
marriage—become more common.

In the recent past not many educated married women were
gainfully employed in India except those who had been compelled to
accept job by gross-economic necessity. The picture has somewhat
changed in the past few years. Now, not only those women, who are
economically hard-pressed, get engaged in paid jobs, but also those who
wish to lead a socially useful life and add to the family income. They
have come to realise that work gives them personal status, and an
independent social standing. With the change in women’s personal status
and social stature has come a change in her way of thinking and feeling
also. Desai quotes a passage from Rajagopal’s *Indian Women in the
New Age* (1936) to describe this development:

> Women are gradually realizing that they have personalities
of their own as human beings and that their mission in life
does not end with becoming good wives and wise mothers
but also realizing that they are all members of the civic
community and of the body politic.\(^6\)

Desai has quoted the following passage from *Sree Bodha and Social
Progress in India*:

> Along with men, women of India have also begun to realize
that the supreme goal of woman’s life is not circumscribed
to merely love making, dutifulness to husband, child-bearing
and domestic work. They have begun to realize that a
woman’s life has a higher and a more serious objective.\(^7\)

The humanitarian interpretation of marriage has revealed that since
marriage is not a spiritual communion in a vacuum, but a union of two
human being also need clothes, food and place to live in, material foundations are indispensable and a wife’s participation in procuring the required family finances, becomes essential in times of economic hardship.

Ross writes:

Indeed, the main reason that so many married Hindu middle class women work without reproach is, because everyone understands the economic problem of middle class and, that a wife’s income is often essential to the family’s standard of living.\(^8\)

A wife’s prescribed role was more definite and her duties were more specific than those of husband and she had to adhere to the set pattern of conduct laid down for her. In this connection Indira writes;

She was to spend the whole day in considering matters entirely related to the house and was particularly to be attentive to the needs and desires of her lord—always subordinating her own comforts and convenience to his.\(^9\)

The role assigned to working women, who are married is two fold, one as wives, mothers, and housewives, and the other, as employees. Being subjected to the dual demands of home and work, they find the crisis of adjustment awaiting at the door. In addition to the biological functions that they have to perform because of their sex and the culturally defined women’s roles in which they have to act, they are confronted at the same time with the responsibilities and duties connected with their employment. The patterns of families with working wife and the functions of their different members are liable to be greatly affected by the fact of wife’s gainful employment outside the home. The husband fails to orient himself to the novel and changed situation, hence the problem of adjustment assumes a grave and gloomy shape for working woman.
Strain can occur when an adult must take over a new work role for which he has not been prepared as a child, particularly if the prestige of this new assignment is not equal to that of the former role... as women’s tasks in all societies have less prestige than those of men, women taking over ‘male’ business or professional roles are moving to a higher level of job prestige, whereas men are moving to lower levels of work.\textsuperscript{10}

A woman is possessed with the desire to fulfil her potential, that is why she displays her commitment to the career selected by her. It amounts to the rejection of an identity based solely on a relationship as a mother, wife or a daughter. An Indian woman in the past, has been denied of opportunities to come up professionally in life. Early marriage and purdah system confined her to her home. In a traditional society the roles of wife and mother were provided with top priority and this engulfed her identity. The modern woman is constantly trying to live as an economically independent individual self. Breaking the glass ceiling has attained now meaning as never before. The Indian working woman, with her resilience and intellect, balances her family and career judiciously—especially when she leads a domain as diverse or challenging as business, politics or social work. Against all odds, she has redefined traditional mindsets to create path where there were none and stormed bastions. Not only male, but female writers also have ignored the professional and bread-earning aspect of a woman’s life and existence. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala and Anita Desai have not discussed at length the attempts of women to gain financial independence since their focus is entirely different. Nayantara Sahgal does better than her predecessors in the depiction of career women especially in her later novels. But only Sonali of \textit{Rich Like Us} arrests our attention. More than any of these women novelists, it is Shashi Deshpande who tries to
project women who endeavour to give equal importance to their professional as well as personal lives.

Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists—Indu (Roots and Shadows) Saree (The Dark Holds No Terrors), Jaya (That Long Silence) and Urmila (The Binding Vine) all are career women. She tries to address particularly the problems of the middle-class working women. Her Career women portrayed by her try to redefine human relationship in view of the newly acquired professional status. She is aware of the predicament of a woman in a male-dominated society especially when the woman is not economically independent. There are numerous stories of women who sacrificed their comforts to accept the challenges head-on to make a difference in society and inspired others and dedicated their lives to cause that was closet to their heart.

The predicament of a career oriented woman, who had cherished dreams of becoming a gynaecologists, and who married a teacher, whose ego clashes as she gains popularity and her return to the abandoned home is the sum and substance of the novel The Dark Holds No Terrors, in which the protagonist ‘undergoes an arduous journey into herself and liberates herself from guilt, shame and humiliation to emerge in full control over her life.’ Besides, there is some what of a certain rage of impotence also, as theme of feminine assertion is directed towards the exposure of uncontrollable female sexuality.

The Dark Holds No Terrors tells the story of a marriage on the rocks, for Sarita is a successful doctor during the day time; at night a terrified and trapped animal in the hands of her husband, Manohar who is an English teacher in a small college; the novel begins with Saru (Sarita) returning after fifteen years to her father’s home; she once proclaimed that she would never come back to her father’s place; she returns unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband; the rest of the novel is what Saru remembers and a brief confession to her father about
her trauma: her stay in her father’s house gives Sarita a chance to review her relationship with her father, husband and her dead mother.

The sublimated self will of Saru along with her ego and love for power is behind the multiplication of her problems; while becomes a successful busy doctor which upsets her family, her husband gets annoyed of her popularity. She can’t concentrate at the domestic front, which is an awkward situation in which she is placed; at personal level, she feels a gradual disappearance of love and family attachment which she has once developed; what she faces is a psychological conflict which becomes inevitable; she as a wife, is not able to devote her time to attend her husband’s need and children are not taken due care of; under such a situation, she fails first as a wife, and next as a mother. The financial ascendance of Sarita, renders Manohar less significant and impotent; he is possessed with the false ideology that his aggressive attitude in the bedroom during coitus will regain potency and masculinity.

At this level the psycho-analytical approach becomes a must, for the burden of a working housewife always ends up with the burden of double duties and conjugal relationship. If the balance is not maintained well, the feeling of disenchantment and imbalance leading of separation which becomes a possible way out for mutual benefits and happiness. Her life becomes a problematic one, so she on hearing the news of her mother’s death decides to go back to her parents’ home. She expects sympathy from her father but to no avail. Manohar’s approach at Saru’s house is not an object of welcome to her, for she thinks that as though Manohar has reached her house and knocks at the door. She tells her father not to open the door. If he does so, her husband being tired of knocking would leave the place. At the same time, she wants some internal help from someone. The whole situation in which Sarita has placed herself is rather unwarranted.
The lack of perfect understanding between husband and wife causes the whole problem. Lack of emotions and spiritual oneness between the husband and wife has to be overcome by mutual surrender of ego then only mutual understanding and happiness will follow. If a working woman has to keep her cottage happy, she should be of a compromising nature. In domestic life, there should be a blend of acceptance and rejection, flexibility and rigidity and above all revolt if the occasion demands and compromise for peaceful life. All these characters are blended in Sarita who represents a middle class society in the modern India. Her trauma is her aspiration and paucity of its fulfilment. A traditional bound woman may—sacrifice anything for the sake of her family’s welfare and she may not zealously guard her individuality. In the case of educated women it becomes more often than not the family life happiness is minimum because of divided self between husband and children and then between work and herself. Feminine sensibilities crumble and natural love disappears, clash of egos results in incompatibilities. The romance of life has shattered, and love is o longer for them a sweet thing to posses and enjoy. “Take away the word, the idea, and the concept will wither away”. A certain cloud of disintegration hovers over the accursed house, for Manohar’s male ego tries to dominate Sarita. It is not a clash of principles but only the clash of egos.

In the vein of literary artist, Sarita starts playing upon the phrase as a matter of dramatic irony, when the interviewer in a lighter vein mentions bread and butter. This makes her husband think that in terms of earning that his wife earns more than him and he is no longer her equal in affluence. Immediately, he thinks that he must show her that he is more powerful than Sarita in the bed; Manu’s neglect for Sarita does not go unnoticed even at an earlier stage:

I did not at that time ponder over his tone I was too busy, I was too tired, I was exhilarated with the dignity and
importance that my status as a doctor seemed to have given me (36).

The innocence of possessiveness and clash of ego does not haunt the mind of Manohar and Sarita, when they are in a state of courtship because of their middle-class inhibitions. When Saru begins to find a status, Manu feels uncomfortable with Saru’s steady rise in status, as he feels ignored when people greet and pay attention to Saru. Besides she is unable to spare time enough for Manu and children. Manu and Saru want to move out to some other place for their own reasons. When Manu feels humiliated and embarrassed, Saru is no longer happy in that cramped and stinking apartment and wants to move into something more decent. Now she is given to think that when she was living with content with the meager salary of Manu, she was happy, but Midas worshipping attitude took away her humble bliss, when she became career oriented:

For me, things now began to hurt (...) a frayed saree I could not replace, a movie I could not see, an outing I could not join in. I knew now that without money life became petty and dreary. The thought of going on this way became unbearable. (92)

The tragedy of ambition in Saru’s case starts when the glimmer of financial help from Boozie blinds her, and frank. Boozie openly flaunts his relationship with Saru to hide his homosexual nature and Saru wanted to exploit him through her feminine wiles to achieve her much coveted goal of becoming an established, reputed doctor. Yet her contentment in her career is no match to her discontentment at home. With her responsibilities increasing outside of home. She recoils from Manu’s love-making and he takes her rejection of sex as rejection of himself. Saru just wants to be his wife so that he doesn’t resent her any longer. Though in the beginning, his beastly behaviour and sexual sadism
confused her, now she has reached a stage when she is not able to bear it any longer.

Her predicament is contrary to the assertion of most feminist that financial independence brings security to woman. Saru thinks that it is easier for the woman in the past to accept such way of life for they did not have to struggle and therefore had no other choice, there was left no option for them but to surrender their ego and existence on the alter of destiny. Saru therefore advocates the feeling that women should pretend that they are smart, competent, rational or strong. Woman can nag complain, henpeck and moan, but never should show themselves as strong personalities;

Don’t struggle, don’t swim against the tide. Go along with it; and if you drown nevertheless, well, that’s an easier death after all. (137).

A woman is expected to behave in accordance with the whims and fancies of her husband. Economic independence and independent identity are not meant for a woman. That she has done injustice to her mother, husband and children, makes Saru confused; the sojourn to her father’s house also does not obliterate the burden of responsibilities that she has left behind such as Renu being sent to school, covering Abhi with blanket; all this gives rise to the need for quest arises. Saru laments, “It’s all a question of adjustment, really. If you want to make it work, you can always do it” (118). In spite of achieving economic liberty, she cannot come out of the clutches of miseries arising out of the performance of double duties. Besides practicing medicine she has to fulfil the assigned job of a housewife. She expresses her desire to leave her medical practice, “I want to stop working. I want to give it all up...my practice, the hospital, everything” (79) but Manu dissuades her from doing so, as their standard of living wouldn’t be possible on Manu’s income.
In an extremely shrewd manner, Manu pretends that he knows nothing of what he did in a beastly manner; this happens in the morning and adds to certain type of intolerance to a self conscious woman like Sarita. At this juncture she comes to know about her mother’s death. Despite her vow never to return home, she does she has reasons to do so as she won’t have to undergo the humiliations of her mother’s taunts, and she has on explanation to give to for her returning home on account of her mother’s death.

Shashi Deshpande contrasts the lives of Saru, Sunita and Nalu and shows that a wife, a mother and a spinster and their own share of joys and sorrows, and it is almost difficult to conclude as to who is the more happier or the more fulfilled. While the married women are reported to be dissatisfied with their marriage, the unmarried ones are reported to have their own sufferings and anxieties. Because of paternal help and advice to regain her will power, Saru feels that it’s her life and there is no need to hide oneself from others and to be a silent sufferer. This is what she has been desiring till then, and the absence of which has alienated herself from her home, her family and surroundings. Towards the end of the novel, however, Saru receives a letter about Manu’s arrival. Initially, on hearing about Manu’s arrival. At this moment of utter despair, it is the call of her profession of utter despair, it is the call of her profession that steadies her and gives her the courage to confront reality. Hence, before going to Sunita who is sick Saru asks her father to tell Manu to wait for her. This is enough proof of her assertion, individuality and independent judgement in favour of professional loyalty required of a medical practitioner. Albeit it is clear that she will no longer remain as an object for Manu to vent his frustration on.

Saru, being a true representative of middle class career oriented woman of modern India, adopts a rebellions attitude towards traditions; the irony is that this voice of rebellion turns out to be a cry in wilderness
and she has to make a compromise with the stark realities of life. This is because, Saru lives in transitional society. Saru passes from the illusion to reality, from frustration to submission and as the wheel finally comes round she makes an ultimate attempt to reconcile herself. All through her life, Saru avoids to face the moment of confrontation. There has been no room for open discussion but has waited for the solution to take its own turn. Saru, at the end, is ready to have a life outside the family and face the hard realities of life. A fragment of conversation Shahsi Deshpande had with an interviewer may be recalled here,

Interviewer : Looking for total sustenance only from human relationship seems frustrating. Looking for it outside-in art, in your job seems less so.

Shashi Deshpande : I agree there. This is the conclusion I've come to myself in The Dark Holds No Terrors.13

Saru desires to liberate herself from the shackles of tradition and exercise her right to reveal her individual capabilities and realise her feminine self through identity-assertion and self-affirmation.

If The Dark Holds No Terror reveals through the vicissitudes of Sarita, a single working woman’s predicament, Small Remedies presents, through striking parallelism several working women, who have their distinctive predicaments to narrate; thus there is Madhu Saptarishi, the protagonist, hailing from a Goan Christian family, an educated woman; Leela, the trade unionist, has the predicament of a political entity, who has to assert herself with all the masculine boldness and moral courage; Savitribai Indorekar, the singer of Gwalior Gharana, exemplifying the struggle for social status for a woman, who choruses music as a career; Madhu a motherless girl, opting for a career of a biographer comes out with a predicament, laying emphasis upon the quest for facts. In Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande seems to have toned her skills to perfection; her protagonist is still the urban, middle-aged and educated woman, but
her canvas has broadened to encompass a cross-section of people who belong to different communities, professions, and a level of society. Madhu Saptarishi, is not much different from her counterparts Indu, Sarita, Jaya, Urmi and Sumi in age, education and family background; Deshpande ventures to write about a Goan Christian family and also mentions a Muslim tabla player and briefly touches upon his life and the people surrounding him, notably his grand-daughter Hasina. The juxtaposition of past and present, and, in Wordsworthian sense ‘the healing power’ is seen in Small Remedies, wherein using the stories of two women Leela, the trade union activist and Savitribai Indorekar: Madhu introduces these two women into our lives is not a mere passive story-teller like the chronicler in Pushkin’s “Boris Gudenow”. She is very much of a mitgestalter, a creator with great potential.

Madhu was a motherless child brought up by her father and a servant, Babu. After her father’s death, Babu had gone. Although Joe and Leela soon make her comfortable and loved, and she even develops a friendly relationship with Tony, Madhu decides to shift to a hostel. After finishing her graduation, wanting to be financially independent, she decides to take a job. When she gets an offer to work in the magazine City Views, she comes to understand that a sense of fulfilment awaits her and she assembles the courage of overlooking the contempt of her colleague. She has companions in the task of writing biography. Lata, a lively woman, Hari, her quiet husband (both strangers till now but they have offered Madhu their home during her stay in Bhavanipur) Tony, Tony’s Rekha (both visit her in Bhavanipur under one pretext or the other because they are concerned about her), Hasina, who is Savitribai’s companion and student. And finally there are memories that keep her company. Madhu presents Savitribai as a young woman who had led a sheltered life not only as a child in her parental home but also as a daughter-in-law in an affluent Brahmin family. Although born in a tradition-bound orthodox Brahmin family, she makes a name for herself
as a great classical singer. In a traditional Indian society music is not
given proper place. Madhu records how Savitribai felt hurt when her
grandmother asked her to stop singing immediately during her
performance at a family gathering. Madhu recalls;

In Neemgaon she was ‘the singer woman’ and there was
something derogatory about the words, yes, I can see that
now, about the way they said them.14

People are shocked and disapprove of Savitribai’s action as she
elopes with a tabla player to some other town and also begets a child
from him. Savitribai had to face gender discrimination. While her father-
in-law choosing a wife from one’s won class and mistress from another
was quite acceptable, but for a daughter-in-law pursuing a career in
classical music was scandalous, although her father-in-law never
discourages her. Madhu realises that Savitribai has prepared the blue
print of the story that she wants her to write. But Madhu knows that this
comprises three volumes.

Firstly, there’s Bai’s book, the book Bai wants to be written,
in which she is the heroine, the spotlight shining on her
and her alone. No dark corners anywhere in this book, all
the shadows kept out of sight, backstage. Then there’s Maya’s
and Yogi’s book. A controversial one. Trendy. Politically
correct, with a feminist slant. A book that will sell (125).

There is her own book, for which she is searching for the real Bai in the
jungle of words she has collected. Which is the real Bai? “The woman
who is in search of her genius, of her destiny? The great musician, the
successful Savitribai Indorekar”? (283) Meanwhile, Leela makes an
entrance into her (Madhu) life. Through Hari she discovers that Leela,
her mother’s eldest sister, was also the eldest sister of Hari’s grandmother.
When Madhu’s father died, it was Leela and Joe who had provided her
a home. The hidden parallelism between lives of Savitribai and Leela is
visible from the facts collected by the journalistic vision and genius of Madhu, “that both were courageous women, that both were women who worked for and got the measure of freedom they needed, that both were ready to accept wholly the consequences of their actions” (284).

The narrative technique in Small Remedies as applied by Shashi Deshpande is typical, for the entire story is revealed through the inner conscious of Savitribai, the nuclear character around whose ocular ken the star of life emerges. Savitribai is such character, vividly portrayed and brought to life by the author. Physically she appears to be a frail women. She is, however, imperious in her attitude to her servants, students and even her biographer, often giving her instruction on how to conduct the interview. (16) Madhu, However, “cannot impose the new concept of heroism on an old-fashioned woman who whitewashes her life through selective amnesia.”¹⁵ Savitribai has to face contempt and ridicule from the other women when she returned to her life among the women, after her music classes. She could imagine the jibes and the hostility and the way she would have been cast aside like an untouchable she says : “To be set apart from your own kind, not to be able to conform, to flout the rules laid down, is to lay yourself open to cruelty”(220).

The village of Neemgaon reverberates with a certain sex scandal about Savitribai, already known to Madhu, that a Station Director, the supposed lover, got several contracts of radio for this singer. Madhu remembers the children teasing Munni and calling him her माता, a kind of euphemism for a mother’s lover. Bai denies the existence of any lover, while recounting her story to Madhu. But to the town, in Madhu’s childhood, it was very simple—why would a man go out of his way to do so many favours for a woman, why would be visit her so often? All such assumptions ending finally in the conclusion : “A woman who’d left her husband’s home—what morals would she have, anyway!” (223).
Savitribai was not the stereotypical feminist with a devil may-care attitude. This is evident in her blanking out Ghulam Saab’s name while relating to a story of her life to Madhu, her biographer.

As a biographer of Savitribai, Madhu thinks of Ghulam Saab, a typical character, whose return to his family makes her appear again as married woman wearing her old mangal sutra. Bai’s efforts show her desire to reclaim her lost dignity. Munni, the illegitimate child of Savitribai and Ghulam Saab, is alienated in her very childhood because of her parents’ unusual relationship. The fact that her mother, a Brahmin married woman was living with a muslim man made them misfit in the society. In order to belong to the society she believes that her real father was Bai’s husband in Pune. She is open in her dislikes of Ghulam Saab. The adamantine chain of unusual relationship developed by Munni binds the father as well as the mother. Her ambition made her neglect her daughter, and Munni uncared and unloved for reciprocates in a similar way, she develops contempt for her mother and detests everything about her. She is accepted by Bai’s in-laws and after marriage becomes a common middle class woman named Shailaja Joshi. Savitribai’s ambition had a domineering impact over Gula Sem Saab, the tabla player and Munni’s lives, and Ghulam Saab devoted his best years to help the woman he so ardently loved. As in the words of Hasina his daughter,

Ghulam Saab was the one who made Bai known. He met people on her behalf, he arranged her programmes, he made the contacts for her. It was not easy for a woman to do these things then [...]’ Without Ghulam Saab, Bai would never have been able to manage this part of her professional life. (274)

Ghulam Saab’s sacrifice of his own ambition for the sake of Bai speaks of his love for her. But Bai’s total ignorance of his contribution to her
success shows her desire to attain the respectability she once renounced. Madhu feels,

(...), the other Bai I see as well, a calculating ambitious woman, using the man for her own ends, abandoning him finally when her need for him is over (176).

The husband had nothing to do with Savitribai’s rebellions attitude against the bonds of matrimony, but her overvaulting ambition and dream to be a renowned singer, which could not be fulfilled while she remained the daughter-in-law of an affluent Brahmin family, had made her reject her husband for Ghulam Saab. She wanted to learn music from famous and renowned singer Kashinath Buwa who was not agree to teach her. She had to pursue him for a long time to achieve his permission. At last he agreed. Bai had performed all kinds of things which she had to do to find her career even in disgrace. Her total ignorance of her only child shows how mad she was to pursue her ambition. Deshpande, while writing of people like Savitribai who dared to be different, has also created characters like Munni who desperately seek the approval of society. Malathi Mathur, a reviewer, writes:

At the other end of the spectrum is Munni, Savitribai’s daughter who turns her back on her mother and all that she stands for, in a desperate desire to conform, having encountered early in life the poisoned barbs that society levels against those who dare to be different.16

The predicament of a politically aware woman is seen in the portrayal of her aunt, Leela. She was a fiercely independent woman and was strongly committed to the communist ideology. She had participated in Quit India Movement, but was critical of Gandhiji’s principles of Ahimsa and Satyagraha. As she grew older, however, she mellowed down and regretted some of her actions. It was evident that she was no run-of-the-mill activist, but a woman who had the courage of her
convictions. She resigned from her party when she felt that party’s reaction to a political situation was not appropriate. Though she is a diehard communist supporter, she is a victim of the gross gender discrimination practised in the communist party, which constitutes the key stone of her predicament. She was a hardworking party activist, but when the occasion came, men junior to her reached the higher echelons of power while she was marginalised. She learns the bitter reality that hard work and loyalty to ideology were no merits, and gender was merit unto itself. Madhu gives a telling example of such chauvinism as prevails in all political parties without exception. The widow of a deceased-sitting member was given a ticket to contest in the elections. Leela a victim of gender-discrimination, sarcastically remarks; “It seems you’ve got to become a widow for them to remember that you exist” (224).

Savitribai was also not unaware how much difficult it was for women to rise to the top in competition with men. Madhu wondered if she had ever heard the phrase ‘gender discrimination’, but she had certainly experienced and accepted it as the normal course of things. Madhu remembers how she had once commented caustically speaking of a young instrumentalist who had reached the pinnacle in no time: “Now a days they become Ustad and Pundits, even before they have proper moustaches” (224). After the death of her first husband, Vasanth, Leela takes up a job to become economically independent and also to educate her brother-in-law. The instinct of social reform makes her decide that living in the crowded chawls among cotton mills, she would work for women suffering from T.B. This led to comming into contacts with Joe, her second husband, who had set up a clinic for T.B. patients. He was a widower with two children, spoke flawless English and well-versed in literature. The dictum love is blind comes true when one thinks that though Leela belongs to a different caste, Joe falls head over heels in love with her. Despite the vast difference in their inherent natures, to Madhu, the two had a wonderful relationship.
The revelation of the self of the novelist is not far from the story of the narrator. Madhu herself, as she is commissioned to write the biography of Savitribai. She had always been intrigued, even as a child by Bai’s relationship with Ghulam Saab and Munni, their daughter. The novel covers that period of her life when she is grieving over the death of her only child, Aditya. In remembering and retelling the stories of Leela, Savitribai and Munni, she presents the glaring inequalities in gender in society. The pity of it is that some of the victims are not even aware of the injustices heaped on them.

Maintaining the humbleness, politeness, due to a female novelist, Shashi Deshpande has repeatedly expressed her displeasure at being considered the champion of oppressed women. She makes honesty an important tool in the quest for self and projects Bai and Munni as failures due to their denial of a certain part of their lives. Madhu’s and Leela’s ability to accept the fact of their life achieves them success in their quest. But what forms the crux of the novel is the fact that we are alone in our quest for self. Madhu may learn from the experiences of Bai, Munni and Leela but she alone has to find her identity by understanding her life.

(iii) Male-Female, Female-Female Exploitation:

The theme of the quest for identity along with the predicament of career oriented literary artist Madhu, having been covered, analysed and judged in *Small Remedies*, an entirely new panorama is set with its doors wavering on hinges, as the arena of triogeniture represented by Kalyani with her primogeniture, Sumi with her claims of deuterogeniture and Arundhati, with her submissions of tritogeniture is presented in all its Kaleidoscopic reflections and counter reflections. Kalyani’s lament lays stress upon her own plight, as her father died worrying about her, and the same tension made her mother’s death a restless affair; when Sumi,
Kalyani’s daughter, is deserted by her husband Gopal, the mother does not want the curse of separation should visit her daughter; after the desertion, Sumi is brought by Shripati, her father, to her ancestral house, where this calamity is considered not only tragic, but shameless also; Aru, the girl of third generation, moved by some Electra like feeling, realizes that Sumi, her mother, was at fault and was responsible for separation from her papa, Gopal; but the irony is that this wisdom dawns upon the girl, when the object of her accusation had breathed her last.

Shashi Deshpande A Matter of Time is a three generation novel. The first generation’s representative is Kalyani, the grandmother, the second generation’s is Sumi, the mother, and the third is represented by Arundhati, the daughter. But ironically, it is Gopal, Sumi’s husband, who emerges to be a more fully realized character than any of these women in the novel. The novel veers round an urban, middle-class family of Gopal and Sumi with their three daughters—Aru, Charu and Seema. It begins with Gopal’s entering the house and telling Sumi that he is leaving the house for good. Sumi is unable to act verbally. The next morning she tells about it to her daughter, repeating Gopal’s word in toto. She is shocked with Gopal’s action that she lapses into complete silence trying, simultaneously to keep things normal for her daughters. But they feel restless as “Sumi, despite her facade of normality, has a quality about her—a kind of blankness—that makes them uneasy”.

Gopal deserts Sumi, and thus begins the trauma inflicted upon a deserted wife and the agony of an isolated husband; all such turmoil corner her at the age of forty and make her stand alone and helpless along with her teenaged daughter, Aru, Charu and Seema. Almost after 23 years of her marriage with Gopal, a history lecturer in a local college, one evening, for reasons even he cannot articulate, in a very causal way walks out and unburdens his responsibilities as husband and father of three grown up children. The firsthand realization comes to Sumi, teaching
her the situation and burden thrust on her, thereafter every things ends leaving Sumi in a shocked silence. Describing the whole scene of Gopal’s casual desertion, Keerthi Ramachandra says:

One evening, while Sumi is watching a film on T.V. about circus “without the dirt, the smells, the fear and despair of the real thing, but sanitized, bacteria free”, Gopal tells her he wants to talk to her. And without any preamble says what he has to. He waits for Sumi’s reaction, but within moments both realize that there’s nothing more to be said and he leaves as quietly as he had entered.18

Though deserted by her husband for no fault of hers, Sumi learns to pick up the threads of her life. Leaving aside all the verisimilitudes with Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh, Simrit in The Day in Shadow, Rashmi, This Time of Morning, Indu in Roots And Shadow and Saru in The Dark Holds No Terror, who all leave their husbands, Sumi is distinct from them as her husband Gopal leaves her. Though deserted, Sumi does not contemplate a divorce as she considers this to be of no use to her, for it liberate a woman legally but the memories attached to the marriage cannot be erased easily. A woman may get relief from the painful life of a maladjusted marriage through divorce, but it will not re-establish her socially, psychologically or financially.

Sumi and Gopal’s is not the ordinary arranged marriage; its typical aspect comprises Gopal’s frequent recapitulations which allow the reader to share in their discovery of each other. Their joyous intimacy leaves one is no doubt of their compatibility—physical as well as mental. Their separation, therefore, is all the more poignant. Premi, Sumi’s sister, is filled with a rage, “at their carelessness in throwing away what they had, uncaring, it seems to her, of the value of what they have discarded” (136).
It is evident that there are no obvious reasons for Gopal walking out on his family. His inward thoughts always remain in an uncommunicate state shared by anybody. He is able to explain to Kalyani, Ramesh, Premi or even to his wife, Sumi, the reason that compelled him so much as to isolate himself from his own family member. The benevolence and generosity of Indian husband makes him assure them that Sumi is in no way responsible for that decision and therefore she need not be blamed. Kalyani, Sumi’s mother, has vague suspicion that Gopal has done this for the sake of money, is far from truth. Humiliation by his students at the college leading to his resignation from his job does not seem to be the sole reason for his momentous decision. To Premi’s probing, Gopal replies, “I can give you so many answers, but I’ve begun thinking that the plain truth is that I just got tired” (133).

Kalyani bemoans:

My father died worrying about me, my mother couldn’t die in peace, she held on to life though she was suffering. She suffered terribly because of me, she didn’t want to leave me and go (47).

Kalyani further explains to Gopal her own-misery and agony surmounted in her heart all through. She pathetically implores him, “What have you done to my daughter, Gopala, don’t do this, don’t let it happen to my daughter” (46). After Gopal’s desertion, Shripati, Sumi’s father brings them to “Big House”—their parental home. For Sumi’s mother, Kalyani, it’s not only a great tragedy, but also a matter of shame and disgrace. She gives a poignant cry, “No, no, my God, not again’. She begins to cry, sounding so much like an animal” (12).

Sumi’s daughters seem to have taken up the threads of their life in the Big House, but she remains totally lost and confused even in her childhood home. Sumi knows that Gopal believes that, “Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes—a lifetime of commitment—is not
possible for all of us.” (69) Marriage, in case of Sumi and Gopal has been an amicable contract on express terms and conditions that either of the persons, husband or wife, was free to leave and depart to the place of his or her liking, if the cement of bondage lost its hold over them. There should not be handaiffs to tie them together. Reminding Gopal about this Sumi tells him :

And I agreed. I was only eighteen then and you were twenty six...But it meant nothing to me them. How can you think of separating, of wanting to be apart, when you are eighteen in love ? ...I thought we would always be together. (221)

Her confession makes her realise from the core of her heart that Gopal’s walking out has left such a void that she cannot find her bearings and there are no markers to show her which way she should go. The incident made a telling effect on her body and soul :

With Gopal’s going, it was of if the swift-flowing stream of her being had grown thick and viscous—her movement, her thoughts, her very pulse and heartbeats seemed to have slowed down. (28)

Her daughters feel hurt by her apparent stoicism, as they want to share their mother’s loss and sorrow. Devaki or Devi even cries to her and tells her, “May be I’m crying because you don’t” (107). At this Sumi expresses her sense of great humiliation and loss : “What do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don’t know why and may be he doesn’t really know, either. And that I’m angry and humiliated and confused” (107). ‘The quality of mercy is not strained’, at least Sumi does not want this line to be chanted for her; the fact that she realizes, that life must go on and she must be strong for the sake of her daughters, is reiterated throughout the novel. Even Aru, who had thought that her mother was indifferent to Gopal’s desertion, realizes after Sumi’s death: I thought she didn’t care about what Papa did, I thought she was uncaring,
indifferent, I said angry words to her but I know now that was not true” (240). Unlike any other in her place, Sumi does not seek any explanation from Gopal though it is she who bears all the disgrace and humiliation. However, she desires to ask him only one question, just day after his desertion, which however remains unasked.

...If I met Gopal, I will ask him one question, just one, the question no one has thought of. What is it, Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns? Because,... it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn your back on everything in your life? Will you be able to give me an answer to this? (27).

The gratefulness of Gopal to Sumi indubitably is due to her lack of certain inquisitiveness, which saves the husband from much embarassment and possible mortification of voicing half truths. But Sumi feels hurt when her daughters blame her for Gopal’s act of desertion : “Do my daughters blame me for what Gopal has done? Do they think it is my fault? Why can’t I open my heart to them?” (23)

The birth of Gopal, as a consequence of an incestuous union between his father and his father’s brother’s wife, culminates into a sense of alienation. Loneliness and abnormal childhood, leads to a certain conflict that rages in his adolescent mind for the reason that led to this marriage. Later in life, he happens to read Hamlet and draws a parallel between his own and Hamlet’s predicament. He realises that his sister, Sucha and he did not share the same father, that shatters his equilibrium. As he later reflects, “That was a betrayal that cut away at the foundations of my life”. (52) For Deshpande’s Gopal, however the dilemma continues and his desertion upsets a number of peripheral characters, apart from the significant character of his wife, Sumi which again compels the
author to stray back into her forte of giving voice to the discontent and frustration of women. Sumi very silence, however, conveys her pain more effectively than words can. Her pride comes in the way when she dislikes the very idea of displaying her grief to Gopal or request him to return home. Sumi views the desertion as ‘Sanyasa’ when she says I’ve begun to think that what Gopal has really done is to take sanyas. “I’m surprised none of you have thought of that” (123).

His own inner emptiness is thus explained adequately. The existential alienation which Gopal experiences can be offered as one of the most possible reasons for his transformation leading to his inexplicable desertion of the family. Nowhere does, Deshpande depict him as a careless husband and father. History and mythology furnish several examples of how men were deified even for their selfishness, while the silent suffering of their wives had been ignored. Lakshmana’s steadfastness and devotion find no parallel in Indian mythology, while Siddhartha is hailed for spurning the luxury and comfort of princely life is pursuit of knowledge. Their respective spouses Urmila and Yashodhara, however, remain shadowy figures in the background, doomed to live a life of anonymity and insignificance. While Gopal is not idolized, he is not reproached either for shirking his responsibilities as a husband and father. On the other hand, Sumi is made to suffer the satirical comments of women like Shankar’s mother : “When are you going back to our husband?” the old woman asks abruptly.

You should be with him. Look at his state! It’s all right to stay with your parents for a while, but that’s not your home. When my daughters come home, I don’t let them stay long. Go back to your husband, he’s a good man. If you’ve done wrong, he’ll forgive you. And if he has—women shouldn’t have pride. (161)

Myths may be centuries old, their contemporaneity still exists, for human nature is still the same; even today a woman’s worth is measured
only through her marital status. A woman in the society gets respect only if she has her husband, irrespective of the number of wives or mistress he has, their incompatibility, his cruel treatment of, or his story silence with, his wife. It is enough if they live together under the same roof because, “What is a woman without a husband?” (167)

Right from her marriage, Sumi has been a content wife and mother and has willingly subordinated herself to her husband and daughters. Keerthi Ramachandra aptly comments on the subjugation of Sumi as the traditional Indian woman when she says:

Her occasional insight into the human conditions, her interpretation of Draupadi’s reveal a sharp mind but one that had deliberately shut itself off. 19

That monetary monopoly also plays a significant part in the settlement of arranged marriage, becomes crystal clear, when there is analysed Kalyani-Shirpati marriage, which is at the centre of this novel; her plight in marriage is in no way less poignant than that of Sumi’s. Deshpande depicts her as an intelligent girl with a promising future, if only she had been allowed to pursue her studies. But the circumstances led her to be married to Shirpati; Kalyani’s mother, Manorama had failed to beget a male heir to their property and feared that her husband would marry a second time. She is opposed to Kalyani marrying into a new family, as the property would then go to them. Three children are born of this marriage—Sumi, Premi, and Madhav, a mentally retarded child.

Filial bondage dominates the scenario when Kalyani’s real tragedy begins, as her four-year-old son, Madhav is lost at the railway station while she is to board the train to Bangalore. A son even though retarded, holds so great an importance in the Indian social setup that Shirpati doesn’t forgive Kalyani for the next thirty years. Soon after the incident, Shirpati sends her back to her parents home with their two daughters.
Shripati returns home only after Manorama, her mother-in-law, urges him on her death bed to return. “But for many others this may well be a sound arrangement where husband and wife are living together under the same roof even if there is only silence between them” (67).

Manorama had wanted her daughter to be beautiful, accomplished and to make a wonderful marriage so that she could show all those who looked down upon her as the daughter of a poor man. After her marriage she had broken off all ties with her own family, except the youngest brother who had been left motherless at the age of one. Coming from a humbler background than her husband, Manorama never got over her fear that her husband might marry again. Moreover, she could never give him a son. On account of her mother’s insecurities Kalyani was not allowed to complete her studies, and was married to Manorama’s own brother Shripati: “Perhaps after this Manorama felt secure. The property would remain in the family now” (29).

They know nothing of the reason for the marriage, of Sripati’s reluctance, of Manorama’s appeal to Sripati’s sense of gratitude, of the cruelty that made Kalyani accept a feared uncle as a husband. They have no idea of the hopelessness that lay within the relationship that doomed it from the start. (143)

Having firm and indomitable faith in Destiny, Kalyani, sees miracles everywhere. The family smiles at her stories but,

They don’t seem to realize that the real miracle is Kalyani herself, Kalyani who survived intact, in spite of what Sripati did to her, Kalyani who has survived Manorama’s myriad acts of cruelty (151).

Manorama emerges as a cruel, insecure woman and ironically, it is she who is a victim and not Kalyani. In fact Kalyani survives victimization and emerges whole and intact. In a world dominated by
male and in which marriage and sons are the only things that matter, Manorama forgets that ‘every cloud had a silver lining’ and this oblivion is the fundamental cause of her ignoring the ‘good’ in Kalyani, and a sense of mental distance from her granddaughters Sumi and Premi. It is this that Kalyani realizes in the end, when she tells Aru:

For so many years I thought I had nothing (...) My mother didn’t care for my children either. Daughters again, she said. And when you were born, a daughter I wondered how she could have been so blind. Now when I look at you, my three granddaughters, especially at you, I think I am luckier than my mother. She is unlucky she one didn’t know how to enjoy her children and grandchildren (226).

Here Deshpande lays bare the social compulsion and the vulnerability of such women in a male dominated society, which always exploits daughters-in-law. Even if nothing is left of married life between the husband and the wife, a woman has to suffer in silence just to keep their marriage going. As Sumi reflects on her mother, Kalyani: “But her is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife” (167). Aru too realizes that there is something strange in the relationship between her grandparents. Sumi tries to persuade Aru to ignore the queer relationship between her grandparents just as she tries to make her forget what Gopal has done:

Do you want to punish him, Aru? I don’t. I’m not interested. I just want to get on with my life. Let him go, Aru, just let him go. This is not good for you (61)

It is when Sumi is out and happens to pass the house of the student at whose press Gopal is working and with whom he is living, that she meets Gopal. In a flash she realizes that Gopal and she must now move on alone and she reconciles herself to their separation:
We can never be together again. All these days I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended in space, in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living. His life has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives has diverged. They now move more separately, two different streams (85)

Despite in A Matter of Time touches on the aspect of female sexuality. Sumi recalls her friend, Vani, confiding in her when her husband was away for a year abroad, “Oh, I miss him so much...specially at night. There! It’s out. I can’t say this to anyone.” (191). The myth of Surpanakha assumes a new meaning, when it is analysed in terms of sexuality and nymphomenia undergoes a process of psycho-analysis; that is why Sumi looks at the mythical figure of Surpanakha from a new angle. She is unable to appreciate Rama and Lakshmana’s treatment of Surpanakha; which is an expression of sadistic perversity : It makes Sumi reflect :

Female sexuality. We’re ashamed of owning it, we can’t speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it. (191).

The optic illusion of Sumi and Aru provides a faint vision of the unfair treatment meted out to a woman in the spheres of life. Permi’s story about one of her patients, the pregnant wife of on AIDS victim, shocks Sumi and Aru. The callousness of the man marrying in spite of being aware of his condition, just so that he would have someone to look after him horrifies them and evokes their pity.
Aru is that initial point, which makes Shashi Deshpande’s fictional craft’s circle drawn just and makes her end where she had begun, at least in *A Matter of Time*, with an exactitude of a perfect geometrician. In the beginning of the novel, just after Gopal’s desertion we find Aru in a state of confusion and defiance. She is unable to understand her mother’s quiet indifference or her father’s behaviour. She particularly resents Kalyani’s oppressive love and the way she likes to look after her and her sisters. She is shocked at her grandmother’s acceptance of such a life: “And when Kalyani signs her name, carefully, spelling out ‘Kalyani bai Pandit’, Aru is amazed. How can she still have his name for God’s sake? (146). Sumi is unable to comprehend the meaning of such an existence. She thinks:

Is it enough to have a husband, and never mind the fact that he has not looked at your face for years, never mind the fact that he has not spoken to you for decades? Does this wifehood make for everything, for the deprivation of a man’s love, for the feel of his body against yours, the warmth of his breath on your face, the touch of his lips on yours, his hands on your breasts? Kalyani lost all this (had she ever had them?) but her kumkum is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife” (167).

But Shashi Deshpande ends the novel on a tragic note. The reunion of Gopal and Sumi is an unusual one. When he returns she neither cries to him nor abuses him or does she ask him for any explanations, for her experiences and predicaments have taught her that ‘happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain’. Everything is normal as Sumi enters the room and finds him having lunch and reading poems.

After lunch also she finds him in a happy mood, laughing and talking to the children. His presence does make difference to the others
and her daughter, but her herself she realizes that they can never be together again. She reflects:

All these days I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended in Space, in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living, his life has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives have diverged, they now move separately. (85)

In the novel there happens the sudden deaths of Sumi and her father Shripati, in a road accident. This gives a philosophical dimension to the novel. The author tries to convey through:

idea of three women from three generations from the same family and how they respond to the tragedy that suddenly overpowers their lives.20

Thus the storm of predicaments is over past; the lily of uxorial existence is faded and dead; Pluto has been replaced by Pluto, and the entire human and masculine attempt is directed towards a sort of half regained Eurydice, Orpheus is left blowing on his own harp:

The hidden soul of harmony:
That Orpheus’ self may heave his head
From golden slumber on a bed
Of heaped Elysian flowers, and hear
Such strains as would have won the ear
Of Pluto to have quite set free
His half-regained Eurydice
These delights if thou canst give,
Mirth, with thee I mean to live.

JOHN MILTON, ‘L. ALLEGRO’
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CHAPTER-IV

THEME OF FEMININE ASSERTIONS

(i) Theme of Career Woman’s Predicament

(ii) Rage of Impotence.

(iii) Male-Female, Female-Female Exploitation