CHAPTER - III

Emerging Woman in Shashi Deshpande's Later Novels: A Matter of Time, Small Remedies, Moving On, In the Country of Deceit

The feminist thought and the feminist movements in the west have had some influence on the women's movements in developing countries like India. Yet 'feminism' as it exists today in India has gone beyond its western counterpart. Indian feminism is a response to the issues specifically confronting many Indian women. Given that India is a multicultural, multi-religious, multi-linguistic and multi-ethnic country, trying to unravel how women are positioned in terms of their status, autonomy, empowerment or marginalization, and considering what measures have been taken by the state to empower them and what efforts they themselves have made to get out of what Naomi Wolf calls 'victim feminism' (45) by self empowering is difficult enough. Women, in order to liberate themselves and advance, need to empower themselves to confront different institutional structures and cultural practices that subject them to patriarchal domination and control.

In their creative writings, the women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Kamala Das, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and others started discussing openly about the various types of oppressions that women have to face in our patriarchal society. The women protagonists in their works question the oppressive role of society and confront the oppositions strongly and find out a new path out of the age-old traditions and customs. Thus, they emerge as individuals with their own identities who are empowered and have courage of conviction. They are the 'new women', who
could be likened to the flooding rivers that find a pathway even through crevices and obstacles.

Women's writing impacts their very existence in the socio-cultural milieu as it accelerates their shift from a marginal position to a central one. Earlier, the suffering wife, the weeping widow, or the sacrificing mothers were the only images found in fiction. In these novels the docile image of women found acceptance, and submissiveness was still considered a virtue. There was no room for a woman who was not virtuous. Women either upheld conservative ideals or they were labeled immoral. Traditional moral aesthetics dominated these narratives. But in the last few decades, women's entry into the writing arena made way for the shattering of the *sita* and *pativrata* image. Instead of extolling the so called virtues of the sacrificing, submissive woman with tears in her eyes but not a word of complaint on her lips, these writers started presenting the fighting spirit of women in their novels. The suffering wife now gave way to the demanding one. Female perspective made it easier to articulate such emotions not depicted in literature in the past. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* write: “A woman writer is engaged at another level with assaulting and revising, deconstructing and reconstructing those images of women inherited from male literature, especially the paradigmatic polarities of angels and monsters” (6). This paradigm shift may be seen in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande besides many contemporary women writers of Indian English fiction. The "silence" is no longer "silent" now and the colonial females seen in the "silence" in postcolonial texts are in fact crying revolt against the mainstream society from the periphery where they subsist.
Shashi Deshpande occupies quite a unique place in the history of Indian English fiction in as much as it was for the first time in her novels that the middle class urban Indian woman became the subject matter of fiction. Deshpande’s heroines find a voice of their own and their initial will to move on is counteracted upon by their passivity to patriarchal construction of space for women. In embracing this space they adhere to the feminine aesthetics. Malashri Lal opines that

This space is operative for the woman who has made the irretrievable choice in her one directional journey. She has accepted the challenge of gender determined environment designed for the promotion and prosperity of men and must contend with prejudices against her attempts to appropriate her own space in the name of personal dignity and social justice” (19).

The ambivalent stance of women writers can be seen in the construction of all protagonists of Deshpande. Deshpande’s uniqueness comes from her women’s belief in the message of Bhagvadgita: *Yathechhasi tatha kuru*, which gives them the right ‘to do as they wish.’ Freedom of choice is the most important freedom and it is this that makes truly emancipated beings. Shashi Deshpande’s writings, rooted in culture in which she lives, remain sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences, and they give artistic expression to something that is simple and mundane. As suggested by Mala Renganathan,

Her feminism is peculiarly Indian in the sense that it is born out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities: tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature. Her
art is intensely personal, not political. Her feminism rooted in the native environment tends to be humanistic and optimistic in its outlook. (72)

Deshpande's major concern is to depict the anguish and conflict of the modern educated Indian women caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand, and self-expression, individuality and independence for women on the other. Her fiction explores the search of the woman to fulfill herself as a human being, independent of her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother. For Deshpande women must speak because they are autonomous beings, but their autonomy is not derived from the liberal humanism which believes that all have been created equal, which should surely be hard to sustain in caste-ridden India. Deshpande's conviction that each individual subjectivity is ultimately responsible only to itself comes from the realization that no one can occupy another's subjectivity, a fact which becomes glaringly obvious in the face of death, which each must encounter alone. The novelist's major concern is to depict the anguish and conflict of the modern educated Indian women caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand, and self-expression, individuality and independence on the other. Deshpande's fiction explores the search of the woman to fulfill herself as a human being, independent of her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother. All her protagonists- Indu, Saru, Jaya, Urmi, Madhu, Sumi, Manjari and Devayani- are shown to be in a state of confusion at the beginning. Slowly as the novel unfolds, they go through the process of introspection, self analysis and self-realization. At the end, they emerge as more confident, more in control of themselves, and significantly more
hopeful. Her protagonists are continuously in search of defining themselves. Thus, her major theme is quest for identity.

**A Matter of Time**

This acclaimed writer renders most poignantly the wider issues of life in her novel *A Matter of Time*, published in 1996. While exploring the theme of a woman's journey of self-discovery, she gives the readers a novel that speaks about the myriad feelings of love and death, the pain associated with death, the fleeting nature of time and its healing effect. The story line is simple, not burdened with many twists and turns and rendered with a voice of authenticity. The protagonist of the novel, Gopal (the respected professor of a University, a devoted husband, and a caring father) walks out on his family one morning for reasons even he does not comprehend fully. His young and beautiful wife, Sumi, returns with their three daughters to her parental home, the "Big House", where her parents live in oppressive silence. A piteous story of loss and pain unravels as the characters try to rationalize the mystery of thirty-five years of silence. The plot comes full circle with Gopal's desertion of Sumi. This fiction that transcends the border of time depicts the cycles of love and loss that become an essential part of the identity of the characters. In their quest for self-realization both Sumi and Gopal breaks free the social codes and try to forge an identity of their own. Estranged from the people they love, the characters of the novel suffer a disorder, both physical and psychic. How they learn to cope with this dislocation is the story that Deshpande weaves for her readers. What makes *A Matter of Time* so enigmatic is its quest for the inner truths of life. As the author points out—"...family life became more vivid and real in this novel that
in any other, a family life which, I soon realized, was leading me to some inner truths of human relationships" (Writing from the Margin and Other Essays 24). Why did Gopal leave his position, possessions, and his loving family? What was it that compelled him to choose the path of renunciation? These are the questions that haunt the readers as well as the characters of this fiction. Deshpande gives no final answer and it helps in making this deeply unsettling novel so appealing. Sumi, with her equanimity in facing the tragedy, forges an identity of her own.

Before we probe into the analysis of the questions raised in the introductory part, it will be perhaps not out of place here to focus our attention on Sumi for a while. Raised in a family where the parents lived in oppressive silence, Sumi always had an aura of composure and patience about her. As Devaki recollects, right from her childhood she had been “Beautiful, graceful, effortlessly, almost without wanting to, gathering friends around herself” (104). Even in crisis, the picture she “presents to the world is one of grace and courage, to be admired rather than pitied” (172). Gopal remembers after he leaves her that in their honeymoon, her “body blocked out everything else about her” (223). As is evident from the novel she has been a good wife and a good mother. Her independent spirit respects independence in others and allows space in marriage too. That is why when Gopal leaves his job, she neither nags him for joining it nor makes the situation difficult for him. Her response to Gopal’s resignation of his much-coveted job deserves admiration- “For Heaven’s sake, does it matter why he’s doing it? He doesn’t want to go on and that’s that!” (16) Though Aru, Charu, Premi and Kalyani think that Gopal’s desertion has something to do with Sumi, he himself confesses later that “this has nothing to do with the relationship between Sumi and him...she has done him no
wrong" (47). So the answer to the questions is entirely related with the hero of the novel who develops fully as a round character, convincing and lovable.

In India marriage is a bond that binds two minds and bodies together. As the novelist in her award winning novel expresses "...a husband and wife care for each other, live with each other until they are dead; parents care for their children, and children in turn look after their parents when they are needed; marriages never end, they cannot- they are a state of being" (That Long Silence 127). But to Gopal it is something different. The novel begins when he is already a middle-aged man of forty-seven. Sumi admits to have fallen in love with his "physical being first" (168). He initially reciprocated her love and basked himself in her warmth and passion. He later admits to himself that he wanted it all- "babies, tending them and caressing them- with joy and passion" (68). But when he tells his wife, Sumi, that he cannot stay married, he makes this decision in good faith. He has no repentance for the decision he takes. Deshpande has portrayed Gopal sympathetically and in spite of his walking out of the relationships, he never becomes unpleasant to the readers. In her essay, 'In First Person', Deshpande says:

I was reading the Upanishad at this time, which obviously influenced my thinking. The epigraphs to the three parts from the Upanishads are an integral part of the novel, illuminating me and telling me what I was trying to say in the novel. (Writing from the Margin and Other Essays 24)

The first two epigraphs to the two initial sections of the novel are from the Brhad-aranyaka Upanishad and the final from Katha Upanishad discussing about renunciation
and bonds. Gopal’s renunciation can even be related with the “Samkhya” Theory of the
Bhagwadgita. But it is very different from the Vedic concept of “sanyasa” or
“vanaprastha” since Gopal is not yet free of his desires- “the space between them in the
room is filled with desire, his desire, that his body, after all these months, is awake”
(223). In an interview given to Vimala Ramarao, Deshpande also admitted: “Gopal does
not want to feel any bonds- not even like vanaprastha” (Pathak 257). His plight may
best be explained in the light of Existentialism.

Existentialism is a philosophical vision as well as a literary movement which first
appeared as a philosophy in the nineteenth century from the ideas of the Danish
philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). His books, Fear and Trembling, The
Concept of Dread, and Sickness Unto Death familiarized the readers with his thoughts.
But this stream of thought gained popularity only in the last century, after the Second
World War, and was propagated by such great thinkers as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre
and Camus through their works. It is generally agreed that “existence” and not
“essence” is central to existentialism. This philosophy begins with “man” who, here, is
primarily the “existing subject” and not a “thinking subject.” Man’s existence precedes
his essence. As Sartre has explained,

We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges
up in the world and defines himself afterward. If man, as the
existentialist sees him, is not definable, it is because to begin with
he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will
be what he makes of himself. (289)
It is through an exercise of free will and decision that man becomes authentically himself. Existence, for the existentialists, is concrete individual existence, not a social or altruistic one. The existentialists hold the view that most of the decisions, problems or questions in the life of an individual are not accessible to reason. They also share the view that freedom to choose is central to human existence. Even the refusal to choose is a choice because an individual may thus identify and assert his unique mode of expression as well as of existence. Because individuals are free to choose their own path, existentialists have argued, they must accept the risk and responsibility of following their commitment wherever it leads. Freedom of choice entails commitment and responsibility. This commitment is controlled, at least partially, by “dread” and “anxiety”- the two very significant emotions in existentialist philosophy. This concept of angst gets special treatment in Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), where it is described as the tension suffered by man in his determination to discover meaning, purpose and order in a world which has none- 

In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusion and of light, man feels a stranger...The divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity. (P-27)

*Myth of Sisyphus* takes as the central image the figure of Sisyphus rolling the rock up the hill even while knowing that the rock would roll down again. Because Sisyphus accepts the absurdity of his fate, he is able to rise above it on an intellectual level and finally to exult in his useless task. Gopal's words summing up the novel echoes Sisyphus:
If it is indeed true that we are bound to our destinies, that there
is no point struggling against them, even then this remains-
that we do not submit passively... but with dignity and
strength. Surely, this, to some extent, frees us from our bonds.

(246)

Deshpande’s narrative technique is simple and has little to do with the disjointed and
broken depiction of absurdity and sufferings in an inexplicable universe depicted by
Sartre, Camus, Beckett and others. But the similarity lies elsewhere. Just as in the
works of writers mentioned above, Gopal is free to exercise his will and finally it is his
own choice and free course of actions which decide his destiny. In the process of
attaining this freedom from human bondage his mind faces relentless sufferings. Camus
and Kierkegaard are frequently referred to by the central characters in the novel. Few
examples will suffice. Sumi thinks of Gopal “as if he has been suspended in space, in
nothingness” (85). Gopal also acknowledges: “Camus is right. We carry our places of
exile within us. It entered into me too...” (217). The allusion to Camus’ work is
perceptible also in the phrase “a man is always an outsider” (68). “Emptiness”, “fear”,
“silence”, and “pain” are other recurrent motifs in the novel.

In spite of whatever comfort life has to offer, there is always a crucial sense of
emptiness and suffering portrayed so well by Jibanananda Das in “A Day Eight Years
Ago”-

...To the morgue he had been taken dead;
Last night - in the darkness of Falgoon’s early spring night,
When the five-day-old moon had dipped out of sight
He longed to die.
His wife had been lying next to him - his child too;  
He had love, he had his dreams - it was moonlight  
Why then would some ghost haunt him? Why then could he sleep no longer?  
Or perhaps he hadn't slept for ages - ...  
(Fakrul Alam 34)

Gopal, too, faces the same sort of dilemma. Trying to articulate his predicament, he tells Premi:

We see people die and yet we go on as if we are going to live forever ... we know it's all there, the pain and suffering, old age, loneliness and death, but we think somehow we believe that it's not for us ... I stopped believing. The miracle failed for me and there was nothing left. .... For me there was just emptiness.  
(133-34)

Being a thoughtful and sensitive soul, Gopal is unable to find joy amidst the family bond because is aware of the fleeting nature of happiness. With the simple intention to be true to himself, he sets in place a series of events with tragic consequences. He desperately tries to escape and free himself of "piercing pain" (246) but he fails miserably. He senses the futility of all his effort when he holds the thin, quivering body of Aru sobbing pitiably in the last page of the novel. This brings us back to Sumi's enchantment with the song 'jeena yahan, mama yahan' in the first section of the novel:

Her mind puzzles over the meaning of the words: what do they mean? That this world is all we have and therefore there is nowhere else for us to go? That we have to live here and die
here? Or does it mean: this is what we have, this area of action is enough for us, we live here and die here, we need no more?

In spite of his special quality with which he “could cross the barrier between the sexes with ease …. do something most man found hard – present his whole self to a female, not just a part of himself” (107), Gopal himself knows that “Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes- a lifetime of commitment- is not possible for all of us” (69). Two human beings, however near they be, can never be one. No matter how strongly we are tied with the familial bonds each one of us is alone. Gopal’s assertion, how harsh it may sound, is the voice of truth: “Our journeys are always separate, that’s how they are meant to be. If we travel together for a while that’s only a coincidence” (212). To him, there can be no such thing as Sa-hridya simply because the two hearts “can never beat in such unison that there’s only one sound” (24). He sums up the truth thus: “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” (52). So, Gopal suffers from an acute existential angst that controls his actions and ultimately makes him take that decision of walking out on his family.

Gopal cannot articulate the specific reason for his desertion nor is it possible for any of us to explain all our actions in life. Mind is always an enigma providing us only fleeting glimpses of its actions. Deshpande, in her essay “In First Person” asserts, I was often asked by the readers of A Matter of Time – why did Gopal walk out on his family? … There was no clear-cut reason for what he did; he only knew he could no longer go on. I knew this, I was
absolutely clear about his confusion. The author can never afford to be ignorant; when I write a novel, I need to know even the things the characters do not know...... (Writing from the Margin and Other Essays 26)

Sumi reaction to Gopal's decision and how this helps her to forge her own individual existence is the next scope of our discussion. After Gopal leaves her, Sumi shows an extraordinary fortitude. The author describes her actions in a “matter-of-fact” manner:

With infinite patience she waits until the early morning light dispels the shadows and makes every object in the room clearly visible. Only then does she get out of bed, wash, make tea for all of them and go into her daughters' room to tell them what has happened. And now the thought comes to her—he could have spared me this, he could have spoken to them himself. But she does not draw back from what she has to do; she tells them about it, almost exactly repeating Gopal's words, leaving out nothing. (9)

In the Indian tradition where marriage is still regarded sacred and desirable, the wish to be divorced from the marital ties is unforgivable. Thus Gopal's desertion is not just a tragedy it is both a shame and a disgrace to the family. Sumi maintains her equanimity in the midst of Gopal's unilateral decision to leave the family. In fact, after that first morning when she spoke to her daughters about him, she has not mentioned Gopal's name. It is not that she is not aware of the marital bliss or that she is indifferent, she only tries to maintain her own dignity. She refuses to show the world her wounds
and to attract sympathy. She shows this equanimity as she does not want Gopal to come to her against his wishes. In an interview given to Vimala Ramarao, Deshpande says: “Sumi’s acceptance is not passive. She has a good opinion of herself, she is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity, she would do anything for pride (Pathak 256).” Though she longs for Gopal’s reassuring presence—“the familiar rustling” (168) by her side at night and feels cold without the presence of Gopal in her life, she accepts the harsh facts of life unflinchingly, asserting that Gopal is “going his way and I have to go mine” (161). She vacates her house since she does not want to become a burden on her parents, neither does she want to live like a “parasite” on them. With her three daughters Sumi enters the Big House and this sets in motion the unraveling of age-old secrets anchored by the four generations of women caught in the "metaphor of silence". Through her narrative technique Deshpande brings in the past and present together. While going to Bangalore to her parental home, Kalyani, Sumi’s mother, lost her four-year-old mentally retarded son at the railway station. Shripati, her husband, stopped talking to her after that incident. The couple has cohabited in this oppressive silence for thirty-five years. Kalyani is visibly devastated and her reaction dumbfounds her granddaughters—“No’, she cries out, ‘no, my God, not again.’ She begins to cry, sounding so much like an animal in pain that Aru covers her ears against the sound” (12). The novel is not narrated along a straight line, but it cuts across the timeline. With psychological insight, Deshpande switches between first- and third-person narrators, crosscutting skillfully among passages of fraught conversations between the three generations of women and fabrics of remembrances. In their struggle to cope up with their situations they form a female-bonding between themselves. Their
longing for the past memories and their futile attempt to hold on to the past presents a heart-rending picture. Aru cannot console herself to the fact that their father has walked out on them without any warning, all of a sudden—"My father a missing person? Do we put him among the juvenile delinquents, the retarded children and adults?" (13). Even Sumi, despite her apparent stoicism, is not immune from the hope of getting Gopal back. The day one of her daughters brings in Gopal's scooter, Sumi rushes outside thinking it to be him. In her struggle for a new definition of herself, she accepts the loss of her marriage and in the process discovers untapped strengths within herself and possibilities for her future. In this novel the author seems to have moved to her more matured philosophy. While the epigraph of her first novel The Holds No Terrors, published in 1990, quotes from the Dhammapada - "You are your own refuge: There is no other refuge. This refuge is hard to achieve", the epigraph of Small Remedies, published in 2000, points at futility of searching for a God to whom we can offer our homage so that He can protect us- "Father of the earth, protect us; Father of the sky, protect us; Father of the great and shining water, protect us, - To which the God shall we offer our worship". But in A Matter of Time, the author perhaps intends to point out that there is really no protection from life's catastrophes and we have to accept what comes on our way. After Gopal leaves, Sumi's creativity blooms forth. She writes a play entitled "The Gardener's Son" which wins instant recognition. As she tells Aru- "It feels so good, you can't imagine! I've been so lazy all my life. And now suddenly I want to do so many things" (231). Sumi tries to subvert traditional Hindu accounts of passive female sexuality, showing its overwhelming, uninhibited, and mysterious powers. She thus evolves her own identity through her creative writing. Her desire to change and
rewrite the “Surpanakha” myth from an original point of view shows her ability to challenge age old patriarchal domination:

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- it is this Surpanakha I’m going to write about. (191)

Thus both the protagonists try to define the “self” in an attempt to free themselves of the social dogmas. Thus, though only for a very short while, Sumi succeeds in gaining a small degree of personal independence through her job and literary recognition. She also learns to drive a scooter, a gesture that is considered to be fit mostly for the males. Sumi dies in a scooter accident at a tender age when once for all life seems to offer her hope and joy. Gopal’s use of the word “destiny” rings back to us- “‘Destiny is just us, and therefore inescapable…’” (26). Thus the novel ends with an austere and philosophical note.

_A Matter of Time_ appreciably outlines the makeover of the canon- from the traditional patriarchal values and mores to the value of female bonding, self identity and assertion of women’s rights. Four generations of women within the same family come together to sculpt anew the course of social history and to bring about an ideological change. The novel exudes pathos, understanding and compassion. As Deshpande rightly says,
It is the note of compassion in this novel that endures it to me, the
compassion that is there in Sumi's understanding of Gopal, in Aru's final
'I am your son, Amma's to Kalyani, Kalyani whom she had begun by
judging harshly. There is compassion in Kalyani's and Aru's acceptance
of their burden and in their forgiveness of Gopal as well. (Writing from
the Margin and Other Essays 24)

Though A Matter of Time brings in a sense of nullity in the Existential vein, it also makes
the readers more compassionate and understanding. We may perhaps best conclude
by quoting the novelist: “There never has been any huge enlightenment, only an
understanding of the fact that as we go on living, we learn to cope, becoming each day
a little more understanding of human frailty, a little more compassionate” (Writing from
the Margin and Other Essays 29).

Small Remedies

Small Remedies (2000) is multidimensional with death at its foreground, music at its
background and the complexities of its existence as its thematic basis. A narrative of
narratives, it is a novel of “becoming” (Jain 281). The conclusive line of the epigraph-
“To which God shall we offer our worship?’ points out the futility of searching for a God
to whom man can offer his homage to protect himself from disasters- “The decorated
threshold, the mango leaf torans, the Oms, the Swastikas, the charms and amulets all
to keep the disaster at bay, to stave off the nemesis of a jealous God” (81).
Though Madhu, the protagonist, was a motherless child, yet she never felt the absence of her mother because of the love and affection showered on her by her father. But her father's death when she was just fifteen years of age shatters the adolescent girl's innocent dreams. The immensity of the grief makes her body respond to the comforting embrace of her father's friend in one of her weakest moments. His effort to console her, leads to a sexual encounter between the two. But the death of her father, her loneliness, and her grief engulfs her and almost obliterates the incident from her memory.

Her father, before dying, left Madhu in the care of an aunt. Madhu goes to this aunt's house and finds herself in a new town and a home full of new people and spends her days in a phase of complete loss of identity. She cannot relate her aunt Leela's husband, Joe, as her uncle and his hostile children, Pavla and Tony as her half cousins. She says:

It was not only the knowledge that, I was merely passing through, that I would be going to the hostel in a month, it was the unreality of the situation, I found myself in, which alienated me from my surroundings. My father dead, Babu gone, I knew not where, the home that had been mine, ever since I could remember, no longer there—these things made me suddenly a stranger to my own life. As if I had been moved sideways, away from my place. My own life had ceased to exist and I could only watch, from a distance, others living out their lives. (44).

Her lonely childhood, her stay with aunt's family, which was rather intolerant to her, makes her exceptionally sensitive. Madhu, after her graduation, wants to be financially
independent; she decides to take up a job. Joe’s friend, Hamid Bhai, gives her a job for his magazine “City views”. To her, her job and the small room that Hamid Bhai rented her—all become symbols of her independent identity. The appreciation and self-fulfillment that she receives, after long years of alienation, not only gives her pride and a sense of self-satisfaction, but also makes her aware of her needs and she aspires to fulfill them. Tony visits Madhu along with his two friends Chandru and Som. Gradually the three make her room their weekend spot. Her friendship with Som blossoms in love and leads to their marriage. The initial confusion subsides when she marries Som and gives birth to her son. Madhu become a part of a real family for the first time. According to her, “A child’s birth is a rebirth for a woman, its like becoming part of the world once again” (88). Her world gets completed with her son. “What can you give me my lord, I who have everything?” (229)- she muses. Motherhood brings home to her the new sense of worth and she changes according to its demands. She recalls, “Motherhood takes over my life, it makes me over into an entirely different person. The in-control-of-herself Madhu is lost, gone forever. It’s my baby’s dependence that changes me; my place in the universe is marked out now” (183). As her son becomes the centre of her universe, she quits her job and becomes a devoted mother. She is so much obsessed with Aditya’s welfare that she depends on the book Small Remedies full of tips for childcare. It becomes the Bible for the motherless and inexperienced Madhu.

But there is a twist in the plot. A painting exhibition, at Rekha’s Art Gallery, brings all the past memory, especially the incident of her sexual encounter with her father’s friend. The truth that he committed suicide suddenly fills her with guilt and in that state of shock, she tells Som about the incident. Som like any other ordinary person holds on
to the single fact of her lost chastity. Madhu recalls it-“But it’s the single act of sex that Som holds into, it’s the fact that he can’t let go off, as if it’s been welded into his palm. Purity, chastity, an intact hymen-these are the things Som is thinking of these are the truths that matter” (262). Since that day Madhu’s impeccable world crumbles down. Som is haunted by her past and becomes even more suspicious and loathsome towards her. They spend their life only in fight, which exhibit hateful insinuations for each other. Aditya, their only son, is quite troubled by his parents’ fights and one day he tries to interfere in their fight. One of them shouts at him to go away and Aditya in a state of shock walked out-never to return. His death in a bomb blast engulfs them in grief and emptiness. Madhu’s world is shattered. For long seventeen years her life was centered on him but there is suddenly a void. She waits for him to return, she walks the streets of Bombay searching for him, sits by the telephone waiting for his call. In spite of Som’s explanation about the riots and Bomb blasts in the city. Madhu doesn’t stop her search of Adit. She moves through the streets of Bombay and feels thrilled when she imagines that, she had a glimpse of him.

Madhu’s attention is successfully diverted from her grief, when Chandru forces her into taking the job of writing the biography of Savitri Bai Indorekar, the doyen of Hindustani music, belonging to the Gwalior Gharana. Madhu agrees to write the biography of Savitra Bai and goes to Bhavanipur, where she stays with a young and loving couple Lata and Hari. In spite of her utter desire to remain isolated, Hari interrogates her on the life of her aunt Leela, and Madhu slowly gets involved in the lives of the people around her. She understands that the more one desires to manage life according to some preconceived pattern, the more irritated, frustrated and fearful
one becomes. Unknowingly Madhu writes the life of three persons- Bai, Leela and Madhu herself, all in one.

Madhu, as a young girl had seen the beautiful Bai, and was even a good friend of Bai’s daughter- Munni. At that time it was below the dignity for a daughter of high class Brahmin family to sing because this profession was traditionally associated with notch girls. Bai was therefore only allowed to sing Bhajan’s at her father's place. But after her marriage she learns of her father-in-law's love for music. His encouragement gives her confidence and she requests him to let her learn music. Breaking away the shackles of tradition, a female trainer was arranged for Bai. Very soon a Muslim tabla accompanist joined the group. The family was furious but Bai’s determination to achieve her goal, gave her enough courage to face the wrath of her family members and the society. Once again, she revolts against the tradition, in search of her identity and walks out of the house with her tabla player—Ghulam Saab. In order to realize her dreams she faces a number of hardships and ignominy and even gives birth to a daughter out of wedlock. Gradually all her efforts start to bear fruits, ultimately making her into a professional singer. Thus, she becomes the great artist in classical vocal world of music. In her essay, “‘To Be or Not To Be': The Question of Professional Women in Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terror, The Binding Vine, Small Remedies” Shubha Dwivedi rightly observes:

*Small Remedies* is a saga of women emancipation. The novel is about the ‘making' of a writer, singer and a social worker....Deshpande recognizes the importance of interaction among different generation of women. She emphasizes that women’s strength lies in their
acknowledgement of their desire – not only sexual but creative as well.

Deshpande's work exemplifies that women need to be assertive in order to regain their mental equipoise and individuality. (281)

During her interview with Madhu, Bai speaks of her life without any mention of Ghulam Saab and her daughter Munni, as if- "she had drawn a line through Munni's and Ghulam Saab's names and erased them from her life. This is something she did long back, when she turned to respectability, when she began her journey to success and fame. (154). It was after Bai's separation from Ghulam Saab that she appears again as a married woman wearing her old Mangalsutra. The name 'Savitri' in the Hindu cultural context symbolizes wifely chastity and loyalty that can even thwart the deity of death.

'Savitri' and 'Bai' together seem to present a paradoxical amalgamation and hence the name becomes ironical. Similarly Munni also tries to erase her mortal parents from her life by taking the name 'Sailaja' which means "born of the mountains". Even towards the end of her life, Bai struggles to find her identity by ignoring a great part of her past life. The ignored part of her life is that which is also related with Munni, the illegitimate child of Savitri Bai and Ghulam Saab. Munni is alienated from her parents right from her childhood, because of her parents' unusual relationship. Her assertions - "My name is Meenakshi" or "He's not my father", "My father is in Pune, He's not here" (31-32) demonstrate her futile attempts to disown her own father. Munni strongly tries to detach herself from the illegitimacy of her parent's relationship. She dislikes Ghulam Saab openly. She tells Madhu that her father is in Pune, in Shukurwar Path, that he is a lawyer, a very famous one and earns a lot of money; thousands of rupees. Ghulam Saab, she tells her, was only a tabla player for her mother. Creating her own imaginary
relations, Munni strives to attain the life and identity of a respectable family, which Bai had rejected. She is aware of her resemblance to her natural father: “[…] She tried hard […] to cover it up, deliberately cultivating a bedraggled ragamuffin look, far removed from his tidy elegance” (75). Yet her eyes light gray in colour […] unmistakably linked her to the man she so strenuously disclaimed as father” (75). The light gray eyes of Munni, makes Madhu recognize her after so many years. To her, Bai and her life style meant disgrace. All her life, Munni struggles to reject her parentage. Her childhood is spent in her total efforts to attain a respectable status and somehow, she even succeeds in doing so. With all struggles Munni succeeds in getting accepted by Bai’s in-laws, gets married and becomes a common middle-class woman named Shailaja Joshi. At last she achieves the identity she had striven to attain. As Madhu feels, “Fighting with her back to the wall for the identity she wanted to have, the one she claimed finally, successfully denying her old one. Shailaja Joshi-a long way from Munni, daughter of Savitri Bai and Ghulam Saab” (77). Madhu later muses-

But for all of us there’s a self inside which we recognize as our real selves. For Munni, the self that she saw as her own lay in future, it was towards that self that she moved with deliberation, it was that self I met in the bus – an ordinary looking woman with an ordinary family life and a name so ordinary that it covers pages in the telephones directory.

(170)

Finally her death in the same bomb blast, which killed Aditya and her recognition as Shailaja Joshi, the only child of Savitri Bai Indorekar, neutralizes her life long struggle to attain an identity separated from her mother. Thus, in death, Munni is once again
identified as the daughter of the woman she detested. In spite of her determination, she fails to attain self realization. Instead of accepting her true self, she denies the truth of her birth and her identity given by her parents- therefore, she lives towards a life of illusion and deception. It is in this that she fails, because in death her identity claims her.

Savitri Bai's sudden stroke and Hari's accident creates a crisis, which brings Madhu in the centre of all action. Madhu finally breaks down while talking about Adit's death, which proves to be cathartic for her; she opens up and tells Hari of her mindless waiting for her son. As she goes on talking about Adit, she finally breaks down, when she narrates how frustrated she was in her attempts to find Adit. She feels too sorrowful, of not being there at his final moment. Voicing her anguish she says,

I can't come to terms with my ignorance of those days, I am obsessed by the need to reclaim them from the darkness. Some times I think I could have borne his death if I had been able to be with him, to see him die we have a right to share it, the most profound human experience of death. With those we love, we have a right to be with them, to travel part of the way, even if we cannot go all the way. But I was denied that right, I was deprived of it. I don't know I will never know how he faced the moment?

(305-306)

When she talks about the loss, it lifts the burden and brings the realization of the despondency of her own life. A simple incident starts healing the wounds of Madhu. She meets a young family celebrating the Upanayanam ceremony of a boy in Bhavani temple. When she is asked to bless the boy who has lost his father a few days back, she wonders, "What blessings can contend against our mortality? Mustard seeds to
protect us from evil, blessings to confer long life—nothing works. And yet we go on.

Simple remedies? No, they’re desperate remedies and we go on with them because, in truth, there is nothing else” (315). This realization makes her accept Adit’s death.

Hasina’s prayer on the stage of Bhavani temple, “I saw a dream, I saw a dream” (319) reminds her of her and Som’s dream dreamt around Adit and gives her enough strength to accept the fate with dignity. She recovers her own sense of self and lost identity. Now she wants to share the sense of despair and her joy and pleasure of having Adit for seventeen years with Som. She feels- “We need to be together, we need to mourn him together, and we need to face the fact of his death and our continuing life together. Only in this, is healing possible” (315). With the memory of her son Adit and Som gives her hope to live and face life. ‘Memory’ forms a recurrent theme in Deshpande’s fiction. As Bijay Danta aptly observes:

... nobody has a memory that is exclusively one’s own. Other memories find their way into the self’s recovery of its past. No story is complete in itself. There are other stories present in it. There are other characters with their memories, which carry other memories. Each memory of each self is already always a palimpsest. .. The past that is sought to be re-inscribed into the narrator’s memory in Small remedies is often at variance with itself. It enmeshes mnemonic repetitions of death, loss, failed marriage, rape or involuntary sex, betrayal, humiliation, and the multiple roads that may have led ordinary and talented people to fame and success or to defeat and oblivion. (123)
Nothing goes away for ever. Bai may have lost her voice because of the stroke she suffers but her voice continues in Hasina. The Kierkegaardian axiom- "life must be lived forwards, but it can only be understood backwards" adopted in A Matter of Time finds relevance in this novel also. Past is necessary to move forward- it is possible to recreate the past in memories. At the end of the novel, we see that Madhu attains self-realization and hopes to accomplish her dream to recreate Adit in her memory and unburden her soul:

I think of how, Tony and I, when we speak of Joe and Leela, bring them back into our lives for a while, Som and I will have to do this for Adit, only Som and I can do it for him, between the two of us, we can recreate him, we can invoke his presence and make his existence real. And then, may be, we can have our own ceremony, Som and I, we can wash away the darkness and ugliness, not only of Adit's death, but of what happened before, with our own oblations of sesame seeds and waters.(323)

Thus the novel ends on the note of affirmation as she feels-"How could I have ever long for amnesia? Memory, capricious and unreliable though it is, ultimately carries its own truth within it. As long as there is memory, loss is never total" (324).

Deshpande creates another exemplary character in Leela. Leela, Madhu's aunt, on the other hand, was a confident woman, well aware of her needs. Right from her childhood days, she had a great inclination towards studies; because she did not show any interest in the domestic chores, she was considered to be a rebel, and as a punishment, was married to a man of low income group. Her grandmother's punishments turned out to be a blessing, for her husband encouraged her to study and
she got through her ‘Matric’ examination. But, her husband suffered from T.B, and died at an early age. Her husband’s death strengthened her resolve to be independent and answer her callings. It gave her a definite direction and purpose, as she has to support her young brother-in-law and her suffering mother-in-law. She feels them as her responsibility, and hence refuses to return to her parent’s house. Her decision of staying in her husband’s house cuts her relations with her own family. She takes up a teaching career and supports her-in-laws. Though, she was a Brahmin widow, she revolted against tradition and loved a Christian and married him after fifteen years. Leela had to wait for so many years to marry Joe because she wanted Joe’s daughter Pavla’s permission, but Pavla did not agree for it. Joe and Leela’s belief in each other and the love they shared made them marry in spite of Pavla’s objection. In spite of the barriers of caste, religion, tradition, language, lifestyle and a hostile child, they found fulfillment in each other.

Shashi Deshpande through her novel Small Remedies, projects the quest for self-realization of Indian women in a hostile patriarchal society. She makes honesty and 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 and Leela’s ability to accept the facts of their life, makes them successful in their quest. The secret of self-realization- “You are your own refuge,/ There is no other refuge,/ This refuge is hard to achieve” (Epigraph The Dark Holds No Terrors)-helps Madhu to become her own solace.

Madhu through suffering, endurance, realization of the self and understanding of human nature emerge as the ‘new woman’ who becomes her own refuge. The ending
blends into an exquisite epiphany of a music which is inaudible to the performer, and can yet take the listener to the peak of blessedness. It is precisely this 'equal music' that can inform a literary text. It is this apprehension of music at the imaginative level—without the help of actual audibility—which can lead to wonderful aesthetic effect in literature attained by means of rich transgeneric evocations. "It is in this way that in the hands of both Vikram Seth and Shashi Deshpande fictional art aspires to the condition of music, by, textualizing classical musical compositions, and thereby attaining the dimensions of 'an equal music'" (Kundu 84). This reminds us of Meenakshi Mukherjee's apt observation:

Of the four remarkable novels I have read in recent times that deal with music- Vikram Seth's An Equal Music, Salman Rushdie's The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Bani Basu's Gandharvi and now Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande, I think, faces the toughest challenge.

This has to do with incompatibility between the discourse of Hindustani and the English language. (The Hindu, 7 May, 2000).

Madhu recovers her lost self through re-visitng and re-telling. Thus both A Matter of Time and Small Remedies transcend the mundane and ultimately reconcile with the greater truth of life.

Moving On

Moving On has a complex narrative structure, that embodies several strands using memory, experience and written texts. Manjari, the central character and the reader of her father’s diaries, feels as if there is a message for her—"...Like Baba saying, ‘this is for you’, the way he had left them, displaying them to me almost, I knew that reading
them would not be an intrusion” (18). With her uncanny insight into the nature of human relationships and an equally unerring eye for detail Shashi Deshpande ventures further than she ever has into the terrain of the mind, teasing out the nuances and exploding the stereotypes of familial bounds. The first component, the diaries act as a supplement and the contents unfold surprises after surprises concerning the image of her father Badri Narayan (Dr. Bones) that affect the memory of her deceased father. This memory, though it remains as an external influence, it magnetizes the internal, that is Manjari’s own story. Manjari’s and Badri Narayan’s diaries, become one, internal to the narrative mode and, to a great extent controls and contributes a lot to the smooth flow of the narration. Deshpande herself says, “Memories and pictures of the past, dreams, hopes and plans or the future-these are as real to us as the present” [literary Review, The Hindu, 5th Sept, 2003]. The narrative mode in the novel holds the past and the present together, in an intense and complex play of all familial relationships.

In getting to study the complex relationship within the family, the novelist weaves her narration around repetitive acts of transgression while bringing into contestation of such binaries as self/other, man/woman, bone/body, physical/emotional, individual and social. Thus the experiential becomes the touchstone above and beyond other things where the existential is not a compelling motif but facilitates reflection on life in that others secrets are discovered complicating one’s own opinions about them and also continually revising oneself, one’s perspective. (Naik 218)
A process of building- rebuilding and deconstruction continues in a narration, that is rolled up in a spiral form with the coils layered one upon another, as well as relating to each other. Among, all other things, the novel *Moving On* is about writing. The novel opens with a man sitting and writing and wondering as to what to write next. In the next chapter, we see his daughter Manjari, the protagonist, sitting to write her own story. Here, in this novel, writing is definitely giving a shape, a voice, a meaning, to one's ideas and feelings. Manjari's mother, Vasu, is the real writer of romantic stories, of ideal marriages, published in popular Marathi magazines. She wrote stories that she did not believe in. Along with her married life, her lived experience, writing was her only other substitute- a world of make-belief world was romanticized in her stories. "Living among women who had to be aggressive and strong to survive the endless drudgery and continuous lechery, she wrote of silent, sacrificing women...an independent woman who hated being questioned, she wrote of woman who found happiness in submission, not only to their husbands, but to their families as well" (125). When looked carefully, we see Vasu's stories are a direct contrast to the diary entries/ writing of Badri Narayan, her doctor husband. She experienced popularity and earned fame and had a number of reader fans, because one of her novels, "Manasi", was turned into a film. Vasu, never expressed any kind of emotions, feelings, she had an enigmatic silence around her. Whatever Vasu failed to get in real life, she achieved through her writing, always giving the ideal family image. The writing of husband and wife, though opposite in these writing modes, because both Badri Narayan, the doctor of bones, and his wife Vasu, inhabit two different worlds the former's being the physical world and the latter's, the emotional, and the huge gap between the two could never be patched. Actually there
are no visible ruptures in the filial relationship, yet the fine ruptures are noticed when 
Manjari decides to marry Shyam of her own choice and will. On the one hand her 
decision is considered as inferior from the social point of view, but it is considered as 
freedom of choice- “Deshpande’s always tries to posit such events in a dialectical 
mode; hence there is no endorsement of any singularity. But a singularity always 
invokes in its wake, its negation, in a process of reiteration or repetition, as in case of 
Manjari, who repeats what her grandfather and father did” (Naik 219). There is duality, 
that is on the fore front over the narrative of Moving on as the novelist explores 
Manjari’s “double consciousness,” Manjari tells her own story and also narrates about 
the ‘writings’ written by her parents. Thus, she is a character, as well as the narrator. 
She has the double function of participating and narrating, she has the insider’s 
knowledge of events and also tells the story from her own perspective. There are two 
stories that travel parallel to each other and intersect each other—one is a man’s story 
and the other is of a woman’s. The significance in the novel, is the narrative voice and 
its location and identity as an individual, a daughter and a woman.

Manjari is not an affectionate reader of her father’s diary, but a critical reader; she 
knows very well, that, any act of violation is a means of gaining access to alternative 
knowledge. Dr.Badri Narayan’s father was Brahmin by caste. Though he was the 
son of a landlord, he married an orphaned Harijan girl. He violated the norms of caste 
hierarchies and was disowned and disinherited by his father. Badri’s mother was his 
father’s second wife, and had the inauspicious Mangal in her horoscope (inauspicious 
Mangal is considered the sign of ill fate and hence inauspicious for marriage) and so 
this second marriage was not socially accepted. Badri Narayan, too, married a girl
outside his caste. After reading her father's diary, Manjari understands the true nature of her parents' relationship and confesses the inadequacy of her knowledge about them "I thought I knew them. Baba and Mai were a book, I'd read a million times, I knew every word of it.... And now Baba is bringing them back, offering me another picture. The truth.... but can there be any one truth about people? People are complex, indecipherably, protean—there is no absolute about them. How can there be the truth about Babu and Mai? Baba is only giving me his picture" (21). Even the so-called real cannot vouch for one truth, or its singularity, it is plural and subjective. 'Baba' was a man of passion, a man who had all along believed in the urgency of the body's need, its fire, whose passion for his profession equally matched with his passion for his wife. Mai did not live up to Baba physical passion; she however escaped that passion by creating a world of passion in her writing. Baba accepted the fact that his wife was not as passionate as he was, "Vasu, was always a little remote even when she was in the midst of her own family, sought freedom; freedom to be by herself, to be on her own, freedom from.... constant demands"(125). Rereading her father's diary, Jiji remembers one of her mother's short stories, Blackout. Set during the times of the Indo-Bangladesh war, this story is told in just a couple of sentences but speaks volumes about its creator. A muslim woman switches on the lights in her house during a curfew. Soon there is a group of self-appointed protectors of law in front of her house demanding why the lights are on. Meek as she appears to be, she stands behind the door, and says, 'I don't know', and gives the standard answer of all illiterate and ignorant women, 'Ask my husband'. The group goes inside, and drags the struggling, protesting man out. The woman hears blows, footsteps, cries, and finally everything is silent, again. She closes
the door, goes into her bedroom, undresses in the dark. *When all her clothes are off, she touches the multicoloured bruises, her fingers lingering over them. And then, with a sigh, she gets into bed, thinking, 'I can sleep tonight.'*

Through Baba's diary we come to know of the painful death of Vasu due to diabetes, we discover how Baba himself copes with cancer, we witness his fears, are confronted along with him with the eternal questions on what life is, what death leads into, we read about how Baba feels during his last days that he failed both as a father and as a husband. We read about her impetuous marriage to Shyam, the birth of Anand which brings back the parents and Jiji together once again, the breakdown of her marriage to Shyam. We read about Malu's return from Pune, about her problems, and eventual death. Jiji married Shyam when she was 18, and when Shyam died she was just 21. It is now while living alone in her father's house that she cannot any more bear the demands of her body, which she satisfies through Raman, the quiet tenant living upstairs. Raja, her distant cousin, who has been asking Jiji to marry him, is devastated when he realises what is going on between Jiji and Raman.

Manjari being entangled in the past cannot easily unshackle herself to move on, for her own experience was similar to the experience of others. The real and imaginary gets mixed up and challenge the idea of autonomy. To become autonomous is a problematic one. Manjari, a rebellious daughter and having tried at some point in her life, to be on her own, can be seen as a radical feminist. Deshpande has been making a conscious effort, to show in most of her writings, that feminism's exclusivist position often does not work. But she says in her essay "Why I am a feminist":
It took me years to say even to myself, 'I am a feminist'. It was the culmination of a voyage that began within myself and went on to the ocean of women's place in the world. Today, when I call myself a feminist, I believe that the female of the species has the same right to be born and survive, to fulfill herself and shape her life, according to her needs, and the potential that lies within her, as the male has...I believe that Nature, when conferring its gifts on humans, did not differentiate between males and females, except for the single purpose of procreation. I believe that motherhood does not bar everything else, but motherhood is a bonus, an extra bonus that women are privileged to have. Would the antifeminists deny all this? (83)

The novel exhibits amply our perception of the other, not in the outside social space of gender and caste hierarchies, but within the limited space of the family, wherein the drama of superiority and inferiority is played daily. Manjari gives up her medical education and marries Shyam; she displays enormous courage and her firm decision in marrying Shyam and again during such trying moments, when it is revealed that her own younger sister Malu is made pregnant by her husband, Manjari experiences excruciating pain and trauma. Malu dies after giving birth to a girl child, named Sachi by Manjari, and Shyam kills himself. Poor Manjari has to face a painful period of struggle and strain. Estranged from family, living among strangers, she grapples with a number of difficulties to support herself and her baby son. "I had no time to brood or grieve. It was down to the basics, work, eat, sleep, wake up, and go back to work". (215) Manjari decides to face life alone, without anybody's support either morally or financially. When she hears about her mother's death, she comes back to her father. She has outgrown
all kinds of hesitations. She drinks uninhibitedly in front of her father and in the company of her cousin Raja. Raja is interested in marrying her, but she turns down his proposals. She learns to drive her car and even runs it as a taxi. When she fails to get a satisfying job, she becomes self employed by installing and operating a computer at home and typing out the manuscripts for others. Through her actions she really shocks raja, who is the upholder of patriarchal norms. She faces real test of her life when, she is visited by strangers and receives anonymous phone calls from the mafia underworld. When she doesn't respond to the threat, she is physically assaulted. But she becomes more stubborn and decides to stay and fight, she doesn't listen to Raja's concern and his advice, and refuses to succumb to the pressures either from the mafia world or from Raja, her cousin- "This is what they want; they're trying to reduce me to this shivering cowardly mass of fear. I won't be scared" (167). She even goes to the extent of disapproving Raja's role of being the protecting male in her life- "I want the brakes under my feet, not some one else's I don't want a dual control, the control should be mine, mine alone"(88). She dismisses the car driver saying, "I'm quite capable of looking after myself" (88). Manjari's struggle for freedom and for being autonomous is theoretically a challenge to patriarchy, not confronting it headlong but in discovering one's own strength as a woman. She remembers her father a lot, when she fails to control her sexuality-the staunch betrayal of her physical body and its relentless demands to quench its hunger. She negotiates the body's hunger by sleeping with her tenant, a much younger man, but again on her own terms, her whims and desire, not his -"Only the body, his body, only my body, and my starved body, No thoughts, no feelings only sensations" (257). She has to move on and live her own life, without
getting dictated by anyone. The novel ends symbolically when both of them part
different ways at the end of a long tedious journey; she starts the car and is back on the
road again to be free. As she moves on, the question that troubles her is whether her
freedom is without any entanglement?

As the title of the novel indicates that "moving on" is a journey from within to without
and from without to within. Manjari, in her many acts of violation, has sought freedom,
and autonomy. Living all alone, can she find freedom? Can she live on her own volition?
These questions are not only posed to Manjari, and as an individual and as a woman,
but are central to feminism as well as to all humanity.

"The term 'autonomy' has been defined differently in different fields and has different
meaning for different women. The conceptual thread that binds them all is the idea of
self-determination—the right of all women to make individual life choices freely and
independently without any form of external influence, in a self-reliant manner, "within the
constraints of what one regards as morally permissible" (Naik 223).

The struggle for autonomy is still vital for women, as an ideal to be achieved. And
the theme of autonomy, selfhood and self-realization, still is an integral part of
contemporary feminist writing. In almost all societies, a woman is culturally assigned the
norms of behaviour, in which standards of conduct, taste and decorum, set the limitation
for her as external signs of seemingly proper and respectable. If at all a woman deviates
from the set norms or any display of transgressive potential in violation to the ideal
image of womanhood it makes her an unruly woman and outcaste by the society.
Women are bound to their oppression by male control of the dominant institutions and the dominant ideology.

Shashi Deshpande in her essay "Why I am a feminist", makes it clear, Feminism is not anti-men but strives to achieve, a better, a more meaningful and companionable relationship between man and woman, as against the conventional sacrificial models of relationship. Women can fulfill themselves only if they are not oppressed. Deshpande clearly indicates that she vouches for relational autonomy for women. Instead of being economically, emotionally and psychologically dependent on men, they would independently nourish ambitions and pursue goals for self—fulfillment. In this changing world, it has become imperative to do away with separate domains for women and man to redefine man-woman relationship as equal and complimentary and not on terms of domination and subordination. For Deshpande, “A world without frightened, dependent, trapped, frustrated women is a better world for all of us to live in”(85). The term ‘relational autonomy” re-conceptualizes autonomy from a feminist perspective and understands an individual as a social and cultural product, embodied and embedded in relationships with others in specific social, political and historical in a sense, Manjari’s refusal to marry Raja, fighting with the mafia for her own ancestral property and driving her own car on account for her resistances to patriarchy and its domination. On the other hand though Manjari could not control her desire and the demands of her body, yet she is in full command of the situation claiming her body for herself. In this realization, Manjari questions that law- ‘But you’re a woman, you’re a daughter’ (64) she further questions ‘the archive’ to counter Raja’ accusation—“I never thought you would sink so low” (283) and articulates, “what it is for a woman to live alone? I gave up wearing saris
because I didn't want to look womanly; I cut my hair short like a man. I wore my most forbidding expression. But it was of no use. They can smell it, yes, they can smell the woman in you" (284) Manjari challenges the essentialised notion of female identity as male fabrication and leaves the door open for social and cultural change.

Relational feminist argue that the concept of the independent, autonomous, impersonal self represses the reality of our situatedness and dependence upon relationships. Manjari, is the new woman, who redefines freedom and also relationships. She is thus a model practitioner of relational autonomy, situated in family and bound by relationships, yet subservient to none. An affectionate daughter, a loving sister, a caring mother, and a good friend, she is hardly imposing or demanding, and is not dependent on anyone. She is not over protective of her children and allows them their own space. Her engagements with life adopt a middle path- be yourself and allow others to be; live on your own terms and let others live on their own. Manjari’s moving on in another search sums up the contemporary women’s unending search for selfhood. In the words of Manjari: “The search is doomed to failure. We will continue to be incomplete, ampersands all of us. Yet, the search is what it’s all about...the search is the thing.”(343)

Deshpande tells stories about ordinary people playing out the scripts of their lives, quite unseeing perhaps, of the grand scheme into which their mundane actions fit. She makes us question our everyday existence and helps us see, through the evolution of well-etched characters, the frailties and possibilities of human life. In Moving On, the narrator is Jiji (Manjari), a widowed woman who moves in to care for her ailing father.
Discovering her father’s diary after his death, she sets out to evaluate her life retrospectively - in view of Baba’s revelations that show past events in a new light. Viewed through Baba’s writings and the observations of the child, Jiji, life in a household ruled by the beautiful but reserved Mai is realistically brought to light. Grappling with choices about the future, she lives alone in the large house that her father has bequeathed to her daughter, Sachi.

Throughout the book, Deshpande uses the body as a repeating theme. It begins with Baba’s teaching tool - Mr. Bones, his enjoyment of physical pleasures (a joy not shared by Mai) and his belief in the perfection and endurance of the body. But this belief disintegrates as he watches his beloved wife succumb to illness and perceives his own impending death. As a single woman, Jiji herself struggles with the desires and demands of her body.

The epigraph reads, “All the stories that have ever been told are the stories of families – from Adam and Eve onward.” Even as Jiji witnesses its disintegration, she comes back to the subject of faith in the family as an enduring institution. With this book, Shashi Deshpande very eloquently tells the story of a family and in doing so restores faith in the belief that it is possible to tell stories about contemporary India and Indians in English - without falling prey to the demands of the mass market.

Baba had moved on in his life. He had learnt that his belief in the human body was just wishful thinking. Having witnessed how Vasu’s body which had enchanted him with its sandalwood fragrance had started to rot even when she was alive because of diabetes, he had learnt that the body is after all not all that perfect as he had once
believed. Vasu had not moved on. She had written stories about passionate love but was unable to feel that kind of passion or understand the passion felt either by her husband or by her daughter. But the story told in this novel is one of a healing process. It is a novel in which the characters are capable of leaving behind past hurts and breaking through the chains of moral codes imposed upon them by the society. Deshpande shows in Moving On how to move on, how to make - remake- one's life. Baba, Jiji, Raja, Sachi, BK, and even Nirmala are fighters, and thus are eventual winners. Deepa Alexander in a review on Moving On, writes- “Deshpande's novels are specific, modernizing women in their traditional milieu. Moving On will widen women's space.” (The Hindu, Aug 15, 2004).

In an interview to Joel Kuortti, Deshpande once said: “... my books go into the female mind and the psychology of the human female which a textbook may tell you about, but a living human being you create in a book can tell you much better” (34). In all her ten novels published so far, this Sahitya Akademi award winning novelist explores what happens in the psyche of her heroines as they go through the complex process of self-realization. Through her writing she makes the readers question their everyday existence and helps them to visualize, through the evolution of her well-sketched characters, the frailties and possibilities of human life. Thus, she creates a familiar world anew in which authentic experiences of the inner psyche of Indian women is powerfully projected. A distinct kind of language and imagery used in her fictions imparts a new vision of reality.
In the Country of Deceit

In the Country of Deceit, was released by the famous theatre personality and playwright Girish Karnad in Bangalore on Friday September 26th, 2008. In her new novel, while exploring the theme of a woman's journey of self-discovery Deshpande depicts a theme that speaks about the myriad feelings of love. In a conversation with K.R. Usha the novelist admitted that in the Country of Deceit has been a surprise for two reasons. First, because Devayani, a character in one of her early novels Come Up and Be Dead appears once again “after five novels and twenty years” and becomes the central protagonist in this work of fiction which, however, is not a sequel to the former. She added that the second surprise to her was that this is a love story which “explores the slippery, treacherous terrain that love takes people into” (The Hindu Literary Review, 6 July 2008). Perhaps it will not be out of place to quote here at length what the author mentioned about this book in a net talk to Amrita Dutta:

I certainly didn’t set out to write a love story. When the novel began, there was only this young woman, Devayani, who’d featured in an earlier novel (a crime novel) and refused to go away as characters usually do. Now I saw her, back in her own home, fumbling for a new start in life, I saw her family trying to get her married, her resistance, her new friendship with an actress … Through all this, a line from John Donne’s poem kept running through my mind like a refrain: For God’s sake hold your tongue and let me love. And then a man, a friend of the actress, entered the story and I knew this would be a love story. It had often seemed to me that everything has been said about love and too much about sex; but this was my story and I had to write it in my way. (Posted on 27 July 2008)
Rendered with a voice of authenticity, Shashi Deshpande’s new novel locates the protagonist at a critical juncture when the roles by which she has lived no longer suffice. The first Chapter, “Ground Zero”, begins by revealing to the readers the invisible bond that Devayani has with her ancestral home and the memory of her father telling them “with an expansive gesture that took in everything in sight, including the hill some distance away, ‘all this is mine’”(3). As in this fiction, in almost all the novels by Deshpande, houses play a very significant role. The opening paragraphs give a touching portrayal of the demolition of the family house. As the first person narrative tells: “We are putting a closure to all the memories of the old house. Memories of my father’s despair, memories of my mother’s suffering” (5). So Devayani enters her life finally through the paradoxical encounter with death. Symbolically, this decay is followed by the sense of a rebirth, a fresh beginning. After the death of her mother, life had almost stopped for this young unmarried woman who had nursed her ailing mother and had been a source of comfort to many of her relatives in their times of distress. She however, tries to emerge from the trauma of her mother’s death and start life anew—symbolized by the demolition of her ancestral home and the building of a modern house. The new house, “a complete reversal of the old house” (4), is spacious, airy, sunny and has a sense of openness. Ignoring the disapproval of her family and friends who are keener on getting her married, she chooses to live alone on her own in this small town in Karnataka called Rajnur which perhaps is the fictional version of Dharwad much like Arundhati Roy’s Ayemenem. Situated in the serene surrounding of Rajnur, the fictional world of In the Country of Deceit reflects prismatic colours. Despite the desolate look that the place had taken on during the process of demolition, Devayani
had looked forward to the day when she would inhabit the house again. After her sister and other relatives leave, she settles in her new home. She spends her time teaching English to a few eager learners of the language and creating a garden with a frog-pond. Thus, she begins to enjoy her life. As she admits later: "I am happy, my garden is blooming. Everything I planted has come up. The right amount of rain, right amount of sun. I feel blessed."(164).

Despande depicts Devayani's warm relationships with the different members of her extended family by introducing the epistolary technique. Her aunt Sindhu's affectionate address to her-"How are you, Putta?"(17)- expresses her strong attachment to her niece. The poignant portrayal of the bond between Savi and Devayani, the latter's friendship with her brother-in-law, Shree, the loving tenderness between cousins, the perfect partnership of Sindhu and Keshav lend new perspectives to the different relations. With her uncanny insight into the nature of human relationships Shashi Deshpande speculates into the topography of the minds of the characters, and depicts realistically the familial bonds.

The different characters try their best to find a "suitable-boy" for Devayani but she refuses: "I want a needlepoint of extreme happiness... 'the answer is no'" (25). The plot gets a new twist with the sudden arrival of Rani, a one-time famous actress, in the protagonist's house. In spite of their differences (both in social and economic status) they become quick friends. It is in connection with her relationship with the filmstar that the protagonist meets the charismatic Ashok Chinappa, the new district superintendent of police who is much senior to her and father of a ten year old girl. She is attracted by
his personality and gets involved in a passionate love affair with him. Dissatisfied with her status of “the other woman” in Ashok’s life, Devayani constantly veers between euphoria and emotional turmoil -“I turned my face from side to side and wondered, do I look like an adulteress?” (148). Though they know full well that such a relationship has no future, yet they spend moments of supreme happiness in each other’s company.

Though Devayani longs for a happy married life and sex without guilt and fear -“This is what I want. I don’t want clandestine meetings, drama, constant fears... This is what I want, this is what I’ll never have” (191-92), she can’t resist Ashok who promises her love and honesty but no future- “I can promise you love and I can promise you honesty” (131). In response to the cautions from her family she says that there are no boundaries in love. Deshpande’s work convinces the readers that truly, there can be no moral judgments in love. A day spend in each other’s company gives her a preview of conjugal bliss: “This is what marriage means; knowing that the years lie ahead of you, a long stretch of time waiting for you to occupy together” (191). Amidst her psychological probing she overcomes her emotional turmoil and realizes the final truth that “only this man could give me such ecstasy, only he could give me such joy with his love making... It was this man, not the sex. This man’s love, not the sex. And yet, the sex too” (193). In our patriarchal society a woman encounters many restrictions with respect to her sexuality whereas her male partner is free from these restrictions. She is discouraged from taking an active role in sex or even allowing herself to experience the act as pleasurable. In the Indian social tradition a woman’s sexuality is limited to raising children only and there is no place for any of her sexual desires that does not continue the process of procreation. In this novel Deshpande dares to break certain conventional
attitudes that are never questioned in our society. Discarding euphemism and circumlocution, she has confronted squarely the various facets of the taboo subject of female sexuality in unequivocal terms. In the first person narrative Devayani expresses her erotic urges like a man in a powerful language. Throughout the book, Deshpande uses the body as a repeating theme. As a single woman, Devayani herself struggles with the desires and demands of her body. In an interview to Kuortti, Deshpande boldly asserts: “I started writing even about woman’s sexuality—very few women wrote about it... it was good to know that there is such a thing as female sexuality and that you are not, need not be ashamed to have that” (34). In being together, the lovers find compassion and understanding. Their ecstasy of togetherness, though only for a few moments, outweighs the pain of separation. As Devayani voyages the deceitful road to an illicit love, she ponders “Why did I do it? Why did I enter the country of deceit? What took me into it? I hesitate to use the word love but what other word is there?” (257), but ultimately understands that there can be no easy answers. Though her separation with Ashok is tragic, yet she has her own joy—“I too had a moment, a very brief moment, when I raised my arms and my fingertips brushed the sky?” (259). Deshpande makes her heroine assertive, she has the courage to make her own decisions. Devayani, as a “new woman” shows patience, courage and an enviable spirit to face life as it comes on her way. As in Moving On, Deshpande, in this novel also shows how to move on, how to make the most of one’s life. Through her protagonist, the novelist depicts the fact that one must understand the meaning of life and learn how to face it. In her afterword to Shakti, the novelist pointed out:
What women need is the strength to deal with the problems of quotidian life, a sense of having the power to deal with everyday problems, as well as large ones. The power to take their own decisions, without being constrained by traditional ideas of honour or sacrifice, an ability to see beyond these ideas, to see things with their own eyes, with their own minds. (319)

When Ashok leaves, Devayani, much like Sumi in *A Matter of Time* backs out without unpleasantness. While suffering from the pangs of her conscience, she had pondered on the futility of her relationship with Ashok and exclaimed—"I had thought Anna and Vronsky's affair beautifully tragic" (149). Deshpande's admirable craftsmanship in portraying the inner psychology of the heroine creates a narrative of tender beauty, no less than the "beautifully tragic affair" of Tolstoy's heroine, rather than depicting a theme of adultery. The novel thus really becomes "a fantasy feast" depicting "a state of intense vulnerability and beauty". *In the Country of Deceit* appreciably outlines the makeover of the canon—from the traditional patriarchal values to the value of self identity and assertion of women's rights. The novel exudes pathos, understanding and compassion. As in Deshpande's other novels, memories play significant roles. Memory is a recurring theme in Deshpande's fiction. Characters imprisoned in their memories dominate the narrative space of her novels. Devayani's last words—"Should I forget these things? Must I forget his tenderness, the gentleness of his touch, the urgency of his passion? And why, yes, why must I forget that I too had a moment, a very brief moment, when I raised my arms and my fingertips brushed the sky?" (259)—reminds us of the
protagonist, Madhu's reconciliation with life with an epiphanic observation—"How could I have ever longed for amnesia?"—at the end of Small Remedies.

Shashi Deshpande attempts to break the long silence of Indian women in her writing by transforming a predominantly androcentric symbolic order to a feminine narration. While the texture of the novel is suffused with feminine sensibility, the structure of the novel, too, is feminine in the sense in which Luce Irigaray uses it. The image of "multicoloured patchwork quilt" (That Long Silence) aptly sums up the narrative pattern. Each narration is an introspection in the stream of consciousness mode reminding the readers of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Thus, the novel has a complex narrative structure that embodies several strands, using memory, and written text in the form of a first person narrative and epistolary technique. Since her preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, Deshpande has tried to create a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the stream-of-consciousness of her central character. Full of innovative flourishes, it exudes a continuous urge for experimenting linguistically and creates a magic spell on the readers. The beginning of the novel gives us a vision of how a cinematographic camera builds up a scene. The author uses segments of scenes and events from diverse time frames and pastes them one after another, forming a "collage". The carefree handling of narration vis-à-vis the time and point of view, has an overwhelming lasting appeal on the readers.

Codemixing or the use of more than one language in the execution of a speech is an important trait in Deshpande's fiction. Inclusion of handful of Kannada words within
the standard English version hybridizes the text. The novelist also makes her characters voice their joys and hopes by using rich and colourful expressions in colloquial Kannada which add a cultural context to her narration—"Finally she would say, 'Arre, aaplach por aahe te?-she's our kid (199). The recurrent use of Hindi—"Nahi Chalega", the producer kept saying" (137), Sanskrit—Punarapi jananam, punarapi maranam (224), lines from folk songs (quoting from Subbalakshmi's bhajan "Bhaja Govindam", films-Mera naam chin chin chu(190), etc. make the novel Indianized. This off and on switching to words and expressions in different languages makes this fiction an enjoyable reading for the Indian readers though this may pose some difficulty for the non-Indians. This hybrid linguistic richness adds fluency to the text. This extraordinary tale of love and deceit is perhaps poetry camouflaged as prose. The hypnotic effect of poetry exudes from almost every page of the novel. It abounds in figures of speeches, especially similes. Most of them are so effective that the comparisons leave the readers spellbound. One example will suffice: "The place you live is like your skin, something you inhabit without being conscious of it" (15). Deshpande is adept in handling simultaneously various devices that become complimentary to each other. Her heroines easily occupy a cultural landscape in which they are heirs to a dual legacy, in which Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf have as much currency as the Bhagwad Gita and the Mahabharata. In an interview to Kuortti, Deshpande rightly pointed out: "In Indian languages there is so much difference between men's language and women's language. Certain things are never said by women" (39).

In this novel she takes up an "other" mode of discourse, the ecriture feminine, to authentically depict the working of the psyche of the central protagonist. This reminds
us of Helen Cixous' view that writing is of the body and that a woman does not write like a man because she speaks with the body-

I don't believe a man and a woman are identical. The fact that men and women have the whole of humanity in common and that at the same time there is something slightly different, I consider a benediction. Our differences have to do with the way we experience pleasure, with our bodily experiences, which are not the same. Our different experiences necessarily leave different marks, different memories. The way we make love- because it isn't the same- produces different sensations and recollections. And these are transmitted through the text... If I were to write a historical novel, what would it matter if I were a man or a woman? If I write about love, then it does matter. I write differently. If I write letting something of my body come through, then this will be different, depending on whether I have experience of a feminine or masculine body. (Newton 230)

She advocated that "woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing..."(Cixous 320). Deshpande's forceful and authentic use of technique and language gives a feminine touch and this makes In the Country of Deceit a rare specimen of gynofiction. Deshpande, as a narrator writes through her body inventing the impregnable language that submerges, cuts through and gets "beyond the ultimate reverse-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence" (Cixous, 256).
The poignant and imaginative projection of the individual experiences in the
narrative of the novel extends from the text to touch a cord in the sensitive reader and
the protagonist, Devayani, remains with us long afterwards we finish reading this fiction.
Deshpande makes her narrative, the simplest vehicle of truth thereby transforming the
whole experience of reading into a more interior, subtle experience. She speaks her
truth gently but firmly, her words lingering, long after their exit.

The woman's issue in India is different from what it is in western countries.
The writers who are conscious of the "othering" of women need to, as Shashi
Deshpande puts it-

make ordinary women understand the possibility of power, of
being able to control their own lives. And to have this power, not
as mothers, not as devoted wives, but as ordinary women, as
humans (Afterword *Shakti* 319).

But Indian women writers have to first battle against the deeply ingrained critical
prejudices that writing is an activity that belongs exclusively to men and if a woman
writes, if she writes at all, it is always trash. In an article Deshpande writes of her own
personal confrontation with this sexist bias:

For quite a while, I believed- a belief that came from all around me-
that men's lives are more important, more significant. And, therefore,
that serious writing is done by men and is about men. That women's
writing, like their lives, somehow lacks weight and substance. (*Indian
Literature*, 107)
In the Country of Deceit is an undoubtable proof that Deshpande's novels can never be blamed of lacking "weight and substance". Her sympathetic understanding of human characters combined with her writing skill, and her power to handle her craft in a unique way make In the Country of Deceit a critical and enjoyable reading.

In her thought provoking essay, "Of Concerns, Of Anxieties", Deshpande writes that her writing originated from her suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, her experience of the difficulty of playing the different roles enjoined on her by the society. It evolved out of her consciousness of the conflict between her idea of herself as a human being and the idea that society has of her as a woman. She adds that by being a feminist, she believes that the female of the species has the same right to be born and survive and to fulfill herself and shape her life according to her needs and the potential that lies within her, as the male has. Being a feminist does not require one to give up family life or to hate men. As she rightly points out, the greatest revolutions can take place in the mind. It is not necessary to walk out, to commit adultery, to divorce, to show defiance or a rejection of tradition. Devayani, too, has her supreme joy out of her moment of self realization. In her interview with Ranjana Harish, Deshpande asserted:

No awareness, no knowledge can be required without going through some pain. To know also means to let go of some earlier knowledge or ideas which perhaps cushioned us and made us more comfortable with the world and with ourselves (60).

The themes treated by writers grow old, lose their topicality, and cease to interest the readers. But the real works of art do not die or lose their poetic value because of
this. Deshpande's latest novel, hopefully, will outlive the ravages of time because it inspires us to "move on". As the novelist says- "sometimes a book, through a kind of identification can spark off an understanding of herself in the reader, which becomes part of the process of healing, of moving on" (Writing from the Margin and Other Essays 33).

*In the Country of Deceit* bares some basic philosophies of life which help us to cope up with our sufferings, becoming each day a little more understanding of human frailties, a little more compassionate- therein lies its magical charm. A good work of art is that which makes us aware of life and enables us to dive deep into human heart. It is here that a work of art transcends the label of being a feminist novel and that is precisely what *In the Country of Deceit* achieves in the end.

When Ashok leaves, Devayani, much like Sumi in A Matter of time, backs out without unpleasantness. While suffering from the pangs of her conscience, she had pondered on the futility of her relationship with Ashok and exclaimed- I had thought Anna and Vronsky's affair beautifully tragic" (149). Deshpande's admirable craftsmanship in portraying the inner psychology of the heroine creates a narrative of tender beauty, no less than the 'beautifully tragic affair' of Tolstoy's heroine.

Deshpande's women do not opt out of imperfect relationship but try and redress the power and gender imbalances through self knowledge. In a recent interview with B K Das (Indian Journal of English Studies 325) the author asserted that all humans should be empowered and this self knowledge which the central protagonists of these novels gather, become their ultimate source of empowerment. The author's search for the location of the self outside the contested territories of conservative discourses slowly
subverts the binaries and transcends to a dimension where the woman is matured and free to understand herself and her shadows. She uses her art to express the subterranean life of silence lying under the skin, a life that is equally eloquent and vibrant like the life lived on surface. Sumi, Manjari, and Devayani gradually undergo a process of introspection and self-analysis to realize their place and role in the family. Through them, Deshpande depicts the fact that one must understand the meaning of life and learn how to face it. Thus she gives her women a new lease of life by empowering them in their novels.

Deshpande perhaps intends to point out that women must see themselves as both reproducers of the species and producers of culture, that is, as both of the body and of the social. Instead of positioning “patriarchy” and men as the culprits who have oppressed women, it is better to accept that all are equally guilty - and equally capable of bringing about a new ethical vision. Rather than reinstate or revalue the previous hierarchies of male versus female, this new concept of feminist vision calls on us to recognize the many rivalries we have within us. The novels raise more questions than they answer and end abruptly with a sense of open-endedness making multiple layers of meaning and interpretation possible. But the vital truth is obvious - it is only through a process of self-examination and self-searching, through courage and resilience that one can change one’s situation from despair to hope - “If it is indeed true that we are bound to our destinies, that there is no point struggling against them, even then this remains - that we do not submit passively... but with dignity and strength” (A Matter of Time, 246). While espousing the cause of women, Shashi Deshpande does not indulge in male-
bashing. She depicts women as they are and seeks to bring them on par with men.

There are many hints and guesses in her novels which whisper results.
Works Cited


