CHAPTER THREE
EMERGING IDENTITY OF WOMEN

I do not wish women to have power over men; but over themselves.
Mary Wollstonecraft

By the second half of the twentieth century feminism became such an important social movement that its impact was very visible in the realm of literature. Feminist movements attained a tremendous momentum, and women all over the world intensified their efforts to deconstruct the social creations of gender in all areas of life. Women are deeply aware of their own rights, and claims, and they feel that there is no excuse for keeping women down any more, anywhere. Consequently for the first time women’s true feelings, real responses, and deeper experiences became the subject matter of different genres.

Feminist writers are engaged in the daring act of representing, and revising the all pervading patriarchal ideologies which control the thoughts, words, and deeds of people. With a clear sense of direction, the feminist writers are engaged in this process of creating, and seeing mental pictures of an ideal world for both men, and women. They are recreating, and remoulding the traditional concept of true feminity, and strikingly representing their new image of womanhood in their writings. They also remind the women readers to realize fully the evil consequences of gender discrimination, and urge them to work for an egalitarian society.

If we examine the emerging celebrity women writers in modern times, Shashi Deshpande maintains a unique position among the contemporary, up-coming Indian writers in English. Shashi Deshpande has paid much attention to the recent phenomenon of the educated earning wife, and her adjustment or maladjustment in
the family. She has dealt with the phenomenon vividly, arriving at the conclusion that women, after attaining all types of rights, are now struggling to adjust rather than to get free from the traditional world. She deals with the middle-class woman who represents the majority, and covers a wide area in the modern society. Sarla Palkar in *Indian Women Novelists* comments:

> The writer has tried to convey to the society that the need of time, in this transitional phase, is not a total revolt but a gradual change in the society for which everyone has to put some effort to bridge the gap between the old and the new generation. (169)

Shashi Deshpande’s novels furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, some offering an analysis of the key elements of patriarchal social organization. To put it in a nutshell, the works of Shashi Deshpande are significant in making society aware of women’s demands, and in providing a medium for self-expression, and thus re-writing the history of India. Shanta Krishnaswamy in *The Woman in Indian Fiction in English* observes that:

> It is not difficult to agree with the view that in Shashi Deshpande's novels, we observe a change corresponding to the change in the contemporary society. We notice that the plot in her novels begins with an unconventional marriage and later on deals with the problems of adjustment and conflicts in the minds of the female protagonists and ultimately portrays their endeavour to submit to the traditional roles.

(6)

Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time* is an exploration of women's inner life. This novel deals with women's psyche. Deshpande believes to be a feminist, and her
concerns are universal. She writes about silent, sobbing women-mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, grandaunts, and daughters - a whole lot of females. The Indian women for years have been silent sufferers, and have never been able to assert their individuality. Traditional words that relate the concept of an ideal woman are self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion, and silent suffering. A woman right from the day of evolution till today is expected to be secondary. Women are caught in the process of redefining, and rediscovering their own roles, position, and relationships within their given social life. Shashi Deshpande looks into woman's rapid changing perspectives, and their search for being within the family as a mode of strength. This point of view is used to present social reality as a woman experiences it.

Shashi Deshpande highlights the clash of tradition, and modernity, quite often seen in the generation gap, and conflict among women in her novels. Her young heroines rebel against the traditional way of life, and patriarchal values. They try to transcend the restrictive role. They rebel, reject, and seek freedom from the traditional norms, and the way of life. Along with her class identity, her writing is gender identity. She says in an interview with Vimala Rao published in *Journal of Indian Writing in English*, “As writing is born out of personal experience, the fact that I am a woman is bound to surface. Besides, only a woman could write my books. They are written from inside, as it were” (26).

*A Matter of Time* moves around the character Gopal, who walks out of his wife Sumi, and three daughters. Sumi reacts very normally. She does not shout, scream or create scenes. She is proud, and defiant. It is very clear that she does not need anybody's pity or sympathy. Sumi understands that life must go on, for the sake of her three teenaged daughters, Aru, Charu, and Seema, and she must be strong, and
steady. Gopal's desertion makes her experience the trauma of a deserted wife, and the anguish of an isolated partner. At the age of forty, she stands alone, and helpless. A woman in such a condition seems to be totally shattered, but Sumi is not emotionally broken. Like any responsible mother, she helps her children to get on with their lives as earlier. Sumi's father Shripati refuses to let his daughter Sumi, and his granddaughters to stay all by themselves. Hence Sumi along with her three daughters comes to her parental home, to the shelter of the Big House, where her parents Kalyani, and Shripati are living in a strange oppressive silence. They have not spoken to each other for thirty-five years. There is a distinct parallel between Shripati's desertion of Kalyani, and Gopal's desertion of Sumi. The novel begins with a lengthy description of the 'Big House,' the ancestral home of the protagonist Sumi:

THE HOUSE is called Vishwas, named not as one would imagine for the abstract quality of trust, but after an ancestor, the man who came down South with the Peshwa's invading army and established the family there. . . . And yet the house proclaims the meaning of its name by its very presence, its solidity. It is obvious that it was built by a man not just for himself, but for his sons and his son's sons. (3)

The House's foundational story, and its stated purpose - as one built for sons - are immediately inverted by Deshpande: when the first character is introduced we learn it is the daughter, "Kalyani, whose father built the house" (5), who is the owner. The 'Big House' is inhabited almost entirely by women. Shashi Deshpande subtly contrasts the family's written history with the lived presence in its embodiment, the house. Thus in the family history "Of the women, there is nothing. They are only an absence, still waiting to be discovered" (95).
Sumi is different from other protagonists of Shashi Deshpande, because she straightaway decides to face the facts squarely. Even before Sumi could realize the seriousness of the situation, and the burden thrust on her, everything ends leaving Sumi in a shocked silence.

Gopal tells her, he wants to talk to her, and without any preamble says what he has to. He waits for Sumi's reaction, but within moments both realize that there is nothing more to be said, and he leaves as quietly as he has entered. Gopal's abandonment creates a vacuum in Sumi's life. Marriage in the Indian society is such a sacred bond for a woman. The belief among them still exists that the husband is the overall for the wife, and sacred duty of the woman is to be an ideal wife, and ideal mother.

Prasanna Sree has rightly remarked in *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande - A Study*:

Inspite of belonging to modern educated urban society and being exposed to the liberal revolutionary ideas and changes shaping in the western world in the name of women liberation movement, the role of Indian women has been just relegated to that of wives and mothers. (142).

Sumi’s husband, Gopal, abruptly leaves the family with a determination to achieve salvation without giving any thought what will happen to his wife, and three daughters who are passing through career making phase. Sudden, and silent desertion of Gopal brings a big shock to Sumi, the protagonist, who is so shocked that she lapses into complete silence. However, she apparently tries hard to keep things normal for her daughters. Gopal’s abrupt desertion is a great cause of humiliation, and mental
trauma for her as it is not only a matter of great shame, and disgrace but also a better realization of being unwanted.

Sumi’s marriage was a failure, and had circumscribed her in an unexpected condition. No doubt that Gopal’s absence leaves her in a state of vast emptiness, yet, from the depth of her despair, she struggles hard to transform her emptiness into meaning in order to redefine her identity. She does not become a passive person, but an active agent. Sumi, like her mother, Kalyani, is a suffering oppressed, and wronged woman. Yet, Sumi does not question the man, her oppressor Gopal. Sumi must be appreciated for her hard efforts to manage the home affairs, and look after children’s welfare even without her husband, Gopal.

Shashi Deshpande makes a significant observation in her novels that marriage teaches women the art of deception, and suppression as a survival strategy. “A husband is like a sheltering tree” (137). A woman should always keep in mind the pithy, and unforgettable dictum – sarcastically yet realistically stated by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* that “to ‘catch’ a husband is an art, to ‘hold’ him is a job, and one in which great competence is called for” (486). Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists are aware of this strategy of survival adopted by them, and are not ashamed to admit it.

The novel revolves around four generations of women - Manorama who represents the first generation, is dead, but her presence is felt through her portrait: the second generation represented by Kalyani, and the third is Sumi, and the fourth, Aru. Shashi Deshpande in this novel reveals the fears, frustrations, and compulsions of these women from different generations of the same family.
Manorama, Kalyani’s mother, always wanted a son to be born, but Kalyani was born, and Kalyani becomes an invisible symbol of her failure to have a son:

To add to her insecurity, that main crutch, the one most women depended on, a son, was denied to her. All that she had was a daughter, Kalyani, who would get married and become a part of another family.

(128)

Now that, Manorama has a daughter she wants her to be beautiful, accomplished in all walks of life, and wants to celebrate a wonderful marriage of Kalyani. But, her daughter Kalyani is not up to the expectations of Manorama. Manorama has come from a poorer background than that of her husband, and after her marriage she had broken off all ties with her own family, except the youngest brother who had been left motherless:

The fact that her mother died just a year after her marriage made it easier perhaps, for her to distance herself from them. . . she rarely went home, nor were any of her brothers and sisters invited to visit her. . . the youngest, a boy left motherless at the age of one. It is possible that Manorama had a soft corner for this motherless child. Or, Perhaps this boy, born after her marriage was the one child she never cared about, and therefore brought her fewer reminders of a past she wanted to forget. (120-121)

Manorama, can never get over her fear that her husband might marry again; because, she can never give him a son. Kalyani, though not so beautiful yet is intelligent, and good in studies. Because of her mother’s insecurities she is not allowed to complete her studies. “Kalyani was not allowed to complete her schooling.
Kalyani was taken out of school, and married off by Manorama to her own brother Shripati” (129).

Kalyani’s education is stopped abruptly, and was married to Manorama's only brother Shripati. This marriage is also fretfully devised to keep the property in the family, and so she forces Shripati to marry Kalyani. Both Kalyani, and Shripati bear the burden of this decision, and remain unhappy. "Perhaps after this Manorama felt secured. The property would remain in the family now". (129).

Kalyani gives birth to a son, and that child is mentally retarded. Kalyani loses him at the railway station on her way to a visit to her parent's house. Shripati searches for the lost boy throughout the station, and the city, like a mad man for the whole day. Kalyani returns home, a deserted wife, Shripati returns home after two months, but, since then, for the last thirty five years, has never spoken to Kalyani.

After Shripati stops all communication with her, Kalyani does not react with expression of subtle emotions. She resists him by building her own nest, she has Goda (her sister), and Sumi, and Premi (her daughters), and their families around the house. It is actually Shripati who is confined to an accursed loneliness, and not Kalyani. This does not mean that Kalyani does not suffer. She is a suffering self, and she alone knows the hurt of desertion, and experiences, the anguish of rejection. By, and large, she maintains a stoic silence, and it becomes a powerful tool of resistance when it is practiced with lack of participation in the social power relations.

Kalyani's resistance is so powerful that Kalyani appears to Aru not as a helpless victim, but as a strong woman who has come out of all that victimization intact. When silence deliberately acts as a barrier to the penetration of the soul,
it works as an operation of power rather than powerlessness. Silence, when it
withholds communication, becomes a potent tool of resistance.

Though, these three women Kalyani, Sumi, and Aru are the direct victims of
patriarchal dominance, Aru tries to reposition herself through constant protest. Sumi,
after Gopal walks over her, regains identity, and she as an individual is recognized.
Kalyani feels empowered when Shripati in his will, addresses her, not as his wife but
as Vithal Rao, and Manorama’s daughter. Not even for a second, she does feel the
pain of having been robbed of her marital status.

The house is now Kalyani’s. They have found Shripati’s will which
left it to ‘Kalyani, daughter of Vithalrao and Manoramabai’, Goda had
looked anxiously at Kalyani when Anil read the will, but for Kalyani,
clearly, there was no sting in the words that took away her marital
status. On the contrary, it is as if the words have given her something
more than the house, restored something she had lost; they seem, in
fact, to have strengthened her. (245)

Ultimately Kalyani finds her identity, and her individuality. Looking at the life
of Sumi, we see that, though deserted, does not contemplate a divorce, for a moment;
divorce frees a woman legally, but it cannot wipe out all the memories attached to a
marriage. Above all this, the social stigma associated with divorce in Indian society,
ever allows a woman to stay, and lead a respectful normal life. A woman has to
struggle, and suffer at all levels - economical, emotional, and psychological.

Luckily for Sumi, she has the full support, and sympathy of her parents, sister,
cousins, and others. This support of her family members helps her to withstand the
shock, pain, humiliation, and the trauma of desertion.
Sumi takes Gopal's desertion as a matter of fact, and undergoes her own type of suffering:

It takes time to get used to sharing your life with another person, now I have got used to being alone. Of course, Sumi had not said any of this to her mother. She has to smile at the thought of it. And the truth is that it is not loneliness that is her enemy right now, it is a sense of alienation. (23).

Sumi knows why Gopal left her, and his daughters. He left them because he had the fear of commitment, and family ties, and responsibilities. Sumi knows that Gopal believes that "Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes - a lifetime of commitment - is not possible for all of us" (69).

Before their marriage, Gopal had proposed that, if, by chance either of the two wanted to be free, he or she would be left to go. There shall be no ties to tie them together. Reminding Gopal about this, Sumi tells him:

Do you remember, Gopal – I am sure you do . . . You said that at any time if either of us wanted to be free, the other would let go. We are not going to be tied together, you said. No handcuffs, you said. And I agreed. I was only eighteen then and you were twenty-six... But it meant nothing to me then. How can you think of separating of wanting to be apart, when you are eighteen in love? I thought we would always be together. (221)

So with all the trauma of being a deserted wife, Sumi is more interested in getting on with her life, and finding a meaningful existence.
Sumi has no hope or wallow in self-pity. She did not hinder Gopal's way of life, for she understands to find her own path of life. Staying with her three daughters in her parent's house, she feels like a 'parasite', and determines to get a job. She understands, that being a daughter is a disadvantage. No doubt, Gopal's desertion upsets everyone in the family, especially to his wife, Sumi, but his desertion springs out Sumi's hidden talents, and her real hidden strength.

As a wife, and a mother, Sumi had led a contented life, and had willingly accepted the responsibilities of a wife, and a mother. Though disappointed, and frustrated, she learns to cope up with disgrace, and humiliation of Gopal's desertion in an admirable way. All the family members curse, and cry, and agonise over Gopal's desertion. The only person who is cool, and silent is Sumi. Though she builds around her a death like silence, which conveys her pain more effectively, she recognizes the need for essential loneliness of all human beings, and so sets him free. Shashi Deshpande says in an interview with Romita Choudhury published as *An Interview with Shashi Deshpande*:

Sumi's acceptance is not passive. She blocks out the unpleasantness. She has a good opinion of herself; she is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity; she would do anything for pride. She distances even her husband. The point is, they are both unusual people. People are puzzled by the abandoned wife not feeling bad.

(129)

Sumi never likes to unlock her heart, and lay bare her emotions to Gopal. Her pride prevents her from requesting him to come back to her. She controls all her feelings, and has a composed expression to the outside world.
Sumi feels that, it is important for women, like her, to retain her feelings as she says:

> It has been important for Sumi to contain her feelings about Gopal’s desertion, not to let them spill over. . . The picture she presents to the world is one of grace and courage, to be admired rather than pitied. Unchanged, except for a feeling - which only those who know her well are aware of - of something missing in her. (172)

Sumi picks up her heart, and prepares for the future - she says, "Retracing my steps, picking things, thinking . . . is this it? But she turned resolutely away from even her immediate past, she is preparing herself for the future . . . " (122). Sumi is in search of a permanent job, and with great determinations learns to ride a two wheeler.

The moment Sumi learns to balance her drive, she is thrilled at her success. She decides to move out of her parents home, to lead an independent life along with her daughters. She makes serious search for a house. But at last she is made to give up the idea, considering the impracticabilities associated with moving out of the Big House, which is spacious enough to accommodate her family.

Sumi, after Gopal's walk out, revives her creativity. She writes a play "The Gardener's Son" for the school function. She rejoices in its success, and remarks: "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). She is encouraged by this success, and decides to rewrite the story of Surpanakha in the Ramayana, from a different perspective.
Sumi says:

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)

These thoughts of Sumi, reflects her modern progressive outlook. She has a sound understanding that man-woman relationship should be sound, equal, and non-partisan. She stands for responsibility, motherly care, love, and concern. Every moment she is concerned, and worried about her grown-up daughters. She is worried about their future, and is aware of her responsibility as a mother-cum-single parent to her daughters. She becomes quite frantic when Aru meets with an accident, cries for help, despite the profuse bleeding from her own injuries. She is so much worried about Aru that she neither leaves her daughter alone nor she takes rest. She desires that her daughter's life must become easy, and comfortable. Sumi, was preparing for a fuller life, it is really an irony of fate that her life cut off in the prime. It is pity that Sumi dies when she was taking up a job to support herself, and her daughters. Had she lived, she would have become an economically independent woman with modern, and matured outlook towards life, and at the same time, a loving, and responsible mother.

Perhaps through Aru, the novelist looks hopefully at the younger generation to penetrate silence, make women realize their situation, and speak up for themselves. Inheriting her mother's pride, and dignity, courage, and confidence.
Aru assures her father:

Yes papa, you go. We'll be all right, we'll be quite all right, don't worry about us . . . 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 or cravenly, but with dignity and strength. Surely, this, to some extent, frees us from our bonds? (246)

The novel comes to a full circle with Aru, during Gopal's desertion, and we find Aru in a state of confusion, and defiance. She still wants to be a child to that state of happy, carefree existence they had enjoyed in the family. Now, with her grandmother, initially she resents Kalyani's oppressive love, and the way she looked at her, and her sisters. But when she comes to know Kalyani from close contacts, her attitude changes into a special relationship. It is Aru, who articulates the feminist voice in the novel, and it is she who questions the injustices against women. Aru joins a computer class, and becomes a part of a women's activist group. When the death news of her mother Sumi, and her grandfather Shripati comes, she rushes to Kalyani, and kneeling her huddled body says: "Amma, I'm here, I'm your daughter, Amma, I'm your son, and I'm here with you" (235).

Through education, determination, and an inner strength, Sumi's daughters find their voices, and establish their identities - Aru as a lawyer, and Charu in the medical line. The girls are already pursued by two very capable young men Rohit, and Hrishi. The novel ends on a note of hope because of Aru, and Kalyani, and the partnership they have forged, and the strength with which they face suffering. The last image on which the novelist closes her story is not of Sumi's death but of Aru,
and Kalyani standing together at the door with the smile of encouragement, which they have for Gopal.

The novel, *A Matter of Time*, moves beyond feminist concerns, and analyzes that 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. The most important message conveyed in the novel comes through Gopal's realization in the end.

The male domination in woman's life is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society, and the consequent relegation of woman to a secondary position seemed to have prompted Indian women writers to take up the cause of women. They stressed the need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position, and see their own need for self-fulfilment as more important than the duty of sacrificing themselves for their husbands, and children. The new woman voices a note of resentment as she feels stifled under the oppressive restrictions, and she has her own changed notions of life. It is true that, in the words of Promilla Kapur in *Love, Marriage, Sex and Woman in India*:

> Woman's education, her rights of citizenship and other legal rights and above all her gainful employment and economic independence has tremendously influenced her outlook and conjugal relationship and attitude towards marriage. (194)

Through this novel Shashi Deshpande not only gives her female protagonist a readymade solution for her problems but also develops a faith in hope so that they can change their circumstances through a route of self-searching, and self-examination, through valour, and resilience. Finally the protagonist emerges out with a new
identity to face the future. “It is the steady watchful look on their faces, the smile of encouragement they have . . . ” (246).

Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytical Theory, and its tool ‘defense mechanism’ is used to understand the protagonist Sumi. Neo Freudian, Sudhir Kakar described the development of this theory from the perspective of employment of the defense mechanisms to allow an individual to fit together with the environment.

It is possible to trace out this perception in Sumi. She uses ‘denial’ as her defense mechanism to overcome her stressful situation. ‘Denial’ is refusing to acknowledge anxiety provoking stimuli. Sumi pretends that a threatening situation does not exist because the situation is too distressing to cope with. Sumi does not even wish to talk about her husband Gopal's act of desertion with anyone. Her act of denial is very clear when she says:

I’ve never been able to cry easily . . . what do I say . . . That my husband has left me and I don't know why and maybe he doesn't know, either? And that I'm angry and humiliated and confused.? Let that be, we won't go into it now. (107)

Thus the defense mechanism, ‘denial’ helps Sumi to keep inappropriate or unwanted thoughts, and impulses from entering the conscious mind. It is also evident that the protagonist unconsciously makes use of the defense mechanism to defend herself from painful feelings.

Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine highlights the inner most recesses of a woman's heart that are brought to limelight through the perspectives of the protagonist, Urmila. She is a clever, educated woman working as a lecturer in a
college. She marries Kishore against the wishes of her parents. Urmila, is drawn as an integrated, wholesome woman who longs to bring about a radical change in the concept of feminism. This novel is the narration of Urmila, who was grieving over the death of her baby daughter, and surrounded by the loving care of her mother Inni, and her childhood friend, and sister-in-law, Vanna. Through her grief, Urmila is drawn into the lives of three very different women Mira, Kalpana, and Shakutai. As the stories of these women unfold, so does a tale of quiet courage, and strength. The first woman Urmila is drawn to her long-dead mother-in-law, Mira who exists only in the notebooks she has left behind, discovered by chance in a dusty storage trunk.

The title *The Binding Vine* is symbolic in the novel of the redemptive power of love. The vine is a creeper, a trailing plant which can have rope-like qualities of binding. But it is not a rope that spells bondage, rather it liberates. This is told in the course of the novel in one of the stands of its narrative Mira, a poet, in whose case domination takes the form of ‘rape in marriage’.

As Mira writes:

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Desire, says the Buddha, is the cause of grief;
but how escape this cord
this binding vine of love? Fear lies coiled within
this womb-piercing joy. (136-137)
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The binding vine needs the support of a strong stem or branch to survive; its identity is often defined by the tree around which it twines itself. This is also the conditioning of the women of Mira’s generation, who are taught from childhood that the only goal of life is to serve a husband, and live in his shadow. The poet Mira admires passionately, and wants to emulate. But Venu, a doyen of the Indian literary
scene - kills her poetic ambition in one stroke with an insensitive generalization, “Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men” (127).

Mira still strives but finally her poems find no outlet except being stored away in a dark box in the attic. The girl child can never even be an inherent part of her parents’ family because she has to leave sooner rather than later, the novel ironically puts forward. The narrator concludes this by observing the family photo of Mira with her parents, and two brothers before her marriage. She is seen standing a little apart, reluctant to form a close-knit family unit. She is passionate about her individuality which her education fosters but when she is married to a man who is desperate to possess her, she finds that she cannot love him, and twine herself around him like a ‘vine’. Interestingly, at one point Urmila’s brother Amrut asks her, “Do women want to be dominated?” (136).

Much later Urmila tries to formulate an answer to this: “No, Amrut, no human being wants to be dominated. The most important need is to love . . . . But love makes you vulnerable” (137). The vine is delicate, and therefore ‘vulnerable’. The binding element is lacking in Mira, and her husband’s relationship, and therefore a part of her finds emotional outlet through her writing – poems, and a diary - the former generously splattered with images of nature to indicate her innermost thoughts which no human relationship can give an outlet to:

The fragrance of the night queen

crosses the hedge of thorns

touches the pinnacle of the shine

and is no longer mine. (7)
and again:

The wheel of seasons turns,
the monsoon river flows turbid and red,
the lightning flashes its splendor,
the rainbow arcs in celebration,
all things are as they were.
Only I, unmoving, becalmed,
have changed. (102)

It is finally at the time of expecting her child, Kishore, the husband of Urmila the novel’s narrator that she uses the symbol of her love as a ‘binding vine’ but unfortunately this can never be concretized because she dies at childbirth. When Mira's creative potential is ceased, and curtailed by patriarchal world, Urmila wonders:

It was her writing that kept her going and that kept her alive. When and where did she write? Certainly she could never have had, in that house, a room of her own. Except at night. Yes, I imagine that it was there she wrote, late at night, after the man has gone to bed. I can see her stealthily, soundlessly getting out of bed, sitting down on floor by the window perhaps, forgetting everything while she wrote. (127)

Urmila realises that "What happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too" (63). There has been no room for Mira’s feelings, and as a consequence her encounter with her husband becomes rape within the institution of marriage. Through her (Mira's) poem, Mira becomes a symbol of female oppression. The words of Adrienne Rich quoted in Indian Women Novelists are relevant here: "it is not rape of the body alone but, rape of the mind as well" (61). Mira's journals, and poetry reveal the pain of a
vibrant young woman trapped in an unhappy arranged marriage, and of a gifted writer whose work, because she is a woman, must remain covered in secrecy, and silence. Towards the end of the novel Urmila translates, and publishes her mother-in-law Mira’s poems posthumously.

Then there is Kalpana, the survivor of a brutal rape, and a young woman who has also been silenced. As she hovers between life, and death in a hospital-ward, Kalpana is watched over by her impoverished mother, Shakutai, with whom Urmila forms an unlikely bond of mutual comfort. The lives of three women who are haunted by fears, secrets, and deep grief are bound together by strands of life, and hope - a binding vine of love, concern, and connection that spreads across chasms of time, social class, and even death.

Deshpande's pulsating urge to abolish sex burdens, and sex privileges is cited with the savage incident of rape forced on the innocent, young girl, Kalpana. Rape is still a menace for women, an act of aggression of male. Kalpana is brutally raped, physically tortured, and mentally paralysed. Shakutai, Kalpana's mother bitterly says, "I kept telling her, men are like animals" (147). Shakutai's outburst brings to light the partisan attitude prevalent in the patriarchal society. If a girl is raped, for no fault of hers, she alone is censured, and victimized. The oppressor (person who commits rape) is not blamed, but the oppressed (raped victim) is not accepted.

The disgrace is not the girl's, the disgrace is the criminal's. That is not how it is. It is really the dilemma which Urmila, the narrator, faces because, if she makes it public, it is possible the family is going to be affected, and if she does not, you know it is like saying the woman is the one who is in disgrace, who has done wrong. Moreover, even the public put the blame only on the woman. Shakutai states, "There
are always people waiting to throw stones at us, our own people first of all" (148). Being a working-class woman, Shakutai knows fully well that the norms are built on the supreme society. Shakutai voices the problems confronted by women as the marginalized in an androcentric world.

The social condition forces Shakuntala to hide such heinous crime just to protect the prestige of her family. Rejecting the advice to report to the matter to the police she cries out, “No, no, no. Tell him, Tai, it is not true, don’t tell any one I’ll never be able to hold my head again, who will marry the girl, we are decent people” (58). Even the police officer convinces, and wants to record the assault as an accident. The police officer says:

Why make it a case of rape? He asked. She's going to die anyway, so what difference does it make whether, on paper, she dies the victim of an accident or a rape? Forget that and think of the girl and her family. Do you think it'll do them any good to have it known the girl was raped? She's unmarried, people are bound to talk, her name would be smeared. (88)

Shakuntala’s husband is a drunkard, and reckless who leaves his wife, and children for another woman. She is to bear the responsibility of the family, and protect it. She has another daughter, too. If the case of Kalpana’s rape becomes public, the family would be blamed, and marriage of her second daughter would be a big trouble. So she does not want to go to the police. She says:

If a girl’s honour is lost, what is life? The girl does not have to do anything wrong. People will always point out a finger at her Doctor…. Even if it is true, keep it to yourself, don’t tell anyone know of it. I have another daughter, what will happen to her . . . ? (59)
The question, which Sakuntala raises here, is of million dollars. This is the question that agitates the mind of every parent who has daughters. Shakuntala prefers to hide such inhuman, and heinous crime because of social bounds, and compulsion. She has no dare to take action against the culprit at the cost of her family’s prestige. But Urmila rebels saying, “She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn't do anything wrong. Why can't you see that? Are you blind? It is not her fault, no, not her fault at all” (147).

Urmila is shocked to find that everyone wants to hush up a rape case, and in the process the rapist is able to get away scot-free. Urmila decides to bring the matter to the public. Through Urmila, Deshpande reveals that women should not keep their sufferings hushed or surrender totally to it; they should expose their sufferings to the public.

_The Binding Vine_ gives a frontal attack on the patriarchal hegemony in our society. Memories from the past stray to Urmila's mind, and a journey to the past helps Urmila uncover mysteries about herself. One theme that was stressed in this novel is rape - both as a random violent act, and within marriage.

Urmila considers arranged marriages as absolutely cold-blooded affairs because in such marriages the girl's feelings are ignored. The marriage of Akka, Inni, and Vanna are examples of this unfairness deep-rooted in Indian society towards women. Urmila, is shocked by her father's attitude towards her mother. Urmila learns from her mother that her father could not trust his wife to look after her daughter, Urmila, properly. He had apprehensions about leaving the female child to the care of a male servant.
Urmila's mother, Inni, pours out all the anguish of a helpless woman, who has nothing to do before the stern dictates of her husband. She says:

He didn't say anything to me, he just took you away . . . I begged him, Urmila, I cried, I promised him I'd never leave you alone, but he wouldn't listen. Nothing could make him change his mind. You know your Papa . . . I didn't want you to be sent away to Renidurg, believe me Urmila, I didn't want that I wanted you with us, I never got used to the idea of your being in Renidurg, I wanted you with me . . . (199-200)

According to Urmila, the scars of an old cruelty make only hopeless man-woman relationship. Commenting on the relationship, Urmila bitterly states, "Because the scars of an old cruelty have shown me how hopeless, how utterly hopeless it is? Because I've seen how bottomless the chasm is, how impossible to bridge? I can’t say these things . . ." (200-201).

While Urmila is a modern woman, Vanaa is a traditional, educated, social worker by profession. Vanaa is submissive, and obedient to her husband. Urmila feels irritated at Vanaa's submissiveness before her husband:

‘You let him get away with you too much,’ I tell her.

‘What do you want me to do?’

‘Assert yourself. You don't have to crawl before him, do you?

‘I don’t crawl, I do what I want’

‘No, you don’t. You’re scared of him, yes, you are, I’ve seen you’. (80)

Urmila thinks, "it is women who take parenthood seriously; men don't, not to the same extent anyway" (76). A question Urmila often asks herself is why she feels the need to forget her dead daughter. Women are tied to their children, and the
binding vine, as written by Mira, signifies the umbilical cord to which mother, and child are physically connected. The death of her daughter makes Urmila emotionally numb in the beginning. Later she learns that pains can be mended.

The life of Shakutai also provides the callous, and irresponsible attitude of man. Shakutai's husband leaves her parents, and goes to Bombay in search of livelihood. Even after six months, her husband fails to come home. Shakutai herself goes to Bombay to join him but there she finds that he does not have a fixed job, and a regular income, and as a result the burden of the family falls on her shoulder. In spite of her doing all kinds of work to support her family, her husband abandons her for another woman. So Shakutai, regrets for her foolish, an irresistible desire to have her mangalasutra in gold. She tells Urmila about her foolish desire:

Then one day I thought the man himself is so worthless, why should I bother to have to this thing made in precious gold? That's been the greatest misfortune of my life . . . marrying that man. (110)

While struggling all alone to find a good life for her children, Shakutai always finds herself asking what would happen if something in the family goes wrong. During her conversation with Urmila, Shakutai expresses her frustration: "What you can expect, they say, of a girl whose mother has left her husband? Imagine! He left me for another woman, left me with these children to bring up" (147). Urmila understands from the lives of Shakutai, and Sulu that the absence of insecurity in marriage haunts them. Shakutai tells Urmila about Sulu:

After marriage she changed. She was frightened. What if he doesn't like this, what if he wants that, what if he is angry with me, what if he throws me out? . . . Nobody should live like that, Urmila, so full of fears. What kind of life is it? (195)
Urmila, differs from these subordinate women. Shanthi Sivaram, in *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, says: "Urmila is different . . . wants to assert herself, and not crawl before man" (136). At the same time, Urmila's own marriage to a man of her choice whom she has known from childhood is far from satisfactory. Her friendship with Bhasker provides ample opportunity to satisfy her urge, for Bhasker has declared his love for her.

Though Urmila comes close to respond to Bhasker, she holds back, and thinks: “And what about Bhaskar then? Oh, I don’t know. It's so much easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue, and chasity, and being a good wife. I see the point of it now." (166). Urmila tries to correct the arrogant upper handedness of men who long to keep women under their beck, and call. Urmila tells her brother:

... no human wants to be dominated. The most important need is to love. From the moment of our births, we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love do we find this anchor. (137)

Commenting on Urmila's relationship with her husband, Viswanatha, in *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, says:

Urmila, the sailor's wife and college teacher, is more self-reliant and has an identity different from that of her husband; she is self-respecting and does not want to live on Kishore's money. She is however, a sensitive vine and need Kishore as an Oak to entwine herself around. (152)

Urmila challenges the oppressed, suppressed, marginalized women's victimization, and seeks a new balance of power between the sexes. Thus we see that
the main thread of the novel is woven around the life of the protagonist Urmila, and her search for freedom, freedom from male chauvinism, gender injustice, sexual harassment so as to acquire a confident voice to declare what it is to be a woman in hostile, masculine, power-ridden society. The protagonist decidedly throw away all the forced man-made constraints of morality to the winds; thus she triggers transformation of woman's self, and finally the protagonist emerges into new, awakened, and empowered status.

*The Binding Vine* attempts to explore the Indian women writers' overwhelming awakening to assert that no longer should women suffer from having to live in a male-designed environment. Deshpande emphasizes through her characters that the outlook of women changed considerably during the last three decades, and with this sociological change they assert that their dice are not loaded. In fact, the protagonists expose the patriarchal tyranny, and express their outspoken resentment of the injustice, and oppression perpetuated on them with the constraints of marital disharmony, callousness of male dictated enclosures, and undue sexual exploitation. Shakutai's decision towards the close of the novel, to reveal the truth about her daughter's rape gives her a new sense of liberation. On Kalpana’s behalf Urmila brings out the culprit. *The Binding Vine* beautifully brings about the feelings, which are left unspoken in the Indian women, and shows the pursuit of love in their journey of life. It's a triumphant story of victory, and defeat, when women find their voices.

Simone de Beauvoir's statement in *The Second Sex* that "one is not born a woman, one becomes one" (229), has a special relevance to India where conventions, religious, and social taboos dictate, and inhibit woman's individuality. Feminity as a cultural construct inscribes the society's views about women. The behavioural patterns
for the Indian women are predetermined by the families into which one is born, and the values, and traditions of a culture that upholds archetypal images of woman.

With Freudian Psycho Analysis the protagonist Urmila is analysed to study her inner struggles. The tool chosen for this study is defense mechanism. The defense mechanism ‘acting out’ is applied to study better the thought process of the protagonist. ‘Acting out’ is performing an extreme behaviour in order to express thoughts or feelings, the person feels incapable of expressing.

Urmila, raged at the indignity heaped on Kalpana, wants to report this matter to the officials, but Shakutai begs Urmila not to do that. Everyone wants to suppress the rape case. Though Urmila is filled with all sympathies for Kalpana, she is unable to do anything. When the hospital authorities wanted to shift Kalpana to a suburban hospital, Urmila uses the defense mechanism ‘acting out’. She rages in protest, and decides to take the matter to the press, so that Kalpana’s case may get the required justice. Despite all the opposition, Urmila presents Kalpana’s case in the press. She pursues the case, and sees that finally it is reopened. As a result, the police are asked to present their new investigations. Very soon the issue gains public attention, and the government orders a deep investigation. The women in the assembly, and all local activists stand in unity. Shakutai then seems to be slowly realizing the enormity of the situation. She says, “the whole world is my friend” (179). Later, the police investigation brings the rapist into light. Thus it is very evident that the protagonist applies the defense mechanism ‘acting out’ to defend her thoughts, and actions.

The following section explores how Shashi Deshpande’s protagonist in the novel *Small Remedies* emerges with a new identity. Madhu, the protagonist in the novel, frees herself from the stultifying traditional constraints to cherish a
spontaneous surge towards life. *Small Remedies* shows women's life where an eternal harmony can be attained only when they are transcendental through rational self-analysis, and sympathy. All through the novel Shashi Deshpande advocates a life by actively participating in it, and not by running away from it. This concept of empowerment is clearly evident in the portrayal of Madhu, the narrator, and the protagonist of the novel *Small Remedies*.

The novel *Small Remedies* starts with the bereaved mother Madhu trying to make her life meaningful by accepting to write the biography of Savitribai, a great singer. The offer was made by Chandru, her husband's friend, and the son of the doctor who used to treat Savitribai:

Chandru is determined I will do this thing. He has planned it, though he is trying to make me think he hasn't, that things happened by chance as he says they have. Impatience is showing on his face, he wants to help, he is doing a favour and damn it, I can't turn it down. (16-17)

An advantage that Madhu has over other biographers is that Madhu happened to be the neighbour of Savitribai as a child, and had been a friend of her daughter Munni. After accepting the offer, Madhu comes to Hari, and Lata's house which happens to be near Savitribai's house.

Feminist writers question the strict division between man’s world, and women’s place. Taking care of children, and family members, preparing food, washing clothes, and cleaning the house, nursing old, and sick family members, supervising the studies of children, etc., are typically considered to be women’s work, and in fact such services are unpaid, and unrecognized as ‘labour’.
Shashi Deshpande is angry about the rigid sex-role differentiation existing in Indian society. She expresses this anger by subverting the patriarchal role assignment, she makes her women push their way into male dominated areas. Shashi Deshpande moves against the age-old belief that the kitchen work is the primary duty, and responsibility of women irrespective of whether they are employed or not, young or old. She challenges this system, and says that men also have taste, and talents for cooking, and they can also acquire the skills of household work perhaps better than women.

In *Small Remedies* Deshpande brings in an instance to prove this premise. One day when Lata goes to her father’s shop to check the accounts, Hari takes her place in the kitchen, and takes charge of the kitchen work: “watch him work, notice the efficiency with which he washes, and dries, which tells me he’s used to working in the kitchen, that he is comfortable with these chores” (43). According to Usha Bande in *Women in Indian Short Stories*:

The definition of ‘New Woman’ is aware of herself as an individual, she is free from her traditional, social and moral constrictions and is able to live with a heightened sense of dignity, and individuality. The ‘New Woman’, then, is the product of a new economic order in which woman casts aside her ‘invisibility’, comes out of the metaphorical purdha and avails of the opportunities provided by education, enfranchisement and employment. She, with her male counterpart, struggles for achievements in the professionals and economic spheres and deconstructs the image of a submissive, repressed and self-effacing being. (14)
In Madhu’s stay at Hari’s house Madhu comes to know that Hari is related to Savitribai. While speaking about the reason for her arrival, she says:

I have come here to forget, to get away from memories, to distance myself from Som, the one person who can connect me to those terrible days, to the horror of our son's death. Here I'm safe. With Hari and Lata, I'm Madhu - - - Nowhere am I Aditya-Chi-Ai, Aditya's mother, the identity. I've drowned myself in for nearly eighteen years. (153)

The protagonist Madhu keeps remembering her beloved son Adit, who was killed in a bomb blast, and comes to the conclusion "it doesn't help, nothing does. It's always a losing battle. Such small remedies these to counter the terrible disease of being human, of being mortal, and vulnerable" (81). After several sessions with Savitribai, who is now very old, and does not seem to recognize her as her daughter's friend, she comes to believe:

As far as she is concerned, the story of her life does not need anyone else. She sees herself as someone unique; she refuses to be at even in the context of other singers. The spotlight has to be on her and her alone; she is still, I sometimes think, inhabiting that I-ME-MYSELF world of a child. (167)

Savitribai wants to be projected as the last of the musicians of the classical style, the doyen of all Hindustani vocalists. She does not talk about her daughter, nor the Muslim Tabla player Ghulam Saab who stayed with her when she was Madhu's neighbour. One day, she shows her album, and Madhu feels that: “. . . in showing me her album, she is presenting me with her own illusion of her life. A life of success, and achievement. Nothing lacking; no unreconciled child, no dead daughter (78)".
As days pass, Madhu, the biographer, starts getting all kinds of doubts, and misgivings about Savitribai's (Bai) narration of her life:

In this story, I see the artist, the woman in search of her genius of her destiny. But the artist was born of the woman. First there was the woman and then the artist. Is it possible to cut the umbilical cord, to sever the connection between the two? . . . To me Bai was Munni’s mother nevertheless, her identity was, for me, connected to Munni.

(133)

Savitribai gives credit to her mother, and her father-in-law for introducing her to the world of music, and for encouraging her to enjoy music. Madhu remembers how in Neemgaon, when she was a child, and Savitribai's neighbour, Bai was referred to irreverently as "the singer woman", and her father, a doctor enjoyed a respectable position. Savitribai realizes that men, and women are judged differently:

. . . my father was accepted and his peculiarities and foibles were overlooked, because he was a doctor, and a very trusted and popular doctor at that. And, of course, being a man, he could get away with much. He could live the way he wanted, without open censure or disapproval. It was not so with Munni's mother. (138-139)

By not mentioning Munni at all, Bai was not only being unfair to Munni but also to the biographer Madhu. Madhu had met Munni on a bus, but Munni had refused to acknowledge response to the name Munni. Instead, she had with pride declared that she was Shailaja Joshi. In this connection, Sunita Reddy's comment in *A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, is worth noting: “Shashi Deshpande while writing of people like Savitribai, and Leela, people who dare to be
different, has created characters like Munni who desperately seek the approval of society” (128).

Later on Madhu happens to read Munni’s death notice in the paper. She thinks:

Whatever it was between them, mother and daughter, Munni’s death should have changed things. Death disarms you, you can't fight anymore, you have to lay down your arms. This has not happened with Bai. Her hostility continues. (169)

Savitribai’s silence regarding Munni vexes Madhu, and she wonders “... what kind of woman are you, denying your own child? Only the lowest, the meanest kind of creature could do such a thing” (78).

Shashi Deshpande's novel shows how carefully she expresses the frustration, and disappointments of women who experience in the social, and cultural oppression in the male dominated society. One thing that emerges clearly is that Madhu's biography of Savitribai will have no life that Bai expects nor Maya wants:

It’s becoming increasingly clear to me that the book I’m going to write will have no relation to the hagiography Bai expects, or to the book Yogi and Maya want. If I don't know as yet what kind of a book it will be, I know this: Munni will have a place in it. (167-168)

In addition to Savitribai’s life, Madhu's narrative glorifies another remarkable woman's life who happens to be her aunt Leela. In fact, Hari believes that Madhu should have contemplated on the idea that a separate biography of Leela can be
written. But Madhu feels that she is very close to Leela, and a little distancing is essential for the writing of a biography. She also feels:

His Leela is the public figure, my Leela is the woman who made me a part of her life after my father's death and brought me out of the terrifying emptiness I faced when he died. It was because of Leela I never felt an orphan. Both her families took me in. (98)

Nevertheless the strengths, and achievements of Leela are scattered in the reminiscences of Madhu. Leela, who is quite independent by nature, on the death of her first husband, Vasanth, takes up a job, and supports her in-laws. She lives in the crowded chawls, and works for the T. B. victims. There she meets Joe, a doctor who is a widower with two children, and dedicated to T. B. patients. They fall in love, and get married. The salient thing is that both were poles apart, and yet they established a wonderful relationship. After Joe's death also, Leela continues to be devoted to social service. About Leela, it is rightly said by Reddy, in the work *A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, "Leela was a person who disapproved of a life that did not look beyond one's own self" (129).

Leela is projected as a broadminded person as well as a woman of independent views, and convictions. It was Leela who had not only accepted Madhu's parents' marriage but had also invited them to stay with her. After the death of Madhu's father, the mother having died much earlier, it is again Leela who provides all help to Madhu. Though she was a devoted worker, she was not given due acknowledgment by her party. Ultimately, she resigns from the party, as she cannot support their actions.
Being a motherless child, brought up lovingly by her father along with a helper by name Babu, Madhu has not known or felt the absence of the mother:

Motherless child that I am, motherhood is an unknown world to me. The mothers I see in my childhood are drab creatures, forever working, forever scolding their children, certainly they're not the women to arouse a sense of deprivation in me. (182)

But when her own child is born, she leaves no stone unturned to bring him up with love, extreme care, and with all efforts to ward off evil befalling him. The birth of her son Aditya makes Madhu to identify herself to find the roots in this world. According to her, "A child's birth is a rebirth for a woman, it's like becoming part of the world once again" (88). Motherhood brings home to her the new sense of worth, and totally she changes according to its demands.

Madhu 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).

Madhu gets so passionate with Adit, her son's well-being, and happiness that her world centers around him only. “But as far as I 'm concerned, there's only Adit, and me in this new world I 've entered. The others are mere shadows. Som is part of our world, but he's on the periphery” (146).

As Adit grows older, he starts relishing privacy, and does not want to be smothered with love, much to the consternation of Madhu. Still "the one contingency I never think of is that Som, and I will outlive Adit. That Adit will die before us is the
one eventuality I'm totally unprepared for" (153). Unfortunately, Adit’s death in a
bomb blast leaves Madhu totally shattered, and almost turns her into a psychic case.
Slowly, she regains composure, and yet “. . . in the months since Adit's death, my
mind has been ceaselessly exercising on the treadmill of this one thought: how does
one live with the knowledge of a child's death?” (155). So it is very shocking to
Madhu to find Savitribai neither mentioning her daughter nor missing her. Munni is
also supposed to have died in the same bomb blast which had killed Adit.

After the collection of material on Savitribai is completed, Bai suffers a
stroke, and is admitted in a hospital. Bai is not in her senses, and according to Madhu
"Anything is possible in that mind where words finally have lost their place, and
images, formless images are left" (307). One event with which Madhu associates
before leaving the place is the launching of Hasina, the grand-daughter of Ghulam
Sahib for a number of years. As a child, and neighbour of Savitribai, Madhu had seen,
and known Ghulam Sahib well. Hasina offers Madhu "her truths about her
grandfather, but she calls it "the truth". She wants me to accept as the truth" (278), to
be included in Savitribai's autobiography. Regarding the biography, Madhu comes to
the conclusion "I have to discover my own truth which will encompass all the
different bits of knowledge offered to me, which will make some sense of them"
(278).

Madhu is apprehensive of going back to her house as she has lost the trust of
her husband Som. The beautiful relationship that she, and Som have shared collapses
the day Madhu after a nightmare confesses of having been raped by her father's friend
at the age of fifteen. Years later, she comes to know that he was her step uncle, and
that he had committed suicide some years ago. Som is shocked beyond words that she
had kept such an important piece of information a secret from him, whereas he had
been frank about everything. Interestingly, Som, before marrying Madhu, had been involved deeply with Neelam, but she had discarded him. Som's agony is such that he feels he cannot trust her any more. Madhu had been devastated with this knowledge. “I know he can't. Trust has gone. Without trust, there can be no truth, without it our relationship has no chance of survival. Nothing can survive without trust” (259).

Madhu had been in this predicament when she got the offer of writing the biography of Savitribai. In addition to the major events covered in the lifespan of three important characters, the characters who are not given equal importance are drawn from different communities, and are lifelike. For the long seventeen years Madhu feels that she had no identity, no desire for self. But when she talks about the loss, it lifts the burden, and brings the realization of the depression 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 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:

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).
The memory of her son Adit, and Som gives her hope to live, and face life. At the end of the novel, Madhu attains self-realization, and hopes to accomplish her dream to recreate Adit in her memory, and unburden her soul. Thus the novel ends on the note of affirmation as she feels: “How could I have ever longer 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). The title *Small Remedies* occurs at two places in the novel. One is: “It doesn't help, nothing does. It's always a losing battle. Such small remedies, these, to counter the terrible disease of being human, of being mortal, and vulnerable” (8). And the other is: “It's a friend of mine who gives me, as a gift on Adit's birth, a book called *Small Remedies*. Full of tips, as it claims, about dealing with a baby's minor problems” (89-90).

The only thing common that can be found between this novel, and the earlier novels of Shashi Deshpande is the portrayal of narrator as an educated middle class woman, and facing a turmoil in her marriage. Otherwise *Small Remedies* is not only an improvement over her earlier novels; it has strong, independent women in different fields contributing something to society. It is however, important to note that each of her novels ends on a note of willpower by its protagonist who resolves to take the reins of her life into her hands.

A close reading of the novels of Shashi Deshpande clearly indicates their preoccupation with the different problems women face. It should be noted that she has not blamed men for all the problems that the women face. The novelist has tried to project strong women capable of surviving all the ordeals as far as possible. According to Shanta Krishnaswamy in *Glimpses of Women in India*: “The women in Indian fiction too, are emerging out of darkness, throwing off their legacy of humiliation, dependence, and resignation, and reaching out for an equitable share of
man’s worldly and spiritual goods” (349). Shashi Deshpande tries to view the roles allotted to women, and the images that got struck to them over the centuries. In some cases, men expected, and took for granted certain responses from women. Women at times, as custodians, inflict harm on other women. To conclude, in the opinion of R. S. Pathak published in *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*:

The novelist emerges in them as a bridge-builder between the old and the new, between tradition and modernity. For this and for portraying the basic reality of Indian society and the place of women in it in a sensitive and authentic manner her novels are of immense value. (25)

Instead of bemoaning their fate or silently undergoing all kinds of hardships, and agonies, women of the present times are courageously handling crises.

It is true that they have not achieved complete freedom or total immunity or solutions to all their problems. They still have to traverse many a difficult path. They still have to prove their worth.

Sigmund Freud in his Psychoanalytic Theory, used defense mechanism as a tactic developed by the ego to protect the ego against anxiety. Sigmund Freud, and his followers emphasis on the unconscious determinants of behaviour, and on the use of defense mechanisms to protect the mind against feelings, and thoughts that are too difficult for the conscious mind to cope with. Madhu of *Small Remedies* uses ‘writing’ as a creative way of self-expression. She finds ‘writing’ as means of escape from the dull domestic life. She uses ‘writing’ as a tactic developed by the ego to protect her against anxiety.

According to Freud, anxiety is an unpleasant inner state that people seek to avoid. Anxiety acts as a signal to the ego that things are not going right. Freud
identified three types of anxiety. Neurotic anxiety is the unconscious worry that we will lose control, resulting in punishment for inappropriate behaviour. Reality anxiety is fear of real-world events. The cause of this anxiety is usually easily identified. The last moral anxiety involves a fear of violating our own moral principles. It is explicit that Madhu of *Small Remedies* suffers from ‘reality anxiety’. Madhu's own personal tragedy - the loss of her son, and the loss of her husband Som's trust does not leave her in peace. She suffers endlessly, and yet tries to take things in her stride, with the belief "...what is gone is lost forever. That time moves on relentlessly, and you have to go along with it" (5).

Abram Kardiner, a Neo-Freudian in his work *Psychoanalysis and India* reveals:

> Defense mechanisms are a part of our everyday life. Even if we are not a Freudian by philosophy or training, we have to admit that there is something to be said for the idea that all of us engage in some form of self-deception at least some of the time. But we cannot detect the form of deception that we our friends, colleagues, and family are using at any given moment. The term ‘defense mechanism’ got its start in psychoanalytic therapy, but it has slowly worked its way into everyday language. (123)

Mitchell, a psychologist in *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis: An Integration* feels: “All defense mechanisms can be adaptive, and allow an individual to function normally. In psychoanalytic therapy, the goal may be to help the individual uncover these unconscious defense mechanisms, and find better, more healthy ways of coping with anxiety, and distress” (135). Thus it is seen that the protagonist Madhu unconsciously makes use of Psychoanalytic tool, defense
mechanism to strengthen herself. Under the pressure of the excessive anxiety produced by her experience of her environment, the ego is forced to relieve the anxiety by defending itself.

The next chapter **Manifestation of Empowered Women** gives a vivid study of empowering women in the literary works of Shashi Deshpande. The novels selected for this study are *Moving On*, *In The Country of Deceit*, and *Ships That Pass*. 