CHAPTER - III
FIGHTERS: THE NOVELS OF MIDDLE PHASE

Shashi Deshpande’s novels, *The Binding Vine* (1993), *A Matter of Time* (1996) and *Small Remedies* (2000), represent a new phase in her development as an artist. Though these novels have not received as much of attention from her critics and readers as her earlier works have, they do occupy an important place in the oeuvre of Deshpande’s creative art. A cursory view of these novels, however, suggests that they mark continuity with the earlier novels of Deshpande. Certainly, some vital points of similarities are perceptible in these novels and those of earlier ones. All these three novels are also woman centric as the protagonists in them are women. Experience of marriage of protagonists and other men and women is central to the plots of these novels. Here also, marriage appears to be the major alienating factor. The incompatibility between the partners leads to disappointment and disillusionment. Besides wifehood, motherhood also offers no fulfilment to the protagonists of this phase. Mythic exaggeration of this role proves rather alienating for them, plunging them further in deeper disappointment. Conflict between social expectations as wives and mothers and their individual aspirations is another quality which these protagonists share with their earlier counterparts.

A look on the critical trends on these novels suggests that many of the critics have overemphasized these similarities in Deshpande’s novels and have blamed her of repetitiveness. R.S. Pathak, for example, opines, “Deshpande’s novels have, like those of Jane Austen, a narrow range,” and there “is the recurrence of certain themes in them.” Basavraj Naikar is of the view that Shashi Despande “has depicted different aspects of woman’s life – especially the middle class woman’s life” in her novels. G.K. Bardiger also stresses that Deshpande’s novels “are about Indian women, especially women with their fears, anxieties, agonies within the married framework of family life.” Ruby Milhoutra finds that Shashi Deshpande has presented in her novels “modern Indian women’s search for these definitions about the self and society, and the relationships that are central to women.”
A close study of these novels, however, proves that critics' this view of Deshpande's art as repetitive and narrow in its range and scope, cannot be wholly justified as they indicate a steady development in the form of writer's art, her vision of life and the attitude of affirmation of protagonists. A comprehensive study of her treatment of the theme of alienation and affirmation in these novels clearly shows that Deshpande is a writer who has something new to say in each of her works. One major area where these novels mark a development on earlier ones is that Shashi Deshpande, in each of these novels, has created more than one important character. If earlier novels were dominated by a single character, the later ones can boast of more than one character who plays significant role in the structural and thematic scheme of these works. Structure of later novels, therefore, appears to be in some ways more complex and inclusive. Another point of difference, which captures readers' attention, is the treatment by her, of the experiences of alienation in greater depths and dimensions through a larger gallery of significant characters. Here, the insights into the male psyche, revealed through the portrayals of male figures, is more comprehensive and, therefore, very significant in examining her understanding of this human predicament. The working of patriarchal order, and how it causes conflicts and even experiences of multiple forms of alienation for both the sexes, emerges more sharply in these fictional constructs. Her treatment of the role of sex in marriage, as an alienating factor, also acquires new dimensions in this phase. It is no longer depicted only as an alienating factor, especially in *A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies*.

What impresses the reader most is the development in writer's vision of affirmation with the values of life, revealed through the actions of her major characters. Here, characters seem to come out of their cocoons and their concerns seem to become enlarged and extended to the social world. All these aspects of the three novels tend to bind them in a kind of coherent relationship.

All these three novels feature women who herald the beginning of a new phase in their life. The keynote of a positive attitude and resolution to march ahead in a spirit of greater camaraderie is heard in the following words of Mira and practiced by Urmi, her daughter-in-law:
Come, my brother, come my sisters
Let us join our hands,
a new road, a new way
a new age begins ....

– The Binding Vine

THE BINDING VINE

A new age begins with Urmila, the protagonist of The Binding Vine, who breaks the long silence, which had become hallmark of woman’s existence. The earlier women protagonists Saru, Indu and Jaya have already begun to question the patriarchal norms of the society and have realized the need to free themselves from this bondage. They are aware that age old societal norms and their predestined roles have subjected them to severe humiliation and consequent alienation from self and society. Through their journey into their past they finally succeed in knowing about themselves but only within limited purview of their own lives. These women’s interests are centered around themselves and their relations. They have no interest in raising their feelings “to purge society of its evils and blaze forth in a trail of glory.”5 But, as Indira Nityanandam remarks, “The Binding Vine is a refreshing change from the first three novels of Deshpande. Protest comes easily to her protagonist here and there is less agony....”6 Urmila of The Binding Vine goes many steps ahead of her predecessors by her efforts to help and to forge a solidarity with women who are victims of patriarchy and sexism. In her essay, “Sisterhood,” Bell Hooks writes, “...sexism is perpetrated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves, who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo.”7 Vanna, Shakutai, Akka and Sulu act in complicity with the status quo but Urmila, the protagonist, raises her voice against their oppression on their behalf and refutes the male view that women are natural enemies who “cannot, should not and do not bond with one another.”8 She, through her own example, gives message to the women “to live and work in solidarity,”9 to bond with one another and counter male supremacy.

The other point which differentiates The Binding Vine from earlier novels by Shashi Deshpande, is that it presents predominantly the women’s world. “It’s not that
men are entirely absent, but they make their presence felt merely by the power they exercise over the women, especially their wives and daughters.\textsuperscript{10} It is a world where women outshine men in terms of their courage to cope with their surroundings, come to terms with their losses and their ability to forge an alliance among themselves and learn to live. This world of women comprises of women of three generations belonging to three different, i.e. higher, middle and lower sections of society. For the first time in this novel, Shashi Deshpande has given enough space to the sufferings, trials and tribulations of lower sections of society represented by Shakutai, Sulu and Kalpana. Through the example of these women and others like Inni, Mira and Akka, Deshpande reflects on the challenges of motherhood, undesirable and torturous sexual relationships, the horror of rape, the apathy of society and the hollowness of the institution of marriage.

Thematically as well as ideologically Deshpande’s novels exhibit continuity with a development: “From the point of view of intertextuality we find not only traces of one novel in the other but also obvious repetitions.”\textsuperscript{11} That’s why, like earlier novels, in this novel also, Shashi Deshpande has dealt with marriage as an alienating agent. For harmony in marital life emotional, mental and physical compatibility between partners is required. Lack of any one of these leads to the alienation of the partners from the very relationship, as is clear from the case of Urmi. She, like Saru and Indu, also goes for a love marriage. She recalls how she fell in love with Kishore at the age of fifteen. The breathlessness of that moment when she fell headlong into that emotion is still vivid in her memory: “It was the day my grandfather died.”\textsuperscript{12} The unnatural death of her grandfather with whom she was residing alone, singled Kishore out of the rest of the humanity, who was till then “only Kishore, Vanna’s rather strange, aloof brother” (163). A letter from him, after three years, fills her with a sense of having manipulated his feelings by the strength of her own. Yet, when reality confronts her, Urmi finds it difficult to cope with her marriage with a person who flits into her life “a few months in a year and flits out again, leaving nothing of himself behind” (164).

Though Urmi believes in the anchoring power of love, she finds that their marriage is not founded on it. The ecstasy that filled the early romantic phase of her love is conspicuous by its absence presently. Romanticism of earlier phase bestowed on her
immense strength to remain confident and fearless. But somewhere on the way that confidence seems to have been replaced by the fear of Kishore not returning, not wanting to return. The very first night instilled in her the sense of distance between them. His parodying of marriage supports the trapped look on his face: “The two of us in a closed room... and we can’t get out. That’s marriage” (137). It is her strong determination to prove him wrong that makes her walk out of her nuptial bed, the very first night. Despite their years of familiarity this first walkout remains undiscussed. This establishes the fact that in spite of being physically together they are emotionally and mentally detached from each other, lacking in, perhaps, mutual trust and confidence.

The permanent detached look on Kishore’s face stifles Urmi’s emotions. Every time when he goes away, the separation is very painful for Urmi; and every time her feeling that “the parting is like death,” (139) remains unexpressed, except in her fantasy. Whenever she tries to articulate her emotional insecurity, during his absence, he frustrates her attempts through assertion of his sexuality. The archetypal Indian husband that he is, he fails to fathom the depth of her feelings. While Kishore offers sex as a solution to her problems, it is only a temporary answer to her painful loneliness. The closeness between husband and wife remains merely at physical level; it never touches the emotional level. It is this incompatibility that drives Urmi to a second walkout immediately after their physical union. This experience gradually forces her to realize her inability to remove Kishore’s mask of indifference: “…Kishore will never remove his armour, there is something in him I will never reach” (141). This inability to reach out to him strengthens the already present silence between them which causes degeneration of their marriage. Marriage is found to be degenerating when there is no emotional involvement because sex alone cannot sustain a meaningful relationship.

Need of love through marital relationship is at the core of every Indian woman’s heart however educated and modern she may have become. This is why, in spite of belonging to the modern educated urban society and being exposed to the liberal revolutionary ideas, the role and position of Indian women have just remained confined to that of wives and mothers only. Vanna, Urmi’s sister-in-law, is educated and working as a social worker but her family expects her to play only the role of a good wife and a
loving mother denying her any independence of will and identity as an individual. Unlike Urmi, Vanna is truly a “good wife” in the Indian sense. She totally submits to her husband Harish but receives indifference in return. His indifference makes her incapable of sharing her feelings with him. Though she is educated yet she never questions his male chauvinism and supremacy. She follows him blindly for fear of inviting his wrath. She has to work in and outside the house with the least help provided by her husband. Her despair and anger at being held solely responsible for house and children comes to the fore when Mandira blames her for remaining outside home for most of the time: “…why is it nobody thinks of blaming Harish? He is never around” (75).

This age old distribution of duties between man and woman is not acceptable to modern woman who has come out of the four walls of house to join the emerging job market. But woman’s foray in new arena of commercial market has increased her problems and consequent alienation, her traditional roles being intact. She does not get any help from her male counterpart as is clear from the case of Vanna and Harish. Harish is careless not only about his household duties but he is also not caring and sympathetic enough to understand his wife’s feelings. Vanna longs for a son but the same is denied to her by her husband. After the birth of a second baby-girl she expresses her desire to Harish for a son. Harish snubs her by saying that she should not be one of those women who crave for sons. Consequently, she has to suppress her desire deep within her heart. In spite of bearing so much due to Harish, her talks are filled with constant refrain “Harish says” (80). This total submission to Harish on Vanna’s part angers Urmi who asks her to assert herself. But Vanna, despite her exposure to the external world, lets him bulldozer and crawls before him for her inability to liberate herself of the set images.

Vanna’s mother and Urmi’s mother-in-law, Akka, is also a victim of images set by patriarchy. Akka is married to Kishore’s father after the death of his first wife, Mira. After the death of Mira, her sister-in-law unambiguously suggests that her brother wants only a mother for his child and not a wife. When Mira was alive, she was his obsession, after her death, it is the child Kishore. This means that Akka’s husband marries her for the sake of the child and has no interest in her as a wife. Akka on the other hand is forced to marry him by her family members because she has crossed the marriageable age. As
no other person would have married her, she is pushed into marrying an obsessed widower. "If obsession was the cause of Mira's suffering, negligence is the cause of Akka's grief." Akka, who shows equanimity even at the time of the marriage of her daughter, Vanna, is driven to tears while telling Urmi and Vanna about the life of Mira. These tears not only show her sorrow at Mira's plight but are also expressive of disappointment and loneliness in her own marital life. She never expresses her sorrow and despair explicitly. She bears the indifference of her husband with stoic silence. This deprivation of basic marital rights and her inability to fight makes her an alienated figure.

The other character who neither can enjoy marital bliss nor is able to fight back is Sulu, Shakutai's sister. Affectionate and good-natured Sulu has a hobby of housekeeping and decoration which goes unrecognized by her husband, who never bothers to appreciate her work. Insecurity looms large on her life because of her childlessness. She is fearful that her husband might throw her out of the house because of not giving him a child. She believes it a serious drawback on her part that she cannot bear Prabhakar's child and a constant hidden fear lurks in her: "After marriage she changed. She was frightened, always 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 ...?" (195) This is how the self-confidence of a vivacious girl can be shattered by Indian institution of marriage which transforms her into a fearful and nervous woman. Moreover, Prabhakar refuses to touch her because of her skin disease but allows her to cook and clear for him if she makes Kalpana marry him. The so-called security, which marriage provides, compels Sulu to compromise with the situation and she agrees to get Kalpana married to her husband. Her acceptance of a life of humiliation where she would serve Kalpana and her husband after their marriage shows her helplessness and powerlessness. This helplessness makes her cling to a crumbling marriage and becomes the cause of her exploitation where she submits to every injustice only to remain married.

Sulu's sister, Shakutai, differs from her as she realizes the futility of clinging to a bad marriage and worthless husband because it is with marriage sufferings started in her life. Soon after her marriage her husband leaves her in her father's home and goes to Bombay on the pretext of earning a livelihood. After waiting for six months, she becomes
impatient and joins him in Bombay on her own. To her utter shock she finds that her husband is lazy and jobless. That’s why, she is forced to live with one of his friend’s family. But her husband’s insistence for physical relationship even when they have to sleep in the corridor, with men walking up and down, has been most humiliating to her. In spite of such experiences, she takes up a job to support her three children and her worthless husband. Shakutai realizes the limitation of her choice because Indian traditions do not allow woman to walk out of marriage. In spite of her submission to a hopeless marriage she receives a great shock when her useless husband leaves her for the sake of a younger woman. On that day she realizes the foolishness of her desire to get her mangalsutra made in gold: “Then one day I thought – the man himself is so worthless, why should I bother to have this thing made in precious gold? That’s been the greatest misfortune of my life … marrying that man” (110).

The situation becomes worse for Shakutai, who on the one hand bears the brunt of desertion by her husband, and on the other falls prey to the double standards of the society that blame her even for her own desertion by her husband and for the rape of Kalpana: “What can you expect, they say, of a girl whose mother has left her husband?” (147) Through Shakutai, Shashi Deshpande brings out how a woman gets alienated from her own experiences and her right to have a life of her choice under the constrictive and coercive authority of patriarchal order. Deshpande is highly ironical when she shows how society overlooks the patience with which Shakutai puts up with a bad marriage and consequent sufferings.

Thus, through the examples of these women Deshpande shows how the institution of marriage becomes oppressive and works as an agent of woman’s sufferings, humiliation and her annihilation as a human being. That’s why, all these women whether literate or illiterate, working or housewife, feel trapped in marital bond. But what distinguishes Deshpande’s women characters is that they never think of snapping this auspicious bond. Some of them, who are submissive, accept it as their destiny and some others who are more courageous ones try to establish their own identity within marriage.

If the husband-wife relationship proves inimical to the personal growth and fulfilment of the characters of The Binding Vine then mother-daughter relationship is
equally dissatisfying for them. A.G. Khan feels that almost all of Shashi Deshpande’s heroines have “an antagonism towards their mothers.” In Deshpande’s novels, mother-daughter relationship is more of a conflict than of compromise and reconciliation. Usually daughters reject mothers as their role models, but they cannot escape their roles of motherhood. In the process of their own roles as mothers, they succumb to the same fears, anxieties and weaknesses as their mothers did. *The Binding Vine* provides a peep into the mother-daughter relationship of five pairs: Urmi-Inni, Mira’s mother-Mira, Shakutai-Kalpana, Akka-Vanna and Vanna-Mandira.

Urmi’s disillusionment with her mother is rooted in her separation from later at an early age. She holds her mother responsible for depriving her of parental love, which was her right as a child. But instead of expressing her resentment and anger, she suppresses it and never feels like asking for the cause of her displacement, and her mother Inni’s predicament whose early marriage had led to early motherhood. Inni’s helplessness, being too young and inexperienced to take care of her daughter, is revealed when she explains her case to Urmi: “I was frightened of you, Urmi …. I was too young. I was not prepared to have a child. And you were not easy, you used to cry all the time, I didn’t know how to soothe you …” (199). In addition to it, she feels powerless before the authority of Urmi’s father who decided to send her to his mother as he held Inni responsible for the negligence of the child: “Then he (papa) decided he would take you to his mother. He didn’t say anything to me, he just took you away …. I begged him, Urmi, I cried … Nothing could make him change his mind” (199-200).

Thus, Urmi’s father, a domineering husband was instrumental in her displacement but it was Inni who had to bear the displeasure of her daughter. Because of this blame she is so guilt-ridden that she tries to make up for the loss of love for her daughter by being an over caring mother. But Urmi remains indifferent to her mother as she holds her mother responsible for deliberately sending her to her mother-in-law for her own convenience. She fails to have a sympathetic understanding of her mother’s predicament, and therefore, remains aloof and resentful. Almost a similar situation is perceptible in the case of Mira who holds her mother responsible for her unhappy lot in married life. Mira, a promising teenager is forced into an unwanted matrimonial relationship. No body takes
note of her resentment against this forced relationship which is taken to be a mere childish resistance. At this crucial point of her life she is in need of her mother’s support who could have refused early marriage for her daughter. But her mother, like Inni, is helpless to intervene, to have any say in decision regarding her own daughter because she has no say in important family matters. Her words, "nothing is in my hands," prove her inability to help her daughter. Her silence pushes Mira into a hopeless marriage. Mira, indifferent to her mother’s compulsion, holds her mother responsible for her sad plight. Mira’s inability to understand her mother’s compulsions creates a rift between the two in a manner that she does not feel like sharing her emotions with her mother. Normally one unburdens one’s heart before near and dear ones, particularly before mother, to give vent to one’s grief. But Mira feels so alienated from her mother that she does not convey her unhappiness to her mother: “She knew I was not happy, I know she knew it; but she was afraid to ask me, afraid I would admit it” (126). Because of this communication gap Mira could not understand and reconcile with her mother. Even after her death a question remains haunting Mira’s mind: “Why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despair your own?” (126)

Deshpande, here, not only underlines the causes of alienation between mothers and daughters because of the latter’s failure to understand the socio-economic situations the mothers are trapped in, but also provides subtle insights, even in these brief portrayals of mothers, how they have to suffer the pain of their helpless suppression of their own dreams and desires about their daughters. They are subjected to double rejection – first, of their rights as mothers in the lives of their daughters, and second, ironically, from their daughters themselves. Deshpande makes her treatment of the mother-daughter relationship more comprehensive and convincing by relating it to the patriarchal set-up wherein even the modern educated woman is caught up in a dilemma between the demands of motherhood on the one hand, and her aspiration for freedom through work outside home on the other.

Double responsibility of home and workplace proves too much for Vanna and becomes the main reason of rift between her and her daughter Mandira. Vanna, a medical social worker, has to stay away from home for a substantial period as part of her duty.
Her daughter Mandira feels neglected in her mother’s absence. She dislikes being left to the care of maid servant: “I don’t want Hirabai, I want my mother” (72). The anger and desperation at her mother’s absence, erupts at the slightest provocation and she complains, “You’re always making fun of me. You’re cruel. I’ll never talk to you again” (31). Vanna, unable to cope at two fronts, fails to understand the real feelings of her daughter and resents her daughter’s feelings of antagonism towards her: “… that little chit. She does it deliberately, she knows she can hurt me” (74). This attempt on Mandira’s part to hurt her mother is due to her immense longing for her mother’s affection which she fails to get. Mandira, deprived of motherly care, tells Urmi that she would never leave her children when she becomes a mother. Here again, daughter fails to understand her mother’s compulsions in negotiating between family and career; and the mother is equally unable to diagnose the tantrums of her daughter who needs her mother’s loving presence and care. While Vanna complains about Mandira, her own attitude towards Akka, her mother, is equally embittered and unsympathetic, for quite often, her remarks drive Akka into silence.

But the most important relationship between mother and daughter, fraught with tensions and complexities, is the one between Shakutai and Kalpana. It is for the first time that through this pair, the experiences of women of the lower stratum have been presented by Deshpande in such depth and detail. Deshpande through them highlights the fact that the experiences of women, irrespective of their class are characterized by disappointments, dispossession and subtle forms of alienation in the tradition bound Indian society. Though Shakutai and Kalpana belong to the lower class of society but their social and economic status does not make their relationship any different from those of middle-class families. Shakutai’s alienation from the child Kalpana starts even before her birth. As she was forced to work in grocer’s shop due to her jobless husband, she was not ready to bear the burden of pregnancy, the burden of the life of Kalpana. She herself accepts before Urmi, “I didn’t want the child, I didn’t want Kalpana. I wanted her to die” (111). The desire to get rid of this unwanted pregnancy was so intense in her that she used to hit herself hard so that the child might not have been born. But the birth of Kalpana and later on of Sandhya makes her weak and desperate, for she alone has to bear their burden. Thus, the forced motherhood brings out unwanted children who are more a
burden than a source of emotional fulfilment. As Kalpana grows up, Shakutai lives always in fear for her security. That’s why, she does not like Kalpana getting dressed up or using lipstick, believing it might unnecessarily attract male attention: “If you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they’ll leave you alone?” (146). But she does not care a bit about her mother’s advice. Being on the threshold of youth and having her own income, she dresses well and goes her own way. The rift between mother and daughter widens as Kalpana holds her mother responsible for her desertion (Shakutai) by her father. Shakutai recalls her daughter’s accusation: “... she was furious with me! “You drove him away,” she said, “you’re always angry, always quarrelling, that’s why he’s gone” ” (93).

This wrong impression in Kalpana’s mind about her mother makes her indifferent and stubborn towards her mother. She becomes secretive and does not share anything with her mother. Shakutai is badly hurt by her “self-willed” behaviour and for taking the side of her father, the main cause of their sufferings: “… she never tells me anything. She didn’t even tell me how much her pay was, can you imagine that? Me, her own mother. As if I was going to take her money away from her! I don’t want anything ….And can you believe it, she gives her father money more easily than she gives me” (92).

Shakutai, a deprived and dispossessed woman, fails to understand the cause behind this behaviour of Kalpana, who does not want any kind of restriction on her way of life. She fails to understand her daughter’s urge to live an independent life of her own, different from the depressing and suffocating life of her mother and aunt.

Thus, none of the mother-daughter pairs discussed above enjoys harmonious relationship that can be soothing for their mental and emotional selves. Misunderstanding and dissentions are the main causes of disenchantment in this relationship. Mothers represent the tradition and their behaviour is moulded by the patriarchy which forces them to bow down before the male supremacy fearing about their security. So they try to cast their daughters in the same mould. But daughters, representatives of modernity, aspire for their independent identity free from all prejudices. This opposition in their line of thought becomes the cause of rift and alienation between them.
Rift or uneasiness with self is also caused in woman when she loses right on her own body i.e. the sanctity of her human body is destroyed through forced physical relations. This establishment of forced physical relations is termed as ‘rape’ in the language of law. It is an extreme example of man’s aggression towards woman. Rape is not an act of lust, as is generally assumed; rather, it is an act of violence and humiliation that degrades and abuses woman through an assertion of male power. Rape is a sexual act that is seen as a potent tool to overpower, control and put women in their place by men. Men have been using sexual violence and rape as a means to wield control over women from time immemorial and across cultures. Frank Hosken says that violence against women is perpetrated “with an astonishing consensus among the men in the world.”

When it comes to marital relationship, many men consider themselves the sole owner of their wives and their bodies and would go to any extent to assert their right. There are many untold stories of marital rape happening within the four walls of seemingly happy homes in India which most of the times are not construed as rape, as it is thought that men have only taken what is rightfully theirs, while women remain mute sufferers robbed of their dignity in their own homes. Shashi Deshpande is bold enough to touch upon this sensitive issue which has hitherto been pushed under carpet. Earlier also, she has dealt with the issue of rape in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. With the repetition of this theme in the present novel, she establishes that rape is not just a social crime but also a psychological perversion stemming from male desire to overpower the self and identity of a woman. It is symbolic triumph of male ego over the femininity of woman. And if it happens inside the ambit of marriage, the institution which is known to provide security to the woman in Indian context, there is no hope left for the victim for freedom or resistance: “It is indeed, an irony that to avoid brutalization of one kind, women willingly submit themselves to the brutality of another kind in the institution of marriage.” That’s what Urmi notices in arranged marriages: “In fact, a funeral solemnity hung over all of us during the ceremony, I could not see the girl’s face, for she looked steadily down throughout, but I could see that her hands were trembling uncontrollably. And the back of her neck, I can remember that looked like a lamb’s, waiting for a butcher’s knife to come down upon it” (63).

For Urmi, the predicament of Mira, her mother-in-law, is like that of a lamb waiting to be butchered by her husband in the form of forced sex. Like Akka of *Roots*
and Shadows, Mira is forced to marry at a younger age of eighteen against her wishes. She wants to study further and develop her poetic talent. But her husband manipulates to get married to her leaving her with no choice. Mira’s unwillingness to marry has no significance for the man who nourishes the dream to possess her. He is obsessive only about her body and fails to forge an emotional bond with her. So, Mira, a victim of loveless marriage, develops “an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married” (63). Her diaries and notes bear testimony to her aversion towards sex. In one of her poems she presents her fear of sexual act.

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

Due to this fear she cannot accept her husband’s love and obsession which is limited to sex only. The frequent invasion of her physical space leaves her wanting for “a room of her own.” It is socially accepted that in marriage a husband has a right over his wife’s body and it is the duty of a wife to satisfy the physical needs of her husband. Shashi Deshpande, through her novels, has criticized the tradition that dictates that the husband has a right to satisfy his biological needs irrespective of the wife’s unwillingness, thus, sanctioning crimes like marital rape. As Indrani Jaisingh an eminent lawyer opines, “It is assumed that by marrying a man, a woman has given her consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at anytime. Thus, even if he forces himself on her, he is not committing an offence (of rape) as her consent is assumed.”17

Mira’s silence is assumed as her consent by her husband: “ ‘Please,’ he says, ‘please, I love you’. And over and over again until he has done...” (67). This forced lovemaking shatters the sensitive Mira to the core, who erects a wall of silence around herself and recoils from establishing an emotional bond with him. Her inability to cope with him makes her nurture a dislike for him and hatred for the word ‘love’ which he uses to define his obsession: “Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say ‘no’ at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all” (67). And that’s why, she desires to be left alone: “I don’t mind his anger, it makes him leave me to
myself, it is bliss when he does that ... why can’t he leave me alone?” (67) Mira’s desire to be left alone to herself is a clear manifestation of the hurt she felt due to forced sexual activity. For Shashi Deshpande the forced sexual relations without the emotional involvement are nothing but rape. The sexual violence against women is a method of “taming” women into passivity. A statement against rape, delivered at international tribunal on Crimes against Women admits: “Legally, rape is recognized as a crime with physical aspects only, namely, the penetration of the vagina by the penis against the will of the victim. In effect, however, the real crime is the annihilation by the man of the woman as a human being.”

Mira’s very being is annihilated by the marital rape. The traditional Indian society expects a woman to satisfy the sexual needs of her husband, as and when he wants; thus a woman’s right over her own body suffers from a sense of negation and her own sexuality is ignored. This forcible fulfilment of husband’s desires denies her the real communication with her partner. Like Indu and Jaya she learns to deceit and gives her husband mere facts and not a peep into her innermost feelings. His husband’s behaviour alienates her so much that she fails to connect herself with anyone in her in-laws’ family. They, instead of sympathizing with her remain indifferent towards her and consider her a mad woman:

They called me mad
they, who cocooned themselves
in bristly blankets
and thought themselves warm
when I spoke of my soul
that boiled and seethed .... (99-100)

This crushing of the very soul of Mira in her husband’s house and utter physicality of marital life proves too much for her.

To lessen the pain of her soul she turns to writing beautiful lyrical poetry “in the solitude of an unhappy marriage” (48). Writing poetry was a talent which she wanted to
develop into a full fledged career in her maiden days. But her uncertainty about voicing a desire to become a poet is clearly seen in the following lines:

‘Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm
Will I emerge a beauteous being?
Or Will I, suffocating, cease to exist?’ (65)

Her existence as a poet is further discouraged by Venu, a poet, who later rises to become a great figure in Indian literature. When she gives him poems to read he snubs her for writing poetry: “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). Here again she becomes a victim of male hegemony who cannot tolerate a woman making forays into their strongholds. Though she was denied the chance to develop her talent but in her marital life this becomes a solid means through which she unburdens her heart’s pain and feels relieved in turn. She pours her heart’s feelings in her poems when she reveals that marital bond is an entrapment for her from which no escape is possible. These lines by Mira clearly show the pernicious effect of marriage on her face as well as on her psyche:

Whose face is this I see in the mirror,
unsmiling, grave, bedewed with fear? (126)

This fear, borne out of marriage, seems to get relieved by anticipatory joy of giving birth to a child. But Mira is unfortunate on this front also as she dies in childbirth. Mira’s untimely death in child-birth ends her alienated existence with a man she could not love. But the fate of Kalpana, another rape victim in the novel, hangs in balance. Throughout the story she remains unconscious and till the end a big question mark remains in the mind of the reader regarding her fate. Through Kalpana, daughter of Shakutai, Shashi Deshpande explains the trauma of rape outside marriage. Because of her unconsciousness the feelings and mental state of Kalpana are not available to the reader. But Shashi Deshpande has dealt successfully with the attitudes of other family members, authorities and society in general who blame the victim rather than the culprit. The tragedy of Kalpana, who is raped at a tender age, is worsened by the fact that the culprit
is her uncle, Prabhakar. He has an eye on Kalpana from the time she comes to stay with them. Sensing the ill-desires of her uncle she goes back to stay with her mother. But Prabhakar is so much obsessed with Kalpana that he forces his wife, Sulu, to get Kalpana married to him. Kalpana refuses the proposal to fulfil his obsessive desire. To take revenge for his insult, Prabhakar brutally rapes Kalpana, throwing the sanctity of relationships to winds. Her body is so badly mauled by him that one “could see the marks of his fingers on her arms where he had held her down. And there were huge contusions on her thighs – he must have pinned her down with his knees. And her lips – bitten and chewed” (88). Her mental shock surpasses the physical torture and she goes unconscious.

Reaction of various persons towards this state of Kalpana show that patriarchal thinking of society always blames the woman for being raped and the real culprit, the man, goes scot free. Shakutai, Kalpana’s mother, in spite of all her love and sympathy blames Kalpana for being raped. Kalpana’s independent spirit and her habit of getting dressed-up well, are taken to be the main causes behind her condition by Shakutai: “Cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, men are like animals. But she went her way. You should have seen her walking out, head in the air caring for nobody. It’s all her fault Urmila, all her fault...” (147). Mira too was a victim of sexual abuse years ago but neither then nor now the mothers of these silent suffering victims stand by their unfortunate daughters as they dare not defy the norms of society. While Mira’s mother kept silent and stood helpless at the misery of her daughter, Kalpana’s mother harps on the family name.

This reaction of Shakutai is borne of the values ingrained in her by the age-old patriarchal set-up in which restrictive rules have been laid for a girl’s speech and conduct so that she doesn’t invite men’s attention. A girl has to strictly observe the social norms of how she is to speak, dress and carry herself in society. Any deviation from these norms invites the wrath of the family members as it invites danger to her modesty getting outraged. According to Shakutai, Kalpana’s deviation from submissive pattern of a girl’s life plays havoc with her life and body. Through the reaction of Shakutai one can gauge the loss a rape victim has to bear in society. A victim of rape is a loser on two counts: firstly, she is physically and mentally mutilated; secondly, the society looks down upon
such a victim as a ‘Kulta,’ which leaves her in a much miserable plight. That’s why, Shakutai does not want a report to be lodged with the police. She knows that if she does, a much greater injustice awaits her and her daughter.

The unfeeling, unsympathetic and utterly unfair attitude of police, judiciary, media and society to the innocent victims of sexual assault pushes the victim further towards alienation from self and society. In the cases of rape, the onus lies on police to encourage such victims to lodge complaints with them so that they can punish the culprit. But the police officer registers the case of Kalpana as a mere accident to the great shock of Dr. Bhaskar, the doctor in-charge. His logic behind his action is a clear proof of social apathy: “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” (88). It suggests that law is also crippled to provide protection to those who are weak and powerless. He further adds, “…her name would be smeared” (88). This reaction of police represents the attitude of society, in general, towards rape victim. Society puts the whole blame on the victim who is pointed out for being raped: “If a girl’s honour is lost, what’s left? The girl doesn’t have to do anything wrong, people will always point a finger at her” (59) and not at the culprit who rapes. Society condemns her as polluted and the chances of her marriage are negligible. This is what concerns Shakutai. She knows that it will not only ruin her family’s name but also undermine the marriage prospects not only of Kalpana but also of Sandhya, her second daughter. Shakutai’s anxiety about Kalpana and Sandhya’s marriage and the callousness of police, reveal how the helpless victim is pushed into abyss of greater alienation and nothingness. Here, the painful irony is that Kalpana’s own mother, Shakutai, wishes for death of Kalpana which will ultimately relieve Kalpana and herself of further humiliation and sufferings.

Thus, the treatment of the experiences of alienation, mainly in the forms of loneliness, negation and rejection from society and members of their own families, projected through the lives of Akka, Vanna, Mira, Shakutai, Kalpana, Urmi and Mandira shows that if some of them like Akka, Vanna and Mira’s mother submit to their fate, Kalpana sinks into a state of unconsciousness, rendered incapable of making any response to her situation. Though Mira cannot muster the courage required to confront
and alter her life in her oppressive marital relationship, she gives vent to her muffled fears and anxieties through her poems. This can be interpreted as an attempt on her part to preserve her innermost self from being annihilated completely. Her life was snuffed out in the process of giving birth to Kishore, her son, but she survives to speak about her frustrations, loneliness and maladjustment through her poems to Urmi, her daughter-in-law, who alone in the novel, triumphs over her dispossessing and alienating circumstances.

Like the earlier novels where a specific incident in the life of protagonists makes them analyze their life critically, here too, the untimely death of Anu, Urmi's one year old daughter comes as a serious shock to the maternal sensibility of Urmila and transforms her outlook towards life. For a brief while it becomes a very unsettling experience forcing her into feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness. This is made worse by her obsession with the feelings of guilt that makes even an idea of personal happiness without Anu a "betrayal" for her. Reflecting on her masochistic attitude, S. Indira comments: "Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow, she holds on to it as she believes that to let go that pain let it become a thing of the past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of loss."19 This masochism is an expression of her sense of worthlessness, self-flagellation and alienation from hope and purpose in life. But unlike the protagonists in earlier novels, Urmi displays a greater capacity to transcend this crisis. If Saru, Indu and Jaya remain tangled in the web of their personal problems and seem to come out of them only towards the end of the novels making some resolutions to gain control over their lives, Urmi bounces back with greater strength and positive outlook. Her greater potential to affirm herself and the meaningfulness of life is further indicated by the fact that unlike her earlier counterparts she gains her equipoise and control over her life without the help or guidance from any source outside herself. What distinguishes her most from characters like Saru and Jaya is the fact that she no longer remains preoccupied with her personal life and problems but develops an enlarged consciousness and great sensitivity enabling her to empathise with the sufferings of others: "After Anu died ... Then I saw Kalpana, I met Shakutai, I read Mira's diary, her poems. And I've begun to think yes..." (174).
This growth towards her heightened humanity begins when she comes across the diaries and notes of Mira, her mother-in-law, which give her a chance to analyze the fate and despair of a woman who is pushed into an unwanted marriage. It touches in her chords of human sympathy and compassion binding her in a kind of oneness of experience. She discovers in Mira’s poems an expression of woman’s sufferings and deciphers a message like a “message tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the next cell.” She feels that her poems are the true reflections of her latent feelings of questioning anxiety and uncertainty which were the hallmark of her marital life. While reading her poems Urmila also vicariously experiences the feelings of the suffocation and mute suffering of a woman who is subjected to rape in marriage. Urmila understands that for Mira marriage is only a “black clouded” night, she awaits with dread and sex for her had become “the sting of scorpion to be borne by women.” After going through all her poems Urmila is confident that she understands Mira, her plight, her suffering and every flicker of her emotion: “I’ve worked hard at knowing Mira, I’ve read the diaries, gone through her papers, absorbed her poems, painfully, laboriously translated them into English. And now, I tell myself, I know Mira” (174). All this knowledge about Mira makes Urmila wonder how she could survive a life denied of choices and freedom. She thinks that perhaps “it was her writing that kept her going, that kept her alive” (127).

And now Urmila decides to publish Mira’s poems to resurrect her, to make her alive again much to the chagrin of Vanna, since this involves the exposure of her (Vanna’s) father’s behaviour. Urmila risks the friendship of Vanna not only for her decision to publish Mira’s poems but also for helping Shakutai’s daughter Kalpana – a rape victim also. Urmila remains by Shakutai’s side and gives her emotional support. The presence of Kalpana becomes a substitute of Anu in the life of Urmila and she feels a strange kind of emotional attachment with her. Though Urmila is not related to Kalpana and Shakutai, she is bound to the grief-stricken mother and daughter by the bond of sympathy and understanding. She regularly visits hospital and Shakutai’s home in the slums to inquire about Kalpana’s condition. Enraged at the indignity heaped on Kalpana, she wants to report this matter to the officials, but Shakutai begs her not to do so. She tries to make Shakutai understand that Kalpana is not at fault but the man who did this to her is the real culprit and therefore, he is to be blamed and not she. Urmila bursts with
anger when Shakutai accuses Kalpana for the wrongs done to her: “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).

Mother’s indifference, the apathy shown by hospital staff and the police official’s callousness fill Urmi with disgust. She is shocked to find that everyone wants to hush up the rape case and in the process the rapist is able to go scot free. Though Urmila is filled with sympathies for Kalpana, her mother’s adamant attitude, not to report to the police, makes it difficult for Urmi to help Kalpana in any concrete way. For some time she remains a mute spectator. But when the hospital authorities decide to shift Kalpana to a suburban hospital, her patience gives way. She asks Vanna to talk to higher officials but Vanna expresses her inability to help Kalpana and asks Urmi also not to take it too seriously. Back at her home, Urmila’s crusade for helping Kalpana does not receive the approval of her mother Inni. Despite all this opposition, Urmila decides to take the matter to the press so that Kalpana may get the justice.

So far, Indu, Saru and Jaya have fought their own battles; Urmila is Shashi Deshpande’s first protagonist who decides to fight another woman’s battle. Through the help of her journalist friend Malcolm, she gets the matter presented in the press. Through this move she succeeds in getting the transfer of Kalpana to another hospital annulled. The issue gains public attention and the government orders a fresh investigation. Soon there is a demonstration of protest outside Kalpana’s hospital. So much solidarity from women activists helps Shakutai shed her fear of humiliation, and enhance her morality. Overwhelmed by the protest from women folk, she says, “The whole world is my friend” (179). These words from Shakutai’s mouth speak volumes about the efforts of Urmila, who, undeterred by various odds in her path, succeeds in achieving for Shakutai and Kalpana what she wanted. She breaks the wall of resentment of Shakutai who was dead against the reporting of the matter to the media. She becomes successful in changing the pattern of thinking of an uneducated woman who gives undue importance to false sense of honour than the wellbeing of her daughter. Urmila’s efforts bear fruit the day when Shakutai, after Sulu’s suicide finds Prabhakar responsible for the calamity and asks, “Should I tell the police?” (194)
Thus, Urmila emerges fully aware of the unequal treatment meted out to women and is desperate to help everyone who comes in her contact. Her encouragement to Vanna to be more assertive in life and not be just a door-mat, her sympathies with Shakutai, her effort to take up the task of translating the poems written by her dead mother-in-law from Kannada to English and her strong intention of publishing them are commendable and are clear manifestation of her feeling of sisterhood in which she differs from earlier protagonists. No other character in Shashi Deshpande’s earlier novels takes up cudgels on behalf of other characters. Moreover, the protagonists in the earlier novels are aware of the inequalities in society but they do not attempt to set them right. It is Urmila who makes Indira Nityanandam comment, “The hope for Indian women lies in the happy fact that though here are Miras and Kalpanas and Shakutais, we also have our Urmilas.”

Though Urmila is educated and exposed to Western ideas, she does not seem to agree with Simone de Beauvoir’s belief that marriage diminishes man but almost annihilates woman. She accepts the sanctity and need of the institution of marriage. Rather, she accepts marriage as a necessity for women and especially for women like Shakutai and Sulu, for whom it is an ultimate source of social, economic, and physical security. By comparing herself with these women Urmila finds that her life is far better than the terrible life these women are forced to lead: “...I’ve been lucky that’s all. While these women ... They never had a chance” (174). This comparison sets the process of introspection of her own situation into motion. She realizes that as compared with all other women she is fortunate enough as she is educated, economically independent, confident and smart enough to deal with the situations. She comes to know that a rift is created in her every relationship because she refuses to flow with the mainstream. She finds relationships very difficult, “with too many chasms to bridge.” But various relationships around her such as between her papa and Inni, Vanna and Harish, Baaajji and Aju, Vanna and her daughters, Shakutai and Kalpana make her realize that though these are filled with love and compassion, it does not prevent them from being “ignited by clashes of egos, desires and self-interest.” Knowledge dawns upon her that relationship can be wholesome only when the people themselves are whole. But the great divide in ourselves is “hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept, to live with” (201). So,
desire for wholesome relationship is an illusion. Realization dawns upon her that one should not expect too much from others; rather, should try to appreciate what one already has.

When the fates of Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu are considered by Urmi, and are compared with her own, she finds that her situation is far better than theirs. This realization makes her regain courage and learn that she should use her freedom and advantages of her life as a gift. It further brings peace of mind to confused Urmi who decides to be content with life as it is. She is now hopeful that her husband Kishore will remove his armour of withdrawal one day which would in turn facilitate her reach to his soul. Though Anu has gone, she still has her son Kartik towards whom she has her responsibility as a mother. She realizes that however burdensome our ties are, however painful our experiences are, one can never give up: "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).

Urmi realizes the strength of love which acts as an adhesive for people, preventing them from feelings of despair and loneliness. It is this feeling of love which makes Urmi involve herself with the problems of Shakutai. Urmi’s company brings change in her thinking who is now at her daughter’s side, in her pain and suffering. The patience with which she bears the death of Sulu, and the practical wisdom which she displays by involving herself in household work, are really commendable and act as source of inspiration for Urmi, the protagonist. Urmi surpasses Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and all the earlier heroines in the sense that by forgetting her own grief she gets involved in the sufferings of those who are less fortunate and tries to bring some positive changes in their lives. She gives voice to the women who are silenced by societal mores. By protesting on their behalf, she draws society’s attention towards these women. Her faith and belief in the system makes her hopeful for a bright future. Though she now understands the value of love and relationships, the real understanding comes to Urmi only through the words of Shakutai, an uneducated, low class woman who says, “This is how life is for most of us, most of the time; we are absorbed in the daily routine of living. The main urge is always to survive” (203). This urge to survive does not let Urmi and
Shakutai succumb to their griefs. The way they are shown busy in their routine chores in the last pages of the story is a triumph of their will to survive and go on in spite of all odds. Daily routine that takes care of a hundred trifling matters brings an order and rhythm to their life. It is this spirit which connects the two, Urmi and Shakutai, whose life can be described through Mira’s words: “Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me, I am terrified by the thought of dying, of ceasing to be” (203).

Thus, this urge to survive makes The Binding Vine a different novel from earlier ones and the feeling of sisterhood which Urmi displays, puts her on a higher pedestal than Indu, Jaya and Saru.

A MATTER OF TIME

Feelings of sisterhood continue to be the watchword of the lives of Sumi, Kalyani and Aru in Deshpande’s next novel, A Matter of Time. Though Kalyani, Sumi and Aru are related to each other as mothers and daughters but unlike the mothers of earlier novels, here, they are not hostile towards their daughters; they, rather, provide them all the care and love they need. Daughters too, fulfil their responsibility as children for their mothers. The major alienating factor for these mothers and daughters seems to be the desertion by their fathers. This type of betrayal in relationships not only proves disastrous for women and children but also for men which becomes clear through the analysis of Shripati’s and Gopal’s predicament. Moreover, this novel can be interpreted as a challenge to the observation of critics who have acknowledged Deshpande as a feminist only, because for the first time in Deshpande’s novels, a male character, i.e. Gopal, occupies a prominent place in the novel. Instead of holding him solely responsible for the sufferings of his family, Deshpande has portrayed the character of Gopal very sympathetically, revealing his complexes and dilemmas, which not only alienate him from his own self but from the other members of the family also. There is a subtle treatment in the novel of alienation from society as well, suffered by both, Sumi and Gopal, because of their peculiar circumstances. The way the two remain impenetrable, unknowable others to each other, has been rendered in a very delicate and suggestive manner by the writer. However, the theme of alienation and affirmation has been developed, in this novel also, mainly through the treatment of human relationships.
Deshpande feels that among all human relationships, family relationships are the most “mystifying thing” in the Indian context and disserve to be harnessed properly. “I will continue to wonder about it”, she says, “puzzle over it and write about it. And still find it tremendously intriguing, fascinating.”

Family is, thus, the hub of all human activities in the fictional world of Shashi Deshpande. But she is not willing to be confined to the grooves of family in the narrow sense. She says, “Undoubtedly, my novels are all about family relationship. But ... I go beyond that because the relationship which exist within the family are, to an extent, parallel to the relationships which exist between human beings outside ... When I am writing about the family, it is not just about the family. It definitely does not limit my canvas. On the contrary, that is where everything beings.”

Deshpande’s comments are confirmed by the novel *A Matter of Time* where she begins with family relationship but ends up by concentrating on larger issues pertaining to human life.

*A Matter of Time* begins with the story of a family which resides in a house named ‘Vishwas’ and through the relationships of members of this house Deshpande reveals that “human bonds in the form of personal relationship often become a prelude to the destructive consequences, disturbing the structure of social harmony.” Harmony in society is mainly based on the harmonious marital relationship, a relationship in which man and woman are intimately related to each other. Economic insecurity, emotional and attitudinal incompatibility and sexual abuse have been the main reasons behind the disillusionment in marriage in earlier novels. But here, in this novel, Shashi Deshpande concentrates on desertion as a major alienating factor in the lives of almost all the characters. The reason behind desertion or fear of desertion on which Shashi Deshpande concentrates in this novel, is failure to bear the male heir (in case of Manorama) or the failure to take proper care of him (in case of Kalyani). It is ingraind in the mind of woman, from the very beginning, that her main motive after marriage is to provide a son to her husband. If somehow she fails in this purpose, her husband as well as society, condemns her as good for nothing. It is taken to be a serious drawback of her personality which authorizes her husband to go for a second marriage, which ultimately results in abrupt fall in woman’s status and dignity. This fear of desertion by husband makes the
woman highly insecure which she tries to overcome through some desperate measures as in the case of Manorama, Kalyani's mother.

Manorama, the confident matriarch of first generation, comes from a humble background. But her intelligence and self-assurance lead to her marriage with the rich Vithalrao. As Manorama comes from a much poorer background than her husband, after the marriage she breaks off all ties with her own family, except the youngest brother who had been left motherless at the age of one: "...perhaps this boy, born after her marriage, was the one child she had never carried about and therefore brought her fewer reminders of a past she wanted to forget." This conscious effort on Manorama's part to forget, or rather, reject her past is an attempt to push away her poverty-ridden childhood from her life and all those relatives who remind her of her humble background, which for her is a threat to her newly acquired status. By cutting herself off from her family after her marriage, she "denuded herself of her childhood, of the innocent part of her being" (120) and becomes schemy to retain her strong position in her husband's house. Her fear of losing this position makes her insecure and schemy. Her insecurity is aggravated by her failure to bear a son: "To add to her insecurity, that main crutch, the one most women depended on, a son, was denied to her" (128). After many miscarriages she gives birth to Kalyani. Though Vithalrao never grudges the birth of only a daughter and not a son yet Manorama's knowledge of tradition, which allows a husband to leave his wife if she gives birth to daughters only, makes her fearful of being abandoned for another wife. This fear alienates her from her true self to the extent that she fails to differentiate between right and wrong, and makes her highly selfish due to which she cannot forge a meaningful relationship with her only daughter Kalyani. In her fit of selfishness, she makes Shripati marry her daughter against her wishes so that the property, her only source of security might remain in "her family" (129). Thus, the greed for property and power makes her so cruel that she turns a blind eye to the welfare of her own daughter.

Through the example of Manorama's daughter, Kalyani, Shashi Deshpande shows how the parents convert the lives of their children into a sort of hell by using them as pawns in their efforts to get rid of their insecurities and fear. Kalyani is the most pathetic figure in the novel who becomes the victim of Manorama's whims in her parental home.
and Shripati’s indifference in her in-laws house. Being a girl, Kalyani has to bear the wrath of her mother who craves for a son who could raise her status as a woman. She becomes an easy prey to her mother’s frustration born out of her inability to bear a male child. Her mother’s disenchantment with her is intensified by Kalyani’s ordinary looks, as against the beautiful and accomplished she desired her daughter to be. Though Kalyani is quite intelligent and good at studies but these qualities of hers do not hold good in her mother’s eyes. Thus, Kalyani proves to be a great disappointment to her mother. She endures the cruelties and rejection of her mother with equanimity. She adopts stoic silence, “so dense and hard that ... words bounce back ...” (211), as a strategy of resisting her mother's dominance. With a domineering mother like Manorama, Kalyani becomes “unsure of herself... with a sense of inadequacy as well” (150). She recalls how terror drove her into numbness when she was questioned by her mother about an anonymous letter. To her mother, the silence confirms her guilt, and as a punishment, her studies are stopped. She is coerced into marrying unwilling Shripati, her uncle, whom she dreaded much. Thus, mother’s antagonism pushes her towards “the hopelessness that lay within the relationship, that doomed it from the start” (143).

When unwilling partners are forced to enter the marital bond, the relationship is bound to be doomed. The fate of Kalyani and Shripati’s marriage bears testimony to this fact. Being relatives, they are not at ease in their new roles as husband and wife. But the real crack in their marriage results from the loss of their four-year-old abnormal son in the medley at a railway station. Unable to control three small children, while Sripati had gone to check the train timings, Kalyani loses track of her mentally retarded son, Madhav. Refusing to forgive his wife’s negligence Shripati leaves her on the platform forcing her ultimately to go back to her parents with her two daughters. This act of public desertion, for Kalyani, is “a memory so painfully blotted out that to bring it back to life would be as painful as the process of childbirth” (144). In spite of this painful desertion Kalyani is ready to reconcile with Shripati who is summoned by bed-ridden Manorama. But the day Kalyani hears about the construction of a room upstairs, she realizes the seriousness of his anger towards her. He agrees to stay in house, but only upstairs, so as to end all communication and contact with her. Living in the same house on two floors, with stony silence between them, connected only by a hanging bell, they live a totally
estranged life. Holding Kalyani responsible for the loss of their only son, Shripati punishes her by severing all relations with her. He detaches himself completely from Kalyani and his daughters. He rarely comes down and never interacts with Kalyani, who brings up their two daughters alone. This detachment on Shripati’s part not only conveys the hurt and despair of his victim Kalyani but also gives us a peep into the mind of a man who, out of gratitude, enters a relationship. Through Shripati, Shashi Deshpande displays the dual standards of society, for men and women. A man is the master of his will who can take any decision on his own accord without being answerable to his wife and children. And wife on the other hand is not even given a chance to explain her case, leave apart taking decision. Shripati’s unwillingness to listen to his wife’s explanation makes him a male chauvinist in true sense. His segregation of himself from Kalyani and family is a clear indication of inflated male ego. His dissociation from his family can also be taken as his way of rejecting a marriage he is forced into, for which he punishes Kalyani indirectly through his silence. This silence adopted by him to punish Kalyani further isolates him from his own family and a life of normalcy. In this way, his wilful isolation makes him more alienated than Kalyani, who has her sister, Goda, and two daughters with her. In an effort to punish Kalyani, he punishes his own self by distancing himself from his family, and thus, denying himself the bliss of a householder, he could have enjoyed. In paying off the gratitude towards his sister through marriage, he unwarily pushes himself and Kalyani into a bottomless abyss of maladjustment, discontentment and loneliness. But it is Kalyani, the woman partner, who has to bear the most of the brunt of his decision. Kalyani, a traditional woman, takes desertion by husband as her fate, and considers her situation better than widows. She is satisfied with the fact that she is a married woman though living in the same house she has not talked with her husband for the last thirty five years. Much to the bewilderment of her granddaughter, Aru, she carries her husband’s name, a mark of matrimony, in spite of being deserted by him. Sumi also questions Kalyani’s supreme faith in importance of marriage for woman in patriarchal culture:

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

It is for this status provided by 'Kumkum' on her forehead that she keeps clinging
to the marriage, the meaning and worth of which was lost long ago. But with the
unexpected death of Shripati her hopeless marriage literally comes to an end.

History of Kalyani and Shripati's incompatible marriage, resulting in different
forms of alienation, gets repeated through Sumi and Gopal, though the difference
between the two pairs is too conspicuous. The mental trauma caused in the two cases is
of the same intensity but the reasons behind desertion and the reactions of different
characters involved in it are quite different. Desertion by husband is a form of emotional
and mental violence against woman because desertion means the intentional, permanent
forsaking and abandonment of one spouse (here wife) by the other (husband) without the
other's consent and without reasonable cause. It is not only a total repudiation of the
obligations of marriage but also the very humanity of woman, who is rendered
emotionally, psychologically, socially and economically bankrupt. She is left to fend for
herself and her children. Moreover, the attitude of the society towards deserted woman
rubs salt into the wound. Such are the norms and values of society that being at the
receiving end, it is the woman who has to carry the shame and stigma of being abandoned
and the husband goes scot free. Gopal's desertion of Sumi is a manifestation of the fact
that man can choose his own path but the responsibility of his weaknesses, essentially,
falls on the shoulders of woman. Man can choose to "walk out" and to make spaces for
"independent self" negating the obligations towards family and society but the woman
has no other option but to bear its consequences, leave apart choosing her own path.

Sumi has to go through the same predicament as that of Kalyani in her marital life
when after twenty years of married life Gopal suddenly declares his decision of
renunciation, leaving Sumi in a shocked silence. The use of third person narrative denies
a chance to the reader to gauge the effect of the shock when Gopal breaks the news to his
wife who was watching T.V. at that time. His words coming to her against the background of clown's song “jeena yahan, marna yahan, iske siva jana kahan” leave her unperturbed at that moment. The realization dawns on her only later when she abruptly gets up at three in the morning and “finds herself alone in the bed, the pillow by her side cold and smooth, the other half of the bed uncrumpled, the blanket still folded. So it is true, what he told her, he meant it, he’s already done it”.

Though utterly shocked at this desertion, Sumi exhibits tremendous will power to pick up the broken threads of life. It seems that the part of herself that can sense and feel has departed with Gopal. Unlike Jaya of That Long Silence, she does not crumble to pieces at the pain and humiliation inflicted on her. Surprisingly her only grudge towards her Buddha like husband is leaving her the task of intimating her daughters the fact that their father has walked out on them. Once the truth dawns on her, she is able to see the picture with a detachment that surprises everyone. Though the Big House provides shelter and safety for Sumi and her daughters yet she experiences a sense of homelessness and rootlessness. Though she shows no outward sign of distress, she “has the air of being lost, of having no place in her childhood home” (33). Beneath the apparent, unperturbed composure and silence of Sumi, is a kind of blankness that suggests her disorientation. Only when she returns with her three daughters to the shelter of the Big House that the dam that she has erected with her silence breaks. Just as it takes time to share one’s life with another person, it is equally difficult to get used to the sense of being lonely. It is not loneliness that is Sumi’s enemy, but a sense of alienation, which is aggravated by her children’s accusation of her not caring about the irresponsible behaviour of their father. Deeply hurt by the accusation she traces her mind for past incidents that hint at his desertion. She remembers that Gopal never believed in ‘sahriday,’ in the sense of oneness. Ramesh’s narration of how Gopal suddenly decided to leave his sister in Bombay to join a college in Shivpur affirms the potential in him to walk out on his family. Hence, while others are pondering over possible reasons, Sumi knows that “the reason lies inside him, the reason is him”.

A close look at her marriage instills in her the feeling that they belonged to two different realms. The unexpected quirks in Gopal that first fascinated Sumi cease to be
amusing in marital life. It was her stubbornness, as Sumi recaptures now, to break out of her father’s authority that emboldened her to spend a night in Gopal’s room, forcing him to accept her into his life. Being immature at the age of eighteen, life was a joke for her to understand that there was something in him intangible for others. For this failure of understanding of Gopal’s true nature she has to pay a heavy price in the form of being abandoned. But now, fully aware of his bent of mind, she refuses to question Gopal about his desertion, for she knows that he who gave an impossible metaphysical reason for resigning a job would provide an equally complex answer. Yet she wants to question about their (her own and her daughters’) fate which is solely the result of his absence from family unit and with which their lives have suddenly come to a standstill.

With Gopal’s absence, the swift flowing stream of Sumi’s life, her movements and thoughts loose their natural rhythm and she becomes hyper-active. It is only a natural physical reaction to her emotional state. Deshpande aptly employs the bird image to communicate Sumi’s mental state: “Now, like a stunned bird coming back to life, there is a frenzy of movement, a tremendous flurry of activity, a frenetic shaking of feathers. Sumi cannot be still” (28). This hyper-activism on Sumi’s part is a clear indication of her tension and frightening loneliness and a desperate effort to gain control over her disintegrating life. Her external cover of confidence and contentment is only a method to hide her unbearable vacuity. The “purposeless extravagance about her movements” and her “stylized manner” of walking are efforts to mask her agony. Her need for constant physical contact, for Gopal’s reassuring presence is a further manifestation of her sense of loneliness and insecurity. Though Gopal was never over-protective, his absence leaves a vast emptiness: “I can’t find my bearings, there are no markers any more to show me which way I should go” (36). Her feelings of bewilderment and agonizing loneliness are further intensified by society’s insensitivity towards her predicament. She is advised by Shankar’s mother: “Go back to your husband, he’s a good man. If you’ve done wrong, he’ll forgive you. And if he has – women shouldn’t have any pride” (161). What pains Sumi more than Gopal’s desertion is the partisan attitude of society towards a deserted woman. Through this advice of Shankar’s mother, Shashi Deshpande comments on the dual standards adopted by society for its male and female members. A man is permitted to abandon his responsibility of a householder and embark on his call for renunciation
through the means of Vanaprastha Ashram. But a woman, who abandons or is even forced by her husband’s desertion to step out of her traditional life, revolving around home and family, is often characterized as outcaste and an aberration. Ironically, it is the woman who has to bear the consequences of rejection of marital life by her husband not only through denial of her physical and emotional fulfilment but also in the form of social alienation. In this context Y.S. Sunita Reddy remarks, “Episodes from history and mythology bear witness to men who are venerated for their selflessness while no thought was given to silent suffering and martyrdom of their wives. Lakshman’s steadfastness and devotion finds no parallel in Indian mythology, while Siddhartha is hailed for spurning the luxury and comfort of princely life in pursuit of knowledge. Their respective spouses Urmila and Yashodhara, however, remain shadowy figures in the background, doomed to live a life of anonymity and insignificance.”

If Sumi feels rudderless, lonely, bereft of her human pride and individual identity, Gopal too, is hurled by his act of walking out on his family, into endless pit of nothingness and meaninglessness. In fact Gopal is a very complex character offering gripping and illuminating insights into the dark recesses of a lonely and alienated soul. The significance of his character can be gauged from the fact that he is the first male figure who occupies a central position in any of Deshpande’s novels. The first person narration, which serves in earlier novels to reveal the workings of the psyche of female protagonists, is used here to unravel the inner conflicts and intricacies of the mind of a man. Detailed and penetrative delineation and soul-searing of Gopal suggests Deshpande’s abilities as an artist to portray the life of male figures with a sympathetic understanding of their predicament. Unlike earlier novels, where males are shown responsible for the exploitation and unhappiness of their female counterparts, Gopal’s case gets a patient hearing in this novel. Gopal has begun his life with high idealisms. That’s why, Kalyani had a great regard and affection for him, and Premi “measured all other men” against him. But in his student days itself “it had seemed to him that there was a truth that lay at the end of the road, waiting to be revealed to him. It did not take him long to realize the futility of this hope” (98-99). This hopelessness in Gopal which forces him to escape from his inner self is the result of bitterness caused by his childhood experiences. Like Saru of The Dark Holds No Terrors, Gopal too, finds it difficult to get
rid of the impressions of childhood insecurities. Gopal’s father had married his brother’s widow who later on became Gopal’s mother. Regarding the image of his father, there is a firm conviction in his mind: “A man who sinned against his brother by loving his wife. The brother dying of grief and the wife and the man marrying immediately after” (42). The awareness that he is the fruit of this unholy alliance fills him with feelings of degradation and humiliation. He views his father as a man who succumbed to his passion for his brother’s wife, and after brother’s death, a marriage of convenience was solemnized. In this decision of his father, Gopal finds the reflections of incest and as in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, his father is his mother’s guilty partner. This realization unsettles his adolescent mind which undergoes severe mental conflict. This conflict is further aggravated by his parents’ gruesome death which leaves him in great confusion and void. What ruins his peace of mind further is his painful realization that even his sister Sudha and he do not share the same father. Isolated and abandoned, Gopal starts nurturing the feeling of loneliness and desolation: “Emptiness, I realized then, is always waiting for us. The nightmare we most dread, of waking up among total strangers, is one we can never escape. And so it’s a lie, it means nothing, it’s just deceiving ourselves when we say we are not alone. It is the desperation of a drowning person that makes us cling to other humans. All human ties are only a masquerade. Someday, sometime, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth” (52).

To fill the vacuum created by utter loneliness Gopal marries Sumi. For him Sumi’s company is a sort of shelter against all chaos and troubles of childhood. It is an effort on his part to fill up the inner void and feelings of utter loneliness. He marries her with a condition that they are “not going to be tied together,” and there would be no “handcuffs.” Laying down this condition between them before marriage shows that the potential to walk out on his wife and children was always there in him. For him, marriage is shelter against the crisis of external world and simultaneously, a means of trying to have some fulfilment. He admits: “After marriage, there were no more doubts. I knew I needed her, her warmth, her humanness, her womanness. The life of the body – why do the saints disdain it so? It is through our bodies that we find our first connections to this world” (68).
But this love based on physicality is bound to lose its sheen with the passage of time after which Gopal is once again left rudderless in this complex world: “But this passes…. We don’t have to go such a long way, either, as Yayati did, to realize that a time comes when the pleasures of the body pall. They taste flat, insipid, and perhaps even bitter. We want love to last, we think when we begin that it will, but it never does …” (168). At this time he realizes the futility of sensual needs: “The body shrinks from annihilation – Camus is right when he says this. But there is no choice. The life of the body has to end. It was my body that told me the truth once again, my body that could lie beside Sumi night after night, quiescent, feeling nothing. After the earlier humiliation of my inability to sustain my excitement, of being unable to go on, this was peaceful. But I could not avoid the truth, I knew it was over” (69).

Disillusionment caused by the short span of physical pleasures gets strengthened by Sumi’s involvement with children and her resultant distance from Gopal. For a father the presence of children might be a casual event but for a woman it is closely associated with her whole existence. If the presence of Aru, Charu and Seema, is an extension of the space for Sumi, it is isolation for Gopal and an unconscious negation of his personal desires. Sumi’s attachment to Aru intensifies the sense of negligence and insecurity in the life of Gopal: “I saw it when Sumi put the baby to her breast. For I knew when I looked at them, that they belonged together. I never did. Even when Sumi was impatient, when she showed a flash of temper as she often did for being deprived of her sleep, they were together in their magic circle. Woman and child, and I was outside. A man is always an outsider” (68). He accepts that Sumi’s over involvement in children brought greater alienation in his life. He feels that a woman pays the debt of motherhood by giving birth to children but a man cannot protect his inner self from the chaos born out of this loneliness: “That’s a debt, we can never repay, it’s a burden we can never lay down. Women will never understand this, they don’t need to, they are luckier, the day they become mother themselves, they have repaid their debt, they are unburdened and free. What is fatherhood set against this weight, this certainty of motherhood” (216).

The absence of feelings of belongingness to his children and the lingering memories of his insecure childhood push Gopal towards renunciation of the life of
householder – desertion of his wife and daughters: “I stopped believing in the life I was leading, suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I knew I could not go on” (41). The reason behind his inability to go on and desertion of his family are not clear to his own self. That’s why, Subhash K. Jha opines, “Gopal is not our average cardboard card but a distressed guilt ridden husband and father baffled by his own sudden withdrawal from active domesticity.”27 This withdrawal from active domesticity is neither meant for torturing Sumi, as it is in the case of Shripati, nor is it instigated by his desire to take ‘Sanyas’ as Sumi infers. It cannot be equated to the Vedic renunciation of freeing “himself of all bondages”28 and if it appears to be renunciation, it is skin deep only. N. Poovalingam emphasizes this fact when he says, “Gopals abandoning the family is not the result of saturation in the worldly life. His is more a withdrawal in pain than a renunciation due to contentment. Moreover, Gopal’s life has nothing to offer in lines corresponding to the other Vedic stages of a man’s life. His predicament is more akin to the existentialist’s.”29

His detachment and renunciation can be better explained through existential point of view. Shashi Deshpande herself has quoted Camus and Kierkegaard at crucial points. Sumi thinks of Gopal, “as if he has been suspended in space, in nothingness.” Gopal, in line with existentialists agrees, “Camus is right. We carry our places of exile within us. It entered into me too …” (217). Thus, exile or in other words silent withdrawal is adopted as a means to escape from further loss of his conscious self. He may be justified in his decision but he cannot be absolved of the charge of adoption of insensitive attitude towards the sentiments of his wife and daughters. That’s why, everybody, except Sumi, questions him for his unreasonable behaviour. Gopal is grateful to Sumi for not asking any questions to him and thus saving him “the mortification of wading through this slush of embarrassing half truths” (41). She is well aware, unlike others, of the developments taking place in him, rendering his life into “bits and pieces” and making it “tantalisingly disjointed” (84). But Aru, not mature enough to see through his alienation, interrogates him bluntly: “Why did you get married at all, why did you have children?” (62) This blunt interrogation from his own daughter kicks up the feelings of guilt and helplessness, lingering in his psyche. He desperately confesses his own weakness and pathetically
implores, “I was frightened, Aru, frightened of the emptiness within me, I was frightened
of what I could do to us, to all of you with that emptiness inside me” (50).

This emptiness and loneliness that haunt the consciousness of Gopal, that make
his life incomplete and intolerable, make him renounce the marital and family life
because “Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes – a lifetime of commitment
– is not possible for all of us” (69). This type of commitment is not possible for Gopal at
least. His fear of commitment in marriage is revealed to Sumi in their last meeting. It is
when she gets a glimpse of Gopal’s new life that she feels the reality of his life apart from
her and children. She painfully understands the actuality of her desertion: “We can never
be together again. All these days I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended
in space, in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living, his life has moved
on, it will go on without me” (85).

This clear understanding of her situation helps her cope admirably with her role as
a single parent; bear her status as a deserted wife with equanimity, sheltering her silence
within deep recesses of her heart. Her very silence, however, conveys her pain more
effectively than words can. But display of grief is not acceptable to the self-pride of
Sumi: “She fully realizes that tying a lacerated heart to one’s wrist as it were and showing
it to the world is meaningless.”30 That’s why, Sumi contains and suppresses her feelings
of hurt deep within herself like Kalyani who never opened her heart to anyone. History of
the mother’s life is repeated in daughter’s life. The only difference being that Kalyani
could not get help from any quarter, not even from her mother Manorama, and Sumi has
her mother, sister and many other relatives by her side in this hour of despair. By
juxtaposing this mother-daughter duo that has to face similar circumstances in their lives,
Shashi Deshpande brings home the fact that unhappy wifehood is the legacy that mothers
transfer to their daughters.

By concentrating on the martial life and sufferings, fears and insecurities of three
women Manorama, Kalyani and Sumi belonging to three generations, Shashi Deshpande
makes it clear that no change has taken place in the predicament of women with the
passage of time. They are still dependent on their husbands for their happiness as they
have been in earlier times. This dependency makes them insecure, and insecurity in turn
leads to either dominance, as in the case of Manorama, or submission and silence, as in the case of Kalyani and Sumi. Through dominance they make the lives of their near and dear ones miserable and through submission they make their own lives miserable by directing the anger inwards. Both the strategies give rise to pernicious home environment to which children become an easy prey. This unhealthy environment in the family where father and mother are not at good terms with each other has a negative effect on the tender psyche of children. Very wrong notions about social and personal relationships and institutions like marriage get inculcated in them, which affect their adult life in a substantial manner. Through the example of Sumi, Premi and Aru, Shasi Deshpande shows the effect strained relationships and uneasy home environment have on children.

To Premi, childhood offers memories which “are only of deprivation and fear” (133). Her peculiar two floored family compels young Premi to distance herself from others for fear of their investigative questions. She feels like a leper among other children with normal families. Seeing happy families is like watching a movie for her. As children she and her sister have accepted the oddity of their family life for it had become an inseparable part of their lives. To the child Premi, the shame of it matters more than the knowledge of what really happened. The singular response of Kalyani to the incident, “the baby (Premi) was crying,” burdens Premi with guilt. Her complaint to Aru, “My father did not speak to me until I was ten,” (18) throws light on her emotional deprivation.

Sumi, herself a victim of emotional deprivation and childhood scars, does not want, as a caring mother, to bring up her children in a crippling environment. She has an ominous feeling that she and her daughters are being sucked into endless nothingness of the Big House as it had done to her mother, Kalyani. Watching their voices subdued to the exact decibel, required to keep them away from being heard by their ‘upstair’ grandfather, Sumi painfully remarks, “I don’t want my daughters live with a hand clasped over their mouths, like Premi and I had to” (59). This single image contains within itself all the untold feelings of pain, agony, alienation and anger that Sumi experienced as a child. These deeply buried childhood fears make her feel like an alien in her parents’ home. To Sumi, who had witnessed the obsessive preference for the male child, the walls
of the house cry out, “We’re interlopers... my daughters and I. Just passing through” (71).

Sumi’s daughters, especially Aru, feel like outsiders in their grandparents’ house, where they take refuge after being deserted by their father. Aru feels doubly victimized: firstly due to her father’s desertion in her own home and secondly due to rejection of her grandmother by her grandfather. Aru, being “the focal point” in the novel, is “an observer” of the drama affecting the entire family. She is trying to make sense of “what is happening, her consciousness moving outside herself and reaching out to others as well, embracing, in fact, the whole of what is happening” (185). Keen observation of happenings around herself makes her extra sensitive about the tragedy that has befallen them. She is pained by the disintegration of the family more than anyone else: “There is no family left. We are five separate individuals, all of us going our different ways. Five units that don’t add up to a whole” (18).

The wholeness which she yearns for and has been denied to her because of her father’s desertion fills her with anger and restlessness. Her restlessness and suffering come to the fore the day they go to vacate their own house. For Aru it is not an occasion of simply vacating the house but a significant event which would break the bondage of the family. She feels wounded when she looks at her belongings in the open. The whole description of the scattered house has a close proximity with the mental condition of Aru. In the novels of Shashi Deshpande parental home assumes the significance of identity and existence. Aru is so overwhelmed by the scene of vacated house that she faints while stepping over the threshold. The fainting fit of Aru is the symbolic manifestation of her inability to accept the denial of her affinity with her roots. Her helplessness in accepting the new situation makes her rebellious. She chides her mother, Sumi, for not questioning Gopal for his irresponsible behaviour. Pained by father’s desertion, which brings with it social stigma and myriad unanswerable questions, she decides to settle the scores with him on her own. She holds her ‘hostility’ against Gopal like a surgeon holding the surgical knife to remove the tumour. Contrary to other emotionally deprived daughters who have never tasted the sweetness of paternal affection, Aru refuses to let go what she has been cherishing so far. But the failure of her attempt completely exhausts her.
Encompassed in her humiliation, she decides to sue her father. It is not her antipathy but her love for him, the intense desire to keep their family intact that drives her to extremes. And this unfulfilled desire brings frustrated look on her face, look of a person combating shadow, “a shadow that absorbs her anger and gives her nothing in return.” Her agony is aggravated by her sense of guilt for she thinks that it was her remark on the occasion of his resignation that led this calamity in their lives.

The calamity in her grandparents’ lives affects Aru as much as it does Sumi and Premi. The oddity of their relationship as husband and wife makes Aru uneasy. Through Premi she gets to know about the reason of long silence between Kalyani and Shripati. This knowledge, instead of bringing consolation to Aru, becomes a cause of greater violence and anger in her mind for Shripati. She is baffled by the horrors of silence in which Kalyani had been suffering for last thirty five years. She is puzzled and broods over the situation of Kalyani and Sumi. She becomes so apathetic that in each relation of man and woman, Kalyani-Shripati, Anil-Premi, Sumi-Gopal, she perceives “new dimensions of betrayal and cruelty” (145). Resultantly she looses her faith in the ties of marriage either as a part of social security or a foundation of man and woman relationship. She admits: “I’ve been thinking about marriage, a great deal. What’s there in it? I mean look at Amma and now Sumi … What do you get out of it?” (138)

This hopelessness in the institution of marriage makes her declare, “I’m never going to get married” (76). Through this response of Aru, Shashi Deshpande brings out how children of broken families tend to develop negative feelings about the very institution of marriage. The social stigma they are subjected to not only alienates them from their environment but also undermines their sense of self-esteem and confidence. It even estranges them from dreams of happy relationships in future, rendering them sceptical, at times even cynical, about human ties. Disillusioned, embittered and bewildered, they find it difficult to relate themselves meaningfully to others.

What differentiates Shashi Deshpande from her contemporary writers is that though her novels present a world afflicted with hatred, fear, anger, loneliness and emptiness they are not shrouded in overwhelming and unrelieved gloom. Hers is not an art of death but of life. It takes an artist like Deshpande to affirm the value of life and the
human potentials to emerge out of the darkness of despair, while describing the realities of disintegration, disappointments and loneliness. Though the glimmers of positive outlook can be witnessed here and there, in some of the minor figures also, it is the protagonist, who mainly through her thinking, decisions and actions affirms the worth and validity of human existence. This is evident from the way Kalyani, Sumi and Aru respond to their predicament in the patriarchal society, resisting in their own different ways, onslaughts on their integrity and identity. In the face of shattering challenges, they try to gain control over their lives and put things in order on the strength of the confidence and courage they find within themselves and from their bonding with each other.

Kalyani, in spite of having an antagonistic mother and indifferent husband, bears no rancour against life. When Shripati ceases all communication with her, Kalyani does not react with a show of emotions. She resists him by building her own cocoon, having Goda (her sister), Sumi, Premi and their families around the house and by maintaining a stoic silence. "When silence becomes deliberate it acts as a barrier to the penetration of the soul by a perceiver; it works as an operation of power rather than powerlessness. As it withholds communication it produces a kind of awe and becomes a potent tool of resistance." Kalyani's resistance is so hard that even the author remarks in one of her interviews that Kalyani appears to Aru not "as a victim but as a woman who comes out of all that victimization intact." Here, Deshpande emphasizes Kalyani's individualistic, dogged resolve to resist her tortures and survive on her own terms. This dogged resolution to go on even in adverse circumstances keeps her jest for life intact. Like her mother and husband, she does not hanker after a son and never makes life a hell for others or for herself. Rather, she brings up her daughters and grand daughters fondly. Though she is rejected by her husband she never feels broken in spirits and never loses her faith in herself. That's why, she feels happy and empowered when she finds that in Shripati’s will she is referred as Vithalrao and Manorama’s daughter and not as his wife. She does not feel the sting of having been robbed of 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). Her alienation from her husband fails to undermine her faith in the value and validity of human relationships. Her
grand daughter, Aru, is surprised to see Kalyani’s keenness for getting a good match for her which shows her (Kalyani’s) interest and faith in marriage – an institution which is responsible for her own misfortunes. This belief in marriage makes her a class apart from other female protagonists because she is of the opinion that for individual suffering, the age-old arrangement for continuity of life i.e. marriage should not be blamed. Her understanding of life, her broadmindedness, her affection towards her children and her urge to move forwards, in spite of all the onslaughts of time, make one conclude that she is a survivor in the true sense.

Kalyani’s positive outlook and resilient spirit are not just a source of wonder for Aru but a reservoir of moral and psychological strength from which Sumi and Aru draw on, when confronted with crisis of similar nature. Shashi Deshpande uses the old strategy of bringing out the affirmative powers, latent in her protagonists, by placing them in the critical situations in their lives. Sumi finds her life falling apart when her husband suddenly walks out on her. If Saru and Indu take refuge in their parental homes and Jaya at her Dadar flat, Sumi also, accompanied by her daughters, comes to her parental house. But the similarities between Sumi and Deshpande’s earlier protagonists end here. If others submit themselves to introspection and rumination to regain confidence, Sumi straightaway decides to face the facts squarely. Rather than getting quagmired in search for causes of her betrayal by Gopal, she just wants to get on with her life. This is evidenced by the way she starts frantically her search for an independent house. Though her parents do not consider Sumi and her daughters a burden, she is unwilling to stay there. Later, however, she is persuaded to give up the idea considering the impracticalities associated with moving out of the Big House, which is spacious enough to accommodate her family, into an expansive and congested apartment.

Sumi is distinguished from earlier protagonists by a greater independence of mind and self-respect, revealed in her refusal to accept any kind of economic assistance either from her parents or from Premi and Ramesh. That’s why, she takes up a job of a teacher which releases the hidden fountains of creativity in her. She writes a play, “The Gardener’s Son,” for the school function which becomes a success. This success gives a new lease of life to Sumi’s writing talent which makes her feel “so good” that now
suddenly she wants “to do so many things” (231). Inspired by this success, she now desires to rewrite the story of Surpanakha in the Ramayana, from a different perspective: “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). This decision to revise Surpanakha’s episode from a woman’s point of view is a clear indication of Sumi’s modern progressive outlook. It also indicates her desire to place man-woman relationship on sound, non-partisan footing where they can feel the warmth of relationship and not its bondage. This moral and intellectual courage to re-interpret woman’s sexuality, to indicate its power and importance for woman, is further evinced in her resolute action of supporting her daughters in every possible way.

As a mother Sumi stands for responsibility, love, care and concern. She is always anxious about her daughters’ well-being and happiness. Her own suffering does not make her wallow in self-pity and neglect her motherly duty as was the case with Saru. Rather, to keep her daughters away from adverse effects of desertion she never reveals her pain openly to them. She is perfectly aware of her responsibility as a mother-cum-single parent to her daughters. When Aru and she meet with an accident, she becomes totally frenetic and cries for help despite the profuse bleeding from her own injuries. After taking her to the hospital she neither leaves her for a moment nor takes any rest. She is worried about her daughter who feels dejected with her father’s desertion. She desires that her daughter’s life should be easy and comfortable: “I want her to enjoy the good things in life, I want her to taste life, I want her to relish it and not spit it out because she finds it bitter” (220). Bitterness in her own married life does not affect her view about the necessity of marriage for Aru who wishes to remain unmarried. Though she has to bear the brunt of desertion, her faith in the institution remains intact. This, clearly, indicates her optimistic vision of life. She is never seen dejected and forlorn; rather, she demonstrates strength and maturity even in adversity. It is because of this maturity and understanding that she tries to redefine her relation with Gopal. She understands that Gopal’s life from the very beginning has a different concept and a different identity.
"...our journeys are always separate, that's how they're meant to be. If we travel together for a while, that's only a coincidence" (212). Thus, she recognizes the essential loneliness of all human beings and sets Gopal free. This acceptance cannot be termed as passivity, as Shashi Deshpande says, "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."33

Unlike the earlier protagonists, Saru, Indu, Jaya and Urmi, she does not hanker after the reunion with her husband. Her pride prevents her to unlock her heart and lay bare her emotions to Gopal. She does not request him to come back to her: "The picture she presents to the world is one of grace and courage, to be admired rather than pitied" (172). It is this courage which makes her realize that they "can never be together again," and their "lives have diverged, they now move separately, two different streams" (83). In this realization she is different, or rather ahead of her predecessors who are always looking for male support. Sumi, on the other hand, has guts enough to go on her own. She has no desire to plead or reform Gopal, nor she is shown taking support of any other male figure as in the case of Saru, Indu and Jaya. Thus, she is far ahead of her predecessors in boldness and confidence. It is due to this boldness and spirit to move on that she decides to join the permanent job of a teacher away from home. But due to her untimely death, this could not happen. If she had not died prematurely, her affirmation would have been complete in physical, emotional, psychological and economic sense. The sudden death of Sumi makes the reviewers comment that the last section of the novel "seems to be least finished, with many loose threads hanging, almost like a first draft and certainly untouched by a publisher’s editor."34 But the novelist says that Sumi’s death "just happened" and that "it was not deliberate."35 The incident of Sumi’s death makes it clear that Shashi Deshpande believes in portraying the life as it is, with all its uncertainties and realities, and does not make it look colourful through her own readymade solutions.

The vacuum created by Sumi’s death is shown to be filled by the novelist through the optimism displayed by Aru. Aru is the representative of the new generation in the novel which does not accept meekly the wrongs done to it; rather, believes in "that you speak
out, state the truth, that you stand up and defend yourself, that you refuse to be
misjudged” (143). This speaks loudly of the clarity of understanding, firmness of
conviction and strength of will and resolution of the new generation which she represents.
Aru is so imbued with confidence and courage that she refuses to be cowed down or
daunted by any external pressure. Deshpande, through her example, dismantles the
traditional definition of woman as a weak and dependent creature. That’s why, Aru
voices her resistance more vociferously than others. Like her mother, she is not ready to
leave Gopal to himself. Rather, she questions him and makes him feel responsible for
their pain and suffering. She decides to sue him for maintenance even against her
mother’s wishes with whom she empathizes greatly. She tries to fill the vacuum created
by her father in her mother’s life by playing the role of a protective male. Aru decides to
give direction and support to her younger sisters and takes care of Seema with the
sensibility of a mother without any complaint. Aru’s conversion into a responsible elder
of the family suggests that woman is not weak by nature. In the absence of male support,
a woman can think in terms of masculine strength.

Besides showing signs of masculine strength, she is sensitive enough to
understand and feel the pain of others. In the beginning 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 quarters, her “troubled relationship” with her grandmother turns into a
“partnership.” It is because of this renewed relationship that when the news of Sumi’s
and her grandfather Shripati’s death comes, she rushes to Kalyani and kneeling besides
her huddled body says, “Amma, I’m here, I’m your daughter, Amma, I’m your son, and
I’m here with you…” (233).

Aru proves true to her words and like a responsible son, she shoulders all the
responsibilities at home after the death of her mother and grandfather. As against Devaki,
who has been so proud of her competence, it is Aru who manages all the arrangements.
Instead of wallowing in emotional mourning she holds “the weight of her grief in her two
hands, not as if it is a burden, but to balance herself” (234). She not only bears the pain of
her mother’s death stoically but also decides to remain by her grandmother’s side through
thick and thin. Inheriting her mother’s pride, dignity, courage and confidence, Aru does
not look towards her father for help rather she assures him, “We’ll be quite all right, don’t worry about us” (246) and both Kalyani and Aru, standing on threshold, bid farewell to Gopal.

Thus, the ending of the novel with two women representing two generations, denying the help of a male, present a highly optimistic view of life. It strongly refutes Dr. Beena Aggarwal’s opinion that “the ultimate conclusion of *A Matter of Time* is depressing.” These two women are confident enough not to ask for any male help. Only one male member i.e. Gopal left in the family, they neither question his decision of leaving them nor plead to change his decision and stay with them as in the case of earlier protagonists who could not shed their dependency syndrome upto the last moment. They always need a man to fall back upon. But Aru and Kalyani are at ease with themselves and ready to face life by forging a mutual bond between themselves.

Though the two accidental deaths of Shripati and Sumi make the ending somewhat gloomy and pathetic, the overall picture presented in the novel assures us a fresh lease of life: “Nothing is over, things keep coming back over and over again, they’re all connected” (219). The novel, thus, presents realistically the picture of life with all its ugliness, bitterness, frustrations and humiliations. But what strikes the reader most is the affirmation of human spirit to live on with grace and dignity even in the midst of most despairing circumstances: “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).

**SMALL REMEDIES**

*Small Remedies*, structured as biography within biography, is “a profound piece of writing about love and loss, grief and hope, rebellion and sacrifice and above all about the Promethean will to resist, endure and survive.” This novel can be taken as the culmination point of this phase as far as various dimensions of alienation and degree of affirmation displayed by characters is concerned. If in earlier novel, *A Matter of Time*, Shashi Deshpande reveals various forms of alienation through the relationships of four
generations of a family then in this novel the scope of the theme gets widened as she brings out the experiences of alienation of a wide range of characters belonging to different communities, professions and religions. Death of the loved ones, undue importance given to chastity in marital relationships, and a pressing need of social conformity are some of the new issues which have been shown as alienating agents in this novel. But what distinguishes Small Remedies the most from other earlier novels is the characters’ urge to survive on their own terms. Moreover, in this novel, it is not only the protagonist who displays courage and will to face all the odds of life but some other strong characters like Savitribai and Leela also display commendable grit and confidence to make way for themselves through the shackling traditions of patriarchal society.

The earlier protagonists come out of their passivity only when their secure life gets threatened for one reason or the other. But the rebellion and protest appear to be very much intrinsic to the personality of Madhu, Savitribai and Leela. The rebellion, though initially latent in them, finds an expression in various forms of their struggles to realize their inner self. Some of them, like Leela, in the process of realization of their own self become liberatory figures for others as well. That’s why, Shashi Deshpande in Small Remedies is more affirmative of human will and potential in charting out the course of their life and relationships. This is further evidenced by the fact that Shashi Deshpande has presented, for the first in this novel, two ideal couples – Joe and Leela, Lata and Hari – through whom she conveys how a fulfilling and satisfying relationship, based on mutual understanding and love for each other, is a truly realizable human possibility, notwithstanding the incompatibilities regarding different backgrounds and religions. These positive aspects of human nature, unraveled in Small Remedies make Soumya Bhattacharya comment that though the novelist portrays, “... the vacuum that grief leaves in its slip-stream, but offers us glimpses of the core of strength and reserves of stoicism all of us need to deal with pain and sorrow and isolation.” Going through this novel is “an uplifting experience,” according to her.

It is generally accepted that experiences of fulfilling and satisfying relationship with parents are mandatory for emotional and psychological well being of a child. But if the child is deprived of this parental love and care due to some unforeseen and
inescapable calamity like death, the child becomes an easy victim of the feelings of homelessness, loneliness and alienation. This is precisely what happens in the case of Madhu who loses her mother when she is only six months old. The result is that she knows, “nothing of mothers.” Though, apparently she never hankers after motherly love but her repeated use of the words, “motherless child,” (182) for herself clearly shows the pang of being deprived of reassuring love and care of a mother. In the absence of mother, it is Madhu’s father, unlike that of Indu, who takes up the responsibility of his daughter wholeheartedly. The father-daughter relationship has always been a comfortable one; the space between them is never crowded with demands, doubts, assertions or questions. The smell of his cigarette permeating her early life provides her an assurance of his presence and a sense of security. But this sense of security is punctured by his father’s death after a long illness. Her world gets collapsed and she is left with nothing but an abyss. The death of her only parent cuts her off from her very roots. The reminiscences of Madhu give us a peep into the emotional turmoil experienced by an orphan child. She remembers how, like Jaya, the death of her father made her rudderless: “My father dead, Babu (the servant) 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” (41). Her grief, coupled with the knowledge of another woman in her father’s life, makes Madhu feel utterly bewildered and lost.

The feelings of homelessness and loneliness get further intensified when she finds herself ‘thrust’ into a new family of Joe and Leela, of which she could never become a part: “I can never be part of this set-up, I have no place in it, not even as an outsider” (102). Though Joe and Leela try to bring her out of the void, the hostility of Paula, their daughter, makes her feel like an intruder in the family: “I feel suffocated by her rage and her hatred which fill the room, dazed by the onslaught of cruelty she unleashes on me” (120). The unuttered pangs of negation, alienation and insult, which she is forced to bear at the Joe’s, makes her crave for the silence and vacuum of the hostel, even during vacation. Thus, the so called family of Leela and Joe further fails to give her any feeling of belongingness, intensifying her experiences of emptiness and nothingness. It is only after marrying Som that she gets into a real, model family.
Love, mutual understanding and faith make the foundation on which the building of happy married life can be erected. Absence of one of these factors makes the very base of relationship weak. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande delineates the importance of unflinching faith for harmonious martial life and through the example of Som and Madhu she shows how the lack of trust between partners becomes responsible for failure of a marriage. Through the example of Som and Madhu Shashi Deshpande also questions the double standards of society regarding female sexuality, morality and undue importance given to virginity. Loss of virginity is the only sin for which Madhu is punished and tortured by her husband and due to which her erstwhile happy married life comes to the point of rupture.

With her marriage with Som, Madhu gains everything she lacked – a family, a friend and a child. Neither Som’s involvement in his profession as a doctor or her own obsession with her motherhood could lessen the intensity of love between them. But the love, security and happiness she found in her marital relationship with Som is destroyed by her honest confession of an incident of pre-marital sex. The sight of a painting at an exhibition brings back the memory of a man in whose physical embraces she found comfort after her father’s death. Troubled by the knowledge of this man’s suicide, Madhu, after a nightmare, confides her thoughts in Som. This revelation of her nightmare proves “the beginning of the nightmare” (259) of their marital life. Knowledge of his secret which Madhu had locked in the innermost recesses of her mind, shatters the very being of Som, her husband because as N.K. Jain opines: “... sexual purity both pre-marital virginal and marital fidelity ... are cherished Indian values sanctified by tradition and particularly enjoined upon women.” It transforms him from a “genial generous, affectionate” man into a “sad and angry man, distraught, possessed by a madness that seems to have no end” (257). The knowledge of his wife’s ruined chastity drives him crazy and mad and makes him repeatedly ask Madhu, “Tell me, go on, go on” (262). But Madhu’s honesty in declaring that it was not rape, kills Som’s faith in her. The reason behind Som’s anger and suspicion is the single act of sex “he can’t let go of, 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). This truth shoves Madhu down the pedestal of the chaste and untouched girl in Som’s eyes though he himself has had a pre-
marital affair. The behaviour of Som makes Y.S. Sunita Reddy comment, “Our society has been so conditioned that she categorizes a woman immoral on the slightest deviation on their part from the normal course of behaviour.”

Som’s denial to understand the fact that Madhu’s physical intimacy with that man involved no emotions, as she had even forgotten his existence, fills her with ‘helpless rage’ and makes her regret her confession. Her helplessness and her powerlessness to undo the damage come to the fore when she says, “I’d taken the plunge and there was no parachute I could open, nothing on the ground to soften my fall” (260). Her fall becomes even more painful when, like Manu, Som too resorts to sex as a means of vengeance for her sexual infidelity. The concealed violence both frightens and infuriates Madhu. If the brutal sex is an expression of his anger, his refusal to touch Madhu symbolizes his total estrangement from his wife. In his frustration when he suspects her of infidelity, dragging even his brother, Tony, into suspicion, Madhu’s patience gives way and she erects a wall of silence between them: “It’s when he adds, in desperation I now think, Tony’s name to the list, that I retreat into silence. I will no longer answer him, I will say nothing, I will deny nothing” (256). This silence affects a bigger barrier between them than words have been able to. The silent struggle exhausts them to the extent that they are unable to relate and empathize with each other even in the time of the worst calamity that befalls them in the form of the death of their only son, Aditya. If on the one hand death of Aditya, the only link that was holding them together, causes a complete rift between them then on the other hand it deprives Madhu of the role of motherhood, which she has cherished since his birth.

*Small Remedies* is the first novel in which motherhood is eulogized by Shashi Deshpande. Unlike earlier protagonists of Deshpande, who don’t welcome the role of motherhood, Madhu wholeheartedly accepts her new role as a mother after Adit’s birth. Here, Shashi Deshpande emphasizes that in traditional pattern of familial relationship motherhood is celebrated as the fulfilment of feminine sensibility and the realization of the real womanhood. Madhu admits: “But it’s with Adit’s birth that I really become a part of it, a full member of the society” (105). Childbirth after two years of marriage is an intense experience for her as a “child’s birth is a rebirth for a woman” (88). Blissfully
immersed in the glory, thrill and joy of a mother, Madhu finds in the gift, ‘Small Remedies,’ from which the novel has taken its title, her bible for nurturing her child. Now it is only the child that matters to her and the “others are mere shadows” (146). Even Som gets pushed on the periphery, and from Som’s wife she turns into Aditya-chi-Ai, the identity in which she immerses herself completely. Overjoyed at her new identity, she becomes overprotective and possessive for her son, Aditya. This possessiveness for her child gives rise to fear about his safety: “But fear is always lurking under the surface of happiness, the undertow waiting to suck me in” (150). If the indifference of the parents alienate children from them then the over caring fathers and mothers not only restrict the healthy growth of children but also tend to distance them from themselves unknowingly. Madhu’s possessiveness becomes a sort of bondage for Adit when he enters his adolescence. His urge to be alone and to be away from the protective love of his mother pierces her heart. She is pained to see that her child no longer needs her care, not even her presence by his side. Her pain becomes too shattering to be expressed through words or tears when she is permanently robbed of her son by his death in Ayodhya bomb-blast. She, who is orphaned in childhood, has presaged a similar contingency and made arrangements for the future of her son. But Adit’s premature death is the only casualty she is totally unprepared for. For Madhu, “Death is not an event, it’s an end. It’s like a nuclear devastation; there’s nothing left” (211) except silence. The silence and darkness around her, after the death of her son, speak eloquently of her loss. Her helplessness in fulfilling her frantic craving for wild justice is revealed when she asks herself, “Which one human in the faceless mob can I hold responsible?” (123)

Madhu’s grief is so intense that she feels helpless in finding ways to cope with it. She was too obsessive in her love for her son to accept his loss. She is so overwhelmed by feelings of bereavement that every present incident reminds her of the irrevocable loss of her motherhood. The metamorphosis from Aditya’s mother, the identity which she enjoyed nearly eighteen years, to a bereaved mother is so complete that now, bereft of this identity, there is only a frightening emptiness engulfing her. Her days and nights without Adit, leave her bruised and battered. She is forced to go through the semblance of living but with no desire to do so. The immensity of this loss makes her feel alienated not only from the springs of life within herself but also from the world around. The suffering
caused by this separation proves too much for the delicate psyche of a mother who longs for the “tabula rasa of amnesia” (153), to be like Bai who never speaks of the daughter whom she had neglected for the sake of her career. But past is something that cannot be erased. It is like a palimpsest. The memories continue to haunt and torture her, sharpening her agony of loneliness. But the impulse of life within her begins to assert itself after a while and there is a quickening of longing in her heart to come out of this state of nothingness.

There grows in Madhu an urge to breathe fully once again as a human being. The opportunity comes in the form of Chandru’s offer of writing biography of Savitribai. Though Madhu is reluctant in the beginning, she agrees later on because she feels a sort of bonding with Bai, who, like her, has also lost her daughter in Ayodhya bomb-blast. Madhu, here, reminds one of Urmu of *The Binding Vine*, who after having lost her daughter establishes a bond with another hapless mother, Shakutai, and comes to terms with her own grief. She undertakes the task of writing the biography of Munni’s mother, Savitribai, who, like her, had lost her child.

Through the portrayal of Munni’s mother, Savitribai, Deshpande reveals how she, unlike Madhu, denies herself the satisfaction and fulfilment a mother gets through a loving and emotional bond with her child. From the beginning of human history the child has been the most seminal factor of human life. A child “is a beginning, a renewal, a continuation, an assertion of immortality” (168). But Bai hopes to reach out to immortality through music and biography, neglecting completely the role of a mother she was expected to play. The woman who was bold enough to walk out on her marriage and family does not seem to merge with the woman who conceals the very existence of her daughter. For the sake of respectability, she dares not accept the existence of her own daughter born out of her extra-marital relations with Ghulam Saab. Her cowardice and fear of disrepute is clearly perceptible in her giving her daughter the name, Indorekar, the name she adopted as a singer, denying her any link with her father. For Bai, her reputation as a singer is far more important than her daughter. The negligence of her motherly role alienates her from her own daughter who hankers after the name, respectability and conventional life, which Bai had found stultifying. Bai’s denial of and
alienation from Munni is so deep that even after her death she is not reconciled. The way she presents a modified version of her life, through selective amnesia, with no reference to her only child, leaves Madhu flabbergasted. She continues to be the same indifferent mother walking without a backward glance “at the child hovering in the shadows, the child who was waiting … for a word from her mother, a glance. Any kind of recognition of her presence” (169).

Lack of recognition from her own mother and illegal union out of which she is born, become the main cause of Munni’s alienation from her parents, especially her mother. The socially unacceptable nature of relationship between her parents makes her feel like an outcaste, stigmatized and humiliated. Her vehement denial of any relationship with Ghulam Saab and the stories of his cruelty which she concocts are a clear indication of her bruised heart. She deliberately cultivates “a bedraggled ragamuffin look” (75) to show that she is in no way related to Ghulam Saab, with his tidy elegance. But her eyes which resembled Ghulam Saab’s defeat her very effort of negating any link with him. Negation by a celebrity mother and the label of illegitimacy spur the juvenile mind to retaliate by rejecting the father. She even concocts and tells stories about her father living in Pune as a lawyer. This is her subtle psychological defense mechanism to save herself from shame and humiliation caused by her lineage. Munni holds her mother responsible for this humiliation and feels totally estranged from a stern and uncaring mother. She develops contempt for her mother and detests everything about her; from her talent to her looks, everything is rejected by Munni. She even hates the men who come to hear Bai sing. Singing of her mother is taken as disgrace by Munni. That’s why, she openly rejects it. She rejects her own vocal talent also, as it would link her to the two people she desperately wants to detach herself from. Her efforts to detach herself from her parents succeed when she is accepted by Bai’s in-laws and is married in an ordinary family. After marriage, she becomes a common middle class woman named Shailja Joshi, the identity she hankered after throughout her life. With her common name and relation with common middle class family, she achieves the legitimacy and acceptability which was denied to her in the company of her mother: “Fighting with her back to the wall for the identity she wanted to have, the one she claimed finally, successfully denying her old one. Shailja Joshi – a long way from Munni, daughter of Savitribai and Ghulam Saab”
The reason behind the adoption of this ordinary identity is well explained by Malti Mathur: "Munni, Savitribai's daughter, turns her back on her mother and all that she stands for, in a desperate desire to confirm, having encountered early in life the poisoned barbs that society levels against those who dare to be different."43 This search for new identity by Munni makes Madhu think, "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 the 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 the page in the telephone directory" (170). It is for this ordinary identity of her own, having nothing to do with her mother's, that she rejects everything associated with Bai—music genius, ambition and freedom. But neither her obstinate denial of the truth of her birth nor her escape into the world of fantasies can solve her predicament of loneliness and uprootedness. That's why, she, "in spite of her determination fails to attain self-realization as instead of accepting her true self she denies the truth of her birth, her identity given by her parents."44

If Munni fails to achieve the identity she hankered after throughout her life, Savitribai succeeds in getting known as a famous singer, the ultimate purpose of her life. To achieve this purpose, she single mindedly pursues her interest, undeterred by the difficulties posed by family and societal conventions. Society expects a woman to be true to her womanly roles at the cost of her desire to establish a separate identity by using her talent. Initiation of Savitribai, who has a love for music since early childhood, in the world of music is prohibited by her father in the name of traditions of their Brahmin family. Savitribai is encouraged to pursue her dream by her father-in-law. The little freedom given by her father-in-law and her little deviation from the social norms lay her open to much contempt and ridicule. The "subtle cruelty of persistent hostility leaves deeper wounds"(221) which she bears with equanimity until her father-in-law comes to know about her decision to become a professional singer and fails to appreciate it merely because singing was not considered a respectable profession in those days.

In a patriarchal society, a woman is never free to carve a space for herself and realize her professional abilities. Even among women the greater restrictions are for
daughter-in-laws, because the responsibility of the honour of the family falls on them. It requires immense courage for a woman to flout the rules and assert herself: “There’s always the temptation to succumb, to go back to the normal path and be accepted” (221). Savitribai resists the temptation and to create a niche for herself in the field of music revolts against the tradition by walking out of her marital home. She elopes with Ghulam Saab, the Muslim tabla player, endangering her marital status and her reputation as a woman. Her decision to live with Ghulam Saab out of wedlock makes her immoral in the eyes of the society, because individual is a part of society and the assertion of individuality beyond social images is condemned as blasphemy. The assertion of her individuality becomes all the more a serious crime because she is a woman going against the norms set for her by the orthodox society. In Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande is more conscious to decode the horrors of gender discrimination and gender defined role which cause the feeling of disgust in individual self. Through the example of Savitribai, Shashi Deshpande shows that recommendation of different patterns of behaviour for man and woman by society is the main cause behind the suffering and revolt of a woman. In a conventional society, when Savitribai defies the traditional code of conduct by living with her Muslim lover, she is deprived of the status of a respectable woman and treated as an outcaste, whereas her father-in-law is allowed to have a Thumri singer from other caste as his mistress. Society registers no protest for this relationship and that “he had a mistress was accepted; a wife from one’s own class, a mistress from another – this was normal” (220). But Bai’s radical way of life is not accepted as normal by society. Savitribai with Ghulam Saab and Munni makes a very unconventional family, different from other normal families in Neemgaon. That’s why, Madhu says that hers was a “radically, shockingly different family” with a singer wife, absent husband and another man – a Muslim sharing the home. But double standards of society, which always work as alienating factors for the woman, are underlined once again by the writer when she shows how in the same Neemgaon a radically different lifestyle of Madhu’s father is conveniently overlooked. The radical lifestyle adopted by Madhu’s father, by deciding to bring up his daughter on his own, with only a male servant at home, is not at all shocking for the society while Savitribai is looked down upon for her unconventional lifestyle. Courageous Bai refuses to be cowed down by this partial attitude and double standards of
society. Like Jaya and Saru, the other protagonists of Deshpande, Bai no longer defines her identity as a subjugated woman but she sustains those sparks of human will that encourage an individual to preserve her identity against all other considerations. This indomitable will to become a professional singer enables her to face the jibes and the hostility of family and society and instigates her to revolt against its norms. Ultimately, her determination and revolt bear fruit as she becomes a professional singer and gradually reaches the pinnacle of success.

Success is an addiction which makes one highly selfish and alienated from one’s natural human self. In the process of attaining success and maintaining it, one can become very cruel, caring only for those things which keep one in one’s place neglecting everything else. Savitribai blindly follows her ambition to become a singer and risks her reputation and personal relationship in return. She does achieve success but at the high cost of love, care, companionship and even the feelings of motherhood. She denies herself that feeling of motherhood which is the main source of life for mothers like Madhu. She rejects her only daughter for the fear of disgrace, as she was borne out of her illegitimate union with Ghulam Saab. She even deprives herself of the unconditional love and companionship of Ghulam Saab who has been instrumental in her success. Bai’s refusal to acknowledge duly his contribution to her success, and even the denial of her only daughter show her immense desire to attain the respectability she has earlier renounced. This deep desire for respectability shows Bai’s unease with her inner self though on surface level she appears to be a self-realized and fulfilled person. To attain the lost respectability as a woman she once again appears with Mangalsutra in public after Ghulam Saab’s departure.

This dire need of acceptability in society, and the way she presents her life to Madhu by consciously deleting the part that could mar her image as a singer and woman, clearly indicate that even at the last stage of life she is keen to construct for herself an image of an honorable woman. She sticks to her denial of Ghulam Saab and Munni till her death. These facts suggest that she is still an alienated person desperately trying for affirmation with society on her own terms and conditions but in vain.
Shashi Deshpande, as already noticed, employs the strategy of juxtaposition and contrast in dealing with realities of life. She has presented contrasting attitudes and responses of men and women in order to accent their strengths and weaknesses. Here, too, this pattern is at work when she depicts strikingly different perceptions, attitudes and actions represented by Savitribai and Leela. If Savitribai is egocentric and crazy for her own ambitions, Leela has a more developed social consciousness and dedicates herself to the service of others. Though the hurdles do come in her life also but she uses them as stepping stones rather than getting disheartened by them. Since her childhood, she has shown great interest in studies rather than domestic chores. This behaviour is taken as her defiance against the traditional role of a woman. As a punishment she is married to a man of average income. But destiny helps her through her husband who encourages her to study further. Untimely death of her husband makes her more determined and strong. Unlike other ordinary women she does not blame her destiny; rather, accepts her responsibilities like a mature person. Her resolve, not to go back to her parents and to stay with her in-laws to take care of them, speaks volumes about her sense of commitment to her duty. She does not shy away from her responsibilities as Savitribai does. This concern for her relations and commitment to her duty makes her a class apart from all the other women in the novel. She does not choose the easy ways like weaklings but has the courage to change the circumstances through optimistic outlook and hard labour. She is confident and is well aware of her needs and goals. To achieve her goals she revolts against all odds and restrictions posed by tradition. Her fight for lofty goals of upholding personal, social and moral commitments turn her revolt against restrictive social norms into acts of affirmation and celebration of human values and potentials.

The courage and energy with which Leela embarks upon new ventures clearly evinces that she is at peace with herself, with the people and total environment around herself. A person who is at ease with self can contribute towards society in real sense. This ease with self makes her work for TB patients as a social worker. During freedom struggle she actively participates in Quit India Movement and is sent to Jail. After independence when she is denied the highest place in party which is her due, she leaves the party at once as she never compromises with her dignity and self-respect at the cost of trivial gains. It is not only in her professional life that she goes against tradition and
chooses a different road but in her personal life also she, being a Brahmin widow, dares to fall in love with a Christian doctor, Joe. She marries Joe after a wait of fifteen years. Her decision to marry Joe, after years of waiting for Joe’s daughter Paula’s consent, shows her resolve and her determination to retain her identity and dignity.

Through the married life of Leela and Joe, Shashi Deshpande, for the first time, hints at what is required to lead a happy marital life. In earlier novels, she has focused mainly on the factors which mar the harmony of the marital relationship and make marriage a bondage rather than bonding, especially for woman. But here, she delineates the importance of positive qualities like love, care, patience, sacrifice and understanding in the smooth sailing of this relationship. So, in this way, Shashi Deshpande appears to be more affirmative in her vision in Small Remedies. Here, if marriage is presented as an agent of alienation in the case of Madhu, particularly after her confession, it also has been presented as an agent of affirmation of human relationships in the case of Joe and Leela. They possess all the qualities needed to be designated as an ideal couple. It seems, on the surface level, that they have no compatibility of their backgrounds, castes, religions, education, languages and even of interests and likings. Madhu recalls with wonder, "...the strangeness of Joe, a widower with two children, falling madly in love with this woman, a widow, who wore, as Phillo said, ‘ayah saris’—cotton saris from the mills her husband had worked in, saris she was loyal to until the mills themselves closed down. A woman who could speak no English and knew nothing of literature or music, the two great forces in Joe’s life, in addition to medicine. A woman who had, as Joe often said, ‘no sense of humour at all’” (99).

In spite of this much apparent disparity in their temperaments, interests and life styles, they share a perfect life together. Together they create a magical relationship based on perfect understanding and respect for each other’s needs and feelings. Shashi Deshpande, through Madhu, speaks of their relationship as “wonderful companionship” and “that beautiful relationship” (99) based on love. Leela’s marital relationship has brought emotional security to her. Therefore, when Joe dies it leaves an emptiness in Leela’s life: “Something has gone out of Leela, though—a passion, a force, a fire"
This feeling of emptiness clearly indicates the warmth of companionship she had enjoyed with Joe when he was alive.

Shashi Deshpande presents her faith in the value of life and human potentials to live a life of fulfilment, of their desires and dreams, on a wider canvas in this novel. She suggests that the possibilities of living an authentic life of one's own are not limited to only one or the other aspect of human existence. In the case of Joe and Leela, their personal relationships, sense of social responsibilities and service to others enable them to transcend their personal grief and loneliness. They achieve a sense of peace and harmony not only within themselves but also with the world around them through a meaningful and satisfying participation in their life. This affirmative vision finds a wider range when Deshpande depicts its possibilities in the life of a woman even as a writer. It is significant to note that Small Remedies marks a step forward in presenting this possibility as humanly fulfilling and realizable for a woman. This is evidenced by the experiences of Madhu as a writer of Bai’s biography.

It is when she meets and interviews Bai and analyzes her experiences incisively that Madhu’s perspective on life in general, and on the realities of her own existence in particular, widens and matures in a significant way. It enables her to grapple with her own conflicts, fears and guilt in a more meaningful manner, making it possible for her to develop a more positive outlook towards life. The death of her son has been haunting her with the question – “was it my fault?” (113) Besides, she feels tortured by friends of guilt when she thinks that it is her prayer to punish Paula that has made her childless, for childlessness is the worst curse humans can think even for their enemies. Though she has tried to come to terms with her loss with the help of the theory of unknown destiny, the pain of living without her son has refused to go away. She continues to suffer spells of intense loneliness, anguish and guilt until she learns about the fabric of Bai’s life and gathers courage to rationalize her own grief. Bai’s pattern of life, in fact, brings a kind of cathartic relief in the agonized soul of Madhu. She compares this emptiness, originated from her immense passion for her son with indifference of Bai towards her daughter. Bai’s aversion towards Munni and her attempt to get herself free from the bondages of child love gives shock to the sensibility of Madhu. She exclaims, “Even more often I
wonder: what kind of a woman are you, denying your own child? Only the lowest, the meanest kind of creature could do such a thing" (78). This blaming of Bai brings a sort of relief for guilt ridden Madhu as she thinks that she, unlike Bai, has given the top most priority to rearing of Adit. For Madhu, Bai’s professional success is of no significance in comparison to her duty towards her daughter. Madhu realizes that her decision of leaving her job of journalist for Adit is a challenge to the myth conceived by Bai who considers that professional identity is the fulfilment of female desires. For her, the idea of constructing the identity without children seems a blasphemy; “It is our children who reconcile us to the passing of time, to our aging, to our irrelevance, our mortality. Without them the world makes no sense...” (155). With this thought Madhu’s dilemma about the fabric of book about Bai ends. Now she decides to make it her own book rather than writing it on the lines dictated by Bai. She becomes impatient to recreate the life of Bai according to her own choices. She declares, “I can trap her into an image I create, seal her into an identity I can make for her” (166). These words of Madhu clearly reveal that the act of writing Bai’s biography has made her a woman of self-confidence and assertion. She is ready to steer the course of her life out of the dark regions of depression, guilt and loneliness into a world where she can live a more satisfying life of her own. It is a journey from a state of hopelessness to a realization that life is never without hopes and possibilities. It is this change in her mood and attitude that enables her to enter a relationship of warmth and understanding with Hari. Perfectly natural and honest communication between the two, their abilities to share each other’s experiences with sensitivity and mutual understanding further help her purge her grief.

The incident of Upanayanam ceremony of the son of a widowed mother dons on her a realization that loss and pain are a human lot, which has to be countered and triumphed over not by wallowing in grief and self-pity but by a stoic equipoise of heart and mind. Her subsequent resolution to go back to Som indicates clearly her faith in the healing powers of human relationship, based on honest sharing of experiences. Together, they, like Tony and Madhu, who kept Joe alive after his death through their recollections, would also keep Adit alive by sharing the memories of their son: “...as long as there is memory, loss is never total” (324).
Thus, *Binding Vine, A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies*, through their protagonists, underscore the importance of human faith in the continuity of life and human urge to survive. Though wifehood, motherhood, rape and dire need of social acceptability cause immense pain and suffering in the lives of women characters, the overall mood of the novels is of struggle for the realization of their human identity. Besides the protagonists some other women characters also display the qualities, in different measures, which enable them to live their life according to their own will. The fact that Deshpande has portrayed in these novels larger number of women figures, who come close to the protagonists in displaying the strength of character, sets these novels apart from her earlier ones. Moreover, in these novels the writer has brought out the conflicts, loneliness and feelings of lostness and bewilderment, afflicting the lives of male characters as well, conveying clearly that the experiences of disillusionment and alienation, in various forms, are as much a feature of the lives of sensitive and thoughtful male figures as they are of women folk. The way Deshpande has rendered, penetratively and powerfully, the psyche of men like Gopal, testifies her abilities to draw her characters, both male and female, with equal ease and authenticity. But none of her male figures has been endowed, by her, with the dynamism, resilience and the strength to overcome crises, with life affirming outlook, which characterize the protagonists in these novels. What distinguishes these characters from their sisters in earlier novels is their ability to actively participate in the life of others and give a concrete form, in action, to their will and resolution. These qualities of protagonists make them fighters in real sense. They are, thus, a step ahead of their earlier counterparts in that they are maturer in their outlook, more firm in their decisions and broader in their concerns.
NOTES


5 S. Prasanna Sree, Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Study (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2003), p. 89.


8 Ibid., p. 43.

9 Ibid., p. 43.


All subsequent references to the text of the novel are from the same edition, and page numbers in all such cases have been given within parentheses immediately after the quotations.


14 A.G. Khan, p. 199.


21 Indira Nityanandam, p. 66.

23 Ibid., p. 252.


All subsequent references to the text of the novel are from the same edition, and page numbers in all such cases have been given within parentheses immediately after the quotations.

26 Reddy, p. 115-16.


33 Ibid., p. 256.


35 Vimala Rama Rao, p. 257.
36 Beena Aggarwal, p. 118.


39 Ibid.

40 Shashi Deshpande, Small Remedies (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 101. All subsequent references to the text of the novel are from the same edition, and page numbers in all such cases have been given within parentheses immediately after the quotations.


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