CHAPTER - IV
WINNERS: THE NOVELS OF LATER PHASE

Shashi Deshpande's preoccupation with the complexity of human relationships, the dramatization of varied responses to challenges in life, conflicts and tensions caused by maladjustment in familial relationships, women's obsession with their own battle between the contradictory demands of body on the one hand and commitments of mind on the other, the ultimate denial of gender specific role and the efforts of the female protagonists to redefine their identity in the context of totality of the experiences related to their own selves and society prepare the foundation on which she constructs the novels, Moving On (2004) and In the Country of Deceit (2008), to project some new aspects of the feelings of alienation.

These novels, in many ways, are a departure from Deshpande's earlier novels. For the first time in these works, desires of body have been given due importance. In all the earlier novels protagonists' abhorrence for body is clearly perceptible. Here, Manjari, Baba, Devi and Sindhu accept the demands of body as something natural. If Manjari, in Moving On, differs from earlier protagonists in the sense that she sees herself and her life through the eyes of a male also i.e. Baba's diaries, Devi, in In the Country of Deceit, appraises herself through the letters from her relatives. Moreover, both of these protagonists are more daring, independent, bold and courageous than their earlier counterparts. They have greater control over their lives and get self-fulfilment in spite of the restrictions posed by societal norms. Moreover, both of them take full responsibility for their actions and never blame others for their predicament.

MOVING ON

In Moving On, Shashi Deshpande reverts to her favourite subject, i.e. family as the "family is a timeless and universal institution – everything begins here, everything that happens outside the family mirrors what happens within it." Through the emotional wounds, intrusions, dissention, domination and violations within the family or domestic space, Shashi Deshpande mirrors the social vagaries, always fraught with disjunctive and alienating potentials for individuals. She is interested in looking clinically at this space: "To speak of the family's domestic scope – how easy the word "domestic" is and how uneasy the things that happen in families are...." While presenting the uneasy things
happening in the family, she weaves her narrative around multiple acts of transgression, bringing into contestation self/other, man/woman, body/soul, physical/emotional, sexual/ethical and individual/social binaries. These dichotomies are interrogated by Manjari in relation to her own position as well as her close relatives, i.e. Baba, Mai, Malu, Shyam, Raja and Sachi. This reflection on the life of others complicates and affects her own understanding and attitude which, in turn, help her in revising her perspective. Thus this process of reconstruction and deconstruction makes the structure of the novel a complex one.

The personal life of Manjari’s parents and her own is presented through two voices, i.e. Manjari and Baba’s diaries. The past is unraveled through Baba’s diaries that Manjari finds after his death. As Manjari grapples with a challenging present, she reviews the events of the past in the retrospective light of Baba’s self-disclosures. The contents of the diaries unfold surprises concerning the image of her father. These diaries cease to remain external and magnetize the internal (Manjari’s own story). Derrida, while exploring "Plato’s Pharmacy," maintains in his reflections on writing and supplement, “If it were purely external, writing would leave the intimacy or integrity of psychic memory untouched.”3 But here the external (Baba’s diaries) becomes internal to the narrative and to a great extent controls and contributes to the narrative flow. As Deshpande herself maintains: “How can we divide human life into segments like past, present and future? Physically we may inhabit the present but in our minds the past and the future are comfortably cohabiting with it. Memories and pictures of the past, dreams, hopes and plans for the future – these are as real to us as the present.”4 The past life of Baba, which is full of alienation, betrayal and violations, is presented through his diaries.

An individual violates the social norms and betrays the faith of close ones only to be independent and to assert his free will which, in turn, alienates him from his family and society at large. Badri Narayan’s father, being a Gandhian, marries a Harijan girl, betraying family tradition and honour. For violating the norms of caste hierarchies he is disowned and disinherited by his father. In spite of this, he enters into a socially unacceptable marital bond second time with a girl who had an inauspicious Mangal in her horoscope. Revelation of these facts to Badri Narayan by his father, when he was on his death bed, changes his (Badri’s) view about him from a dull man to a rebel. This changed
perspective about his father leaves Badri Narayan forlorn after his death. Left alone after the marriage of his only companion his sister Gayatri, death of his father comes to Badri in the form of “emptiness, a blankness that seemed to swallow”5 him up. He is completely left distraught not just with “the finality of death, but with its ability to make nothing of life” (14). The inevitability of death has been dealt with as a major alienating factor by Shashi Deshpande in all her novels from *The Dark Holds No Terrors* to *In the Country of Deceit*. That’s why, Shashi Deshpande has used Italo Calvino’s saying as a prologue to section two which says, “The ultimate meaning to which all stories refer has two faces, the continuity of life, the inevitability of death” (193). Badri continues his life after the death of his father by marrying Mai but the “emptiness, the ice cube within me remained, surfacing suddenly at times, taking me by surprise, angering me too, by its persistence” (14). This feeling of emptiness is relieved for a while by new relationships through marriage and fatherhood.

Inheriting the rebellious spirit of his father, Badri marries Mai, a girl of other caste whose “dainty body, her exquisite face” drew him to her so immediately. Being an anatomist, who has a skeleton jokingly called ‘Mr. Bones’ in his home, body holds immense importance for him. It is not only the beautiful body of Mai which attracts him towards her but “an emotion stronger than any” he had felt until then also played its role. It makes him overlook the fact that she did not feel the same way for him. He is confident of making up the deficiency in her feelings through his love and passion but he was “hopelessly, completely naïve” (108). Their divergent ideas about passion come as first stroke to his idea of perfect love. Being a passionate man, desires of body hold immense importance for him which his wife, Vasu, fails to reciprocate with equal intensity. Vasu’s passivity in physical relations makes it impossible for Badri to get the pleasure from their bodies he always wanted. Dissatisfaction in sexual relations brings despair and frustration for Baba who “can love enough for two, but what about passion?”(108) This lack of passion on Vasu’s part can be attributed to the societal norms which have made sex a taboo. Even the mention of sex is taken to be a breach of chastity in our society, what to talk of expressing sexual feelings. It is because of this consciousness that Vasu dislikes Mr. Bones, the obscene, uncovered body. This frigidity and hatred for passions of body
on Vasu’s part act as barrier, separating her from Baba, hampering the harmony in marital life which he hankered after throughout his life.

Denial of physical pleasures distances Baba from Mai. Though, apparently, he seems to adore her but most of the times he has his own way even at the cost of her discomfort. Her boredom and displeasure in the company of RK, BK and Gayatri is not taken into account by Baba who forces her to visit them every now and then. This lack of concern for the comfort of Mai on Baba’s part can be attributed to her failure in providing him physical satisfaction. Puritanic obsession with purity and chastity is not only a cause of dissonance and alienation between husband and wife but also from her own self. This alienation from her own self, which she suppresses very dexterously in her real life, can easily be inferred from her writings. She does not believe in love in real life but she writes about love stories with a happy ending. Like other protagonists of Shashi Deshpande, for Mai also writing is an expression of her private self: “It was a kind of secret business, an activity she did in private, something no one in the family ever spoke of” (121). Jaya in That Long Silence, Madhu in Small Remedies, Indu in Roots and Shadows, Mira in The Binding Vine adopt creative writing as a remedy to give vent to their frustration. Creative world of Vasu is her own space where there is no place for the commands of Baba. Her interrogation with her own self emerges in her stories. She writes about “silent, sacrificing women” as against the women “who had to be aggressive and strong to survive the endless drudgery” (125). It provides a peep into her psyche torn between the pulls of her instinct for freedom on one hand and the definition of a good and dedicated wife she has internalized, on the other. That’s why, there is a marked contradiction between her “real self” and her “creative self”. Manjari seems to sum up well this divided self of her mother when she describes her as “a maverick self hidden behind the decorous woman so conscious of the proprieties, a self that she was constantly battling against” (125). This contradiction between the creative self and real self is a clear indication of split in her inner life which aspired for remoteness and freedom while writing about togetherness and relationships. This contradictory behavior of her mother’s makes Manjari realize that a woman can never express her real self. In the essay, “Masks and Disguises,” Deshpande has admitted that woman writers often assume masks to express their real self. Mai’s negation of her real identity in her stories suggests that Mai
Mai’s desire for freedom from her children’s demands makes Manjari uncertain and suspicious of her own worth as a child. A child is the most important person for a mother. This feeling of importance provided by mother makes the child confident of his/her worth. But constant chiding and indifference from Mai’s side make Manjari unsure and fearful of “not existing, for if Mai did not see me, I did not exist. It frightened me” (119). Only a mother’s love and approval can make the existence of child meaningful. That’s why, Manjari declares and shows her love towards her mother by clinging to her. But Mai’s constant rebuffs make her doubt Mai’s love towards her: “But there was always this tiny mustard seed of suspicion in me; like a jealous, possessive lover I was always weighing things, wanting to be sure I was loved, that she wanted to be with me”(119). This doubt whether she is loved by Mai gets strengthened with the birth of Malu because she feels that for her parents Malu “mattered more than anyone else” (44). Here, in Moving On, Shashi Deshpande deals with sibling jealousy between sisters for the first time. In earlier novels she has shown how the boy child controls the life of girl child but here Shashi Deshpande shows how the love and affection tilted towards one girl can affect the life of the other. Extra parental care which Malu gets makes Manjari condemn her as “the little tyrant who knew her power, who used it to get what she wanted” (44). She painfully becomes aware of the fact that she will have to work hard if she wants to be loved as against Malu whose mere existence promises her parental affection. Realizing Malu’s central position in the family and her mother’s power over herself (Manjari), she becomes more and more anxious and “willing to do anything to please others. The girl who needed everybody’s approval” (69). This need for approval is a clear indication of her need to be loved, need to be wanted and cared.

Need to be loved is the main innate desire of every human being. When this need is fulfilled on certain conditions, there is every possibility of change of object of love as
soon as a better alternative is available. Manjari revolts against the conditional love of her mother as soon as Shyam accepts her unconditionally, overlooking her ordinary looks: “She knew I was her slave, she had no doubts about it; she just liked to feel her power, to flex her muscles, so to say. But I escaped finally, I escaped because I met Shyam…” (230). In her urge to be loved and to be married to Shyam, she even overlooks her studies and career. Mother’s disapproval, as in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, strengthens her decision of marriage with him. Marriage with Shyam acts as a means through which she declares her defiance towards mother and all other repressive forces which deny a woman the life of her own choice. Her choice of marriage with Shyam is triggered by bodily desires which leave even her father, Mr. Bones, flabbergasted: “As a father, I found it hard to be a witness to the raw sexuality of my daughter’s feelings for a man, something Jiji almost flaunted” (109).

For the first time in this novel, Shashi Deshpande has tried to explore the issue of importance of body in man-woman relationship. Hitherto all the protagonists had a craving for emotional and spiritual union with their life partners. But in *Moving On*, Manjari’s marital life and her life after Shyam’s death is controlled by the desires of body. The novel meanders around the body, which is generally considered a barrier to the sublime waves of the soul. This premises that the body is inferior to the soul and is nothing more than a mere means for the fulfilment of spiritual goals, is shown bereft of any logic by Shashi Deshpande through the example of Manjari.

Manjari’s longing to feel a man’s arm around her body for a crushing grip is fulfilled after her marriage with Shyam. Like all the earlier protagonists, Manjari fully enjoys physical pleasures with Shyam. Her features and physique which were a source of constant tension for her now become the means of ultimate pleasure. But her body, which gets some solace in the arms of Shyam, soon starts wriggling once the sexual spells are over. Moreover, she finds herself ill at ease living in Shyam’s house with its disgusting ambience. The practical responsibilities of human life cannot be met by mere romantic swearings and beautiful ballads in praise of body. Shyam’s professional failures and Manjari’s increasing demands after the birth of a son prove too much for their marital happiness. Frustration borne out of failure to fulfil Manjari’s demands make Shyam irritable, who blames her that she has changed: “I never knew you were so money
minded. I never thought you were such a bourgeois" (290). Differences start widening between them due to financial crunch caused by Shyam’s joblessness: “Closeted in one small room though we were, we seemed to be living on two different continents. In bed, we lay close, but without touching. It was like the game of pebbles I’d played as a girl, a game in which, if two pebbles touched, you were out” (290). Manjari’s process of getting out in the game of marital happiness is accelerated by her denial to give Shyam the space he urgently needs for himself. Manjari’s constant naggings for a separate home, Shyam’s failure in his profession and the resultant tensions between the two intensify Shyam’s feelings of loneliness which ultimately lead him into the arms of Malu, her younger sister. With Malu’s pregnancy the ugly truth of his liaison with Malu comes to the knowledge of Manjari and at “first there was disbelief, then anger and finally humiliation. I felt betrayed, shamed” (317). This feeling of betrayal is further aggravated by her mother’s indifference towards her who, instead of Malu, blames her of being guilty, of being the wrongdoer. She feels herself like a forlorn who has been forsaken by everyone around her. This incident creates a lasting rift between them and she “lost Shyam” (292). But the loss of Shyam, when he commits suicide “had seemed the final betrayal, his dying in the sea, the sea by which we had lived those days of perfect happiness, the worst treachery” (327). Though she feels let down by Shyam’s behaviour, she is left distraught and devastated by his death:

I had entered a dark tunnel after Shyam’s death, a space in which nothing could grow, nothing could survive. Worst of all was the feeling that I was set apart from human kind, that I no longer belonged to the world of ordinary people, ordinary living; each thing I did was a painful reminder of what had happened to us. I had lost the innocence which makes it possible to face each day with hope. Time is the greatest healer, they say. But for me, time was the enemy as well, taking me further and further away from Shyam, turning him into a memory eventually making even the memories fade, so that finally I was left with nothing. (326)

Married at eighteen and widowed at twenty-one, she is left to deal with this feeling of nothingness and the responsibility of bringing up two young ones, Anand and Sachi. Widowhood brings new problems in its wake for Manjari. Shashi Deshpande brings the stark reality of the lives of widows to light through the example of Manjari.
Widows in our society are expected to lead a life of austerity by suppressing their physical desires and urges. But here Shashi Deshpande shows that the rigid restrictions of social codes cannot stop the rhythms of body. These rhythms of body which forced Manjari to marry Shyam and invite her parents’ wrath and displeasure, push her into the arms of Raman, a person of dubious identity: “It’s my body that frightens me, it’s my body that is suddenly my enemy. I feel as if I have been invaded by a stranger, a stranger I’d kept out successfully so long” (226-227).

Her body fails her ultimately and she gives in to its commands. Her body makes her forget the difference between good and evil. It is for this reason she invites him to bed. What differentiates Manjari from Indu of *Roots and Shadows* who goes for physical relationship with her cousin, Naren, is that unlike Indu, Manjari has no emotions and feelings involved in the relationship: “I don’t want to hear his voice either. Only the body, his body, only my body, my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensation. The smell of sundried clothes, of sweet, the hardness, the pressure of his body, it’s weight on mine and my body responding, welcoming his” (257). Though she feels at peace with her body but soon her mind gets unsettled due to variety of fears, tensions and guilt. This suggests a powerful conflict between her natural libidinal desires on the one hand and her consciousness of this act as something immoral on the other. The urge to bathe and scrub harshly to punish her body is a clear proof of guilt her mind gets gripped by. She is also fearful that she might lose Anand and Sachi if they come to know about her relationship. But what precipitates her fears and tensions is the fact that she had thought that with this man she would be able to let Shyam go “but it has not happened. Each time I have been with him, I have thought – this is not Shyam. Each time, I have hated him -- and myself -- because he is not Shyam” (278). This creates in her a tormenting feeling that she has betrayed Shyam by turning to Raman for her carnal satisfaction. The body, which she had found to be source of satisfaction, ultimately comes to be viewed by her as a kind of culprit responsible for her digression from the socially sanctioned moral conduct of a widow. This is an expression not only of alienation of her mind from her body but also from the moral ambience of her social world. This feeling of betrayal, caused by the hungers of her body, alienates her from her own self.
Thus, undue importance given to the fulfilment of physical desires plays havoc in the life of all the main characters i.e. Baba, Manjari, Malu as well as Shyam. Baba's passion, which could not be matched by Mai's, becomes the main hindrance in attainment of happiness in his marital life. Manjari's thoughtless and instinctual decision to marry Shyam, based on hormonal urges, proves disastrous for her in the long run. As soon as physical desires begin to pall their relationship starts withering. The relationship established merely on physical desires, and devoid of emotional union, moves towards doom as quickly as it starts. The bond between Shyam and Manjari is based purely on physical fascination and carnal urge which is further evidenced by the fact that he takes no interest even in his son, Anand. He is utterly negligent, both as a father and husband, having no feelings of emotional attachment to them. When Anand is sick, Shyam leaves him alone in Manjari's lap instead of taking him to the hospital. Shyam, with a deep emotional vacuum ultimately tries to find solace in his relationship with Malu and makes him pregnant. Again it is characterized by a thoughtless submission to the desires of body which shatters the very foundation of relationships and consequently of the family. All the characters react differently according to their personalities to this tragedy. For Shyam and Malu it proves too heavy a burden to bear with. That's why, Shyam commits suicide and Malu loses her balance of mind which eventually becomes the cause of her untimely death. Malu's death comes to Mai as a shattering shock, and she withdraws into silence: "...she wrote nothing, not a word, she spoke very little and only when necessary" (113). Her silence eats into her mind which pushes her into a state of coma and finally towards death. But Baba and Manjari prove themselves as fighters as against the sufferer like Mai and cowards like Shyam and Malu. Though Baba is shattered after the death of Vasu yet he moves on as he believes that nature does not "believe in stasis; stasis is putrefaction, stasis is death" (114).

To move out of the stasis created by death of Vasu, Baba decides to write diary in which he introspects his life and relations objectively and brings to light all those bleak aspects of his personality which marred his relationship with Manjari and Vasu. Recalling his passionate life with Vasu, Baba is filled with guilt. He recalls how like a beast he had forced Vasu to fulfil his passionate desires. He realizes that he failed to make Vasu understand that he didn't want to possess her body but to feel himself
complete by merging into her. He repents that his urgent need for her body erased all the
other messages of love and tenderness. It is this tenderness towards his wife which fails
him as a father. When Manjari is in need of his support at the time of her marriage, he
joins Vasu rather than helping her. He feels that he had been cruel to Manjari and “failed
her in her time of need” (55). He even accepts his responsibility in Manjari’s choice of
Shyam as her life partner. He feels that his neglect of Manjari’s feeling and undue
attention paid to Malu has been instrumental in her marriage with Shyam. At that time he
had accused her that she was giving up her life: “It was like committing suicide” (95).
But now, in his diary, he accepts that beyond the periphery of personal relationship,
Manjari has a woman within her inner self. Baba defends Manjari’s infatuation for
Shyam not as a father but as a sensitive human being who believes in the creed of
individual’s right of self preservation. He acknowledges her identity as an independent
individual: “My daughter, I thought, my child, I told myself. Did that give me the right to
take over her life? We come to life as individuals; to be a parent is to be an instrument,
the means of letting another human enter the world and have the experience of living —
that’s all” (241).

This renewed understanding of Manjari’s behavior and his own guilt makes him
aspire for her company in his last days: “This is Jiji’s duty. I was with my father in his
last days, my daughter should be with me. It is a duty we owe our past; if we leave this
undone, we can’t move on, we will carry the burden of past with us forever” (114). But
when she joins him, he finds it hard to re-establish the same warmth and understanding
they once enjoyed. What he misses in his relationship with his daughter, he finds it in his
relationship with his grandchildren, Anand and Sachi. Baba’s turning back to childhood
in the form of Sachi signifies his urge to seek a continuity of life and to escape the
shadows of “loss” and “extinction.” He desperately admits, “Sometimes I think, it is not
children but childhood itself that creates happiness. I see childhood as a repeated happy
motif in our lives; first our own then our children’s and finally our grand children” (55).

Through this admission of Baba, Deshpande reveals the need of interdependence in
personal relationships. Through Baba, Shashi Deshpande underlines the fact that “our
identities do not contain just us; by ourselves we mean nothing. An identity becomes
active, positive and meaningful only in relation to others. The whole potential of who we
are and what we are, is realized only through our relationship with others" (56). This understanding of importance of interpersonal relationship makes him hope for Manjari's union with Raja: "'I like to think... she will respond to him...'" (305) and will be able to get rid of blinkers.

Manjari is able to get rid of blinkers by revisiting her own past, and Baba's, Mai's and Malu's through Baba's diaries. These diaries make her see the life of every person with his eye and she gets to know the life from a different perspective, learning that people are "complex, undecipherable, protean – there is no absolute about them" (21). The changed vision provided by these diaries and her own journey into past enable her to deal with demands which her present makes on her in the form of dealing with a rebellious daughter, devious property sharks and a sexual partner who threatens to throw her life out of gear again. She reconstructs her "self" in the context of these external forces. The recreation of the past events is termed as life narrative by Ulrich Neisser which he says is way of defining the self: "They (life narratives) are the basics of personal identity and self understanding and they provide answers to the question "who am I?"7

With her father dead and both the children being away for studies, Manjari has ample time to find the answer to the question "who am I?" Manjari is the most courageous and bold protagonist created by Shashi Deshpande. Unlike the earlier protagonists, who fall prey to confusion, tension, fear and anxiety, Manjari moves on undaunted by adverse circumstances. Estranged from parental family and widowed at a tender age of twenty one, she does not give in to the idea of suicide and does not indulge in grieving and in recalling memories of Shyam; rather, she decides; "I don't want to think of these things, I don't want to bring up these memories. I left them behind the day I turned away from the sea, turned away from death, back to life" (90).

This gesture on Manjari's part is indicative of her optimism towards life. She does not blame her fate like cowards; rather, busies herself in fulfilling the demands and needs of her children and her own self like fighters. To survive is her basic aim at the moment. By denying the help her father offers, she refuses any sort of sympathy from her family members. She prefers to live on her own and shows them that she has no regrets about her decision of marrying Shyam. Even in these adverse circumstances, she does not
compromise with her convictions and turns down the proposal of marriage with Raja because marriage without the foundation of love, and only as a means of social security, is not acceptable to her. Since she decides not to get into marriage again, neither persuasion nor other considerations – physical, financial, emotional – can prevail on her. By refusing the marriage with Raja and the security it offers, Manjari challenges patriarchal norms of society which designate woman as weakling, always in need of male protection. Her revolt against patriarchy and her urge to be independent gets revealed when she learns driving and tries to run a taxi, installs and operates a computer at home and types out manuscripts for others as means of self-employment. Her real test, however, begins when visiting strangers and anonymous phone calls from the land mafia underworld subject her to psychological pressure and try to coerce her to sell out her ancestral house. She is even physically assaulted, almost on the verge of rape, to force her to give in. Stubbornly she decides to stay and fight, against Raja’s concern and advice, refusing to succumb to pressure: “This is what they want, they’re trying to reduce to this shivering cowardly mass of fear. I won’t be scared” (167). She disapproves Raja’s role of protective male in her life: “I want the brakes under my feet, not someone else’s. I do not want a dual control, the control should be mine and mine alone” (88).

Manjari transcends her distinctive femaleness and denies all types of controls society imposes on her individuality and sexuality. She fulfils her responsibility towards her body by meeting its urges through extra-marital relation with Raman. Through this relation, Manjari expresses her emancipated vision of life in which she is capable enough to exhibit her desires. Suzanne La Follettes justifies that “the emancipation of woman has another significant effect, namely, an increase in frankness concerning extra marital relation.”8 Shashi Deshpande also seems to approve of this frankness as is apparent from Majari’s words: “If the face knows how to deceive, the body can’t lie. I can lie in words, I can make my face show what is not there, I can conceal what there is, but the body can’t lie. The body is honest, yes, it told me its need and I’ve gone along with it, I’ve given it what it wants. I’ve done nothing wrong” (259).

Besides being guiltless, what makes her truly bold and new woman is that she dictates the terms and conditions of physical relationship with Raman. It is she who initiates this move, it is she who departs, and it is she who terminates this arrangement.

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She is in full command of the situation as she wants to move out of the "eternal conflict between man and woman, the man asserting his rights, claiming his right to her body, the female denying him" (276) and claiming her body for herself. In this realization, Manjari seems to convey the view that the woman should be herself, not owned or claimed by men. As Foucault maintains that power develops through dispersed systems, which is then exercised over the body and ironically, we keep it functioning. We don't question 'the archive' or the systems of statements that appear to us as 'law'. However, Manjari questions that 'law' when she is blamed by Raja: "But you're a woman, you're a daughter" (64). She further questions 'the archive' to counter Raja's accusation and articulates her revolt against patriarchy: "I gave up wearing sarees because I didn't want to look womanly. I cut my hair short like a man's, I wore my most forbidding expression but it was of no use. They can smell it, yes, they can smell the woman in you. No matter how you dress, whether you share your head or hide behind a burkha, they come at you wanting your body, touching you, ruling over you, sniffing at you" (284). These words of Manjari reveal dual standards of society where widows are forced to suppress their feminine desires for the fear of attracting undue male attention, but men have no restrictions of any sort.

Manjari denies to be ruled by dual standards of society and makes an assertion of her needs as a woman. That's why, she openly accepts her own share of willingness in physical relations with Raman before Raja. She is neither embarrassed nor regretful and apologetic. Through Manjari, Shashi Deshpande reveals that the cover of morality cannot suppress the instinctive desires. A woman, before being a gender stereotype, possesses her own bodily demands and it is beyond all logical arguments or the barriers of social code. Manjari realizes the harsh reality of Baba's theory - just as death is not an end of personal relationship the demands of body exist beyond these expectations of relationship.

This independent spirit, which is a major driving factor in Manjari's life, makes her feel guilty for some time with regards to her children. It is because of her free spirit and rebellious attitude that she rears her children alone and fails to provide them the care and warmth of a family: "Perhaps, I wronged Sachi, perhaps I wronged both my children by making myself invulnerable, by being self-sufficient" (155). In spite of this realization...
and re-examination, the turning back is no remedy for Manjari, because according to her, life moves on: “It’s no use going back, agonizing over the choice we made, imagining. What would have happened, if we’d taken the other road” (311). So, as a mother, to undo the wrongs done to Sachi, she takes it as her self-imposed duty to reveal to Sachi the secret of Malu and Shyam’s story, which is also the story of the life of Sachi. She not only decides to reveal the past to Sachi, but also makes up her mind to marry Raja so that Sachi can get a real family. The ease and comfort which Sachi enjoys in the company of BK and Raja encourages her to think about marriage with Raja who has been pursuing her for a long time. She is fearful of the fact that “Raman has come between us. No, not Raman it’s my body which has played traitor. Raja will never forgive me, never” (305). But to her utter surprise “he’s crossed the hump, he’s on the other side now” (341) and “gone past what happened between Raman and me” (341). Raja’s belief in happy endings makes her dispel her fear of disappointment in relationships. She realizes that one has to have faith because it is the faith which is “the adhesive that holds things together” (342). With this renewed faith she agrees to Raja’s proposal of living together as a happy couple. It is not an end, but a prelude to a new beginning, new dimensions of life.

Manjari’s decision to marry Raja clearly shows Deshpande’s affirmative vision of life. In spite of being witness to so many digressions, domination, betrayal and frustration in her family circle, Manjari once again is ready for search of happiness though the “search is doomed to failure... we will never find what we are looking for, we will never get what we’re seeking for in other humans. We will continue to be incomplete, ampersands all of us, each one of us. Yet, the search is what it’s all about ... the search is the thing” (343).

Through this search of happiness within domestic space, Shashi Deshpande reposes faith in the institution of family and human relationships. Manjari is a survivor who redefines freedom and relationships with the affirmation that she is “different not inferior.” She is situated in the family and bound by relationships but subservient to none. Her engagements with life adopt a middle path – “be yourself and allow others to be; live on your own terms and let others live on their own.”

It is this urge of Manjari as well as of Baba to live life in spite of inimical forces like suffering, disease and death that make Moving On a comprehensive thesis of
ceaseless process of human survival. In spite of a long and painful disease, Baba expresses his desire to continue his life and to avoid nothingness and to escape the extinction of personal relationships. That’s why, he questions, “Why do I have to die, why must I leave this familiar world and go into the unknown?” (335) This questioning of Baba about imminence of death shows his intense desire to remain a part of drama of life. But the next moment his intellect finds death ‘natural’ and now it is ‘a sense of being incomplete’ that troubles him. It is in the words when his intellect reasons out this feeling of incompleteness that the affirmative message of *Moving On* is delivered to the reader: “To achieve this wholeness is the final stage of evolution, it is nirvana. But for us, who are only a part of that wholeness, it is unattainable. And yet, from the moment the umbilical cord is cut, we begin our search for the part of ourselves that will complete us, we look for that which will make us whole. It never happens, I know that now” (336). This willing acceptance, by taking into consideration all the factors of human life, is termed as affirmation in real sense. It is this acceptance reached through mature vision and knowledge that makes this novel one of the most affirmative novels of Shashi Deshpande. This note of affirmation reaches a new level in her next and the last novel, *In the Country of Deceit*.

**IN THE COUNTRY OF DECEIT**

Like *Moving On*, *In the Country of Deceit* also presents life as a constant struggle and underlines the human potential to survive. Both of these novels strongly emphasize the value of human relationships. Here again, Deshpande deals with the conflict between opposing pulls and pressures of tradition and modernity, society and individual, needs of body and conscience, physical and emotional aspects of experiences in the lives of men and women.

Though the title, *In the Country of Deceit*, suggests the predominance of the elements of unhappiness, tension and a mood of sadness and pessimism, the novel, paradoxically enough, is charged with an atmosphere of relative ease and positive attitude to live life with all that it brings. The most powerful moving force in the lives of almost all the important characters is the strong emotion of love. Primarily, this novel is a story of love between an adult man and adult woman, exploring “the slippery, treacherous
terrain that love takes people into." Deshpande herself says that though she has been exploring the idea of love in all her novels but except for one or two early attempts she had "never written a love story, in the sense in which these words are usually used." It is for the first time, in this novel, she weaves the plot around love, a strong emotion according to her, and probes into women's experience as individuals, their involvement in and the constraints of family life and the problematic of marital relations. Desire of love, its fulfilment or denial, loyalty, betrayal, faithfulness and the question of right and wrong are some of the issues which act as alienating agents in this novel. If fulfilment of desires of body takes precedence in the earlier novel, Moving On, desire of love controls the lives of the characters, here in this novel, though physical desires too hold their due importance in their lives.

The fact that the novel in imbued with a positive and affirmative spirit is evident right at the beginning of the novel when one sees Devyani, the protagonist, and her sister, Savitri, demolishing their old house and constructing a new one in its place, after the death of their parents. The newly constructed house with large, spacious, airy rooms and a walled garden is in total contrast to their old house with its dingy and dark rooms. This complete reversal of the plan of the house signifies an attempt on the part of Savi and Devi to get rid of the memories of their mother's illness and their father's suicide out of depression. It indicates their resolution to "put a closure to the memories of sadness and pain." It also goes to suggest that they cannot live in the shadows of their parents' lives characterized by sickness, failure and abject surrender to the pressures of existence. The novel, thus, at the very outset, introduces the conflict between disquieting and alienating forces, represented by their parents, particularly the father, on the one hand and the urge to live a life free from the hold of cramping and constricting forces, on the other represented by the protagonist and her sister.

Devi's father was a man of overgrown conscience which, it appears, had ossified into masculine pride, making him give up his job in the bank immediately after his marriage, only because the bank was owned by his father-in-law. His was a personality which was torn apart by his idealism, intellectualism and love of simplicity on the one hand and the demands of life's realities, the consciousness of his responsibility as a man to support not only his wife and children but also his siblings, on the other. His failures to
carry the burden of responsibilities pushed him deeper into his lonely self, worsening his state of depression, a problem he had always suffered from. His sister’s comment – “I think he always had a problem” (61) – amply testifies that like Gopal in *A Matter of Time*, Devi’s father had a tendency to withdraw into self instead of grappling with the challenges of life. This further hints at his being an introvert individual, unable to share and communicate with others. This state of utter loneliness and estrangement from his aims, from the image he had conceived of himself and also from all those around him ultimately pushed him into the nothingness of death.

The determination and the efforts of Devi and Savi to build their life anew indicate their complete denial of the life of their parents’, engulfed by despair, pain and nothingness. That’s why, the house they construct is airy, full of life and with big and spacious rooms, giving the sense of openness. This is an evidence of the inner strength and resilience which they, Devi in particular, continue to display in different situations. The sufferings, despair and the suffocating atmosphere of the family fail to infect their spirits to live on and make their life a happy experience. Devi, who had been the only companion of her parents after Savi’s marriage and had lived under constant fear of disaster due to her father’s depression and mother’s illness, is now “free of all fears” (9).

She, who had been “the accompanist to other people’s lives” (8) feels contented and at a peace with herself in her new home and with her independence: “Now, for the first time, I had to play solo. I had no one else to look after, no one to think about. I felt as if I was waiting for something to happen” (8). And something, she is waiting for, happens when she befriends Rani – an actress living in her neighbourhood. This friendship introduces her to the beautiful and charismatic world of love and subsequently leads her into the country of deceit. It begins when Rani introduces Devi to Ashok Chinnapa, Superintendent of Police, posted at Rajnur, who instantly falls in love with her. His constant phone calls and earnest proposal fuel Devi’s desire “to run, not away from him, but into his arms” (94). With this desire starts the battle in her mind between resistance and acceptance of his proposal, a clear manifestation of her conflict. Her belief in loyalty, honesty and faithfulness and her strong craving, not for sex but for love, pull her in opposite directions and render her unable to decide what she actually wants : “I didn’t
know what I wanted any more, I didn’t know what I care about ... what was wrong with me?” (95)

Ashok’s promise of love and honesty to her helps her resolve her dilemma and she gives herself – physically as well as mentally – to him: “Only this man could give me such ecstasy, only he could give me such joy with his love making. Ananda, Sindhu had called it. Yes, more than joy. Bliss ... It was this man, not the sex. This man’s love, not the sex. And yet, the sex too” (193). But her ecstasy and joy are soon overpowered by feelings of guilt because she has “overgrown conscience and has a very strong sense of right and wrong.”

Indu in Roots and Shadows and Madhu in Moving on establish physical relations outside the ambit of marriage and feel guilty about the fact that they had violated the sacredness of their marriage. But here, in this novel, it is interesting to note that Devi is unmarried and yet Deshpande makes her feels guilty and not Ashok. This, she does, perhaps, to highlight the importance Devi attaches to honesty and faithfulness. This goodness of Devi unsettles her mind and makes her ponder over the question of right and wrong. Guilt of wronging the woman (Ashok’s wife) and her daughter gets multiplicated when she has to lie even to Sindhu and Savi about Ashok: “I had entered the country of deceit. I could no longer be open and honest with people I loved; I had to deceive them” (147).

This candid confession and realization of Devi amply indicate that she is a woman with a balanced mind and clear perceptions. Her conscience and rational mind are strong enough to withstand the pressures of the desires of her body and the powerful of emotions of love for her lover. Her selfish interests fail to put blinkers on her sense of judgment.

This strength of her mind and personality, which accompanies her in her crisis in this country of deceit, is set off by the lack of these qualities displayed by characters like Kailash Navilur’s mother and Prem. If Devi remains in charge of her self, despite the depressive atmosphere of her parental home and then her irresistible love for Ashok, Kaliash Navilur’s mother and Prem get unhinged and even perverted by the shocks they get when betrayed by their partners. Deception wreaks havoc on the life of KN’s mother whose husband a school teacher, had ‘run away’ with his colleague, abandoning his wife and two young sons. The various hardships she has to bear while bringing up her children
does not let her forget that cheating and its concomitant feelings of pain, suffering, despair, loneliness and anger: “She had forgotten nothing – neither her pain, nor her suffering, nor her hatred of the other woman” (162). The way she narrates her own story to Devi clearly shows that though the world has forgotten the story but her anger is still fresh and intact: “It was like watching her tear off a bandage, revealing a wound that was still raw, still sore, still bleeding” (162). This cheating by her husband not only has wounded her soul but also has very adverse effect on her mind and personality. Her intense pain and anger make her so insensitive to others feelings that when Devi comes to meet her she mentions only those facts about her family which put her in utter discomfort. That’s why, Devi calls her “A terrible woman” and her visit to her “a terrible visit.”

It is not only the women who are shown as victims by Deshpande in her novels, as she has been blamed by her critics, but she brings out with equal intensity the disastrous effects on the psyche of men as well, when deceived by their wives. Rani walks out on her first husband, Prem when she falls in love with Mahesh Tiwari and starts staying with him. This faithlessness on his wife’s part affects the psyche of Prem to the extent that he becomes a pervert and changes girlfriends like he changes his shirts” (166). His decision to not to marry again, his habit of changing girl friends and “revelling in the way women fell for him” hint at his utter loneliness, his sense of failure and his loss of faith in the loyalty of female sex.

Faithlessness and deception in marital relationship not only affects the partner left behind but have very deleterious effect on the mind and behaviour of the children of the family. Roshni, Rani’s daughter is so much hurt by her mother’s irresponsible behaviour that she bears nothing but hatred in her heart for her mother: “She abandoned me and went to that bastard” (169). This denial of her existence by her mother pains her most. Her sharp tongue and her curt remarks, whenever she talks to her mother, are a clear indication of her anger and alienation from her mother. Thus, through Roshni, Deshpande reveals how negligence of the existence of child by parent, for her selfish interest, can lead to anger and aggression, another form of alienation, the child finds hard to get rid of: “Often, I wonder why I do it (hurt her mother) ... And I swear I won’t do it again. But I do. Again and again” (172). If Roshni turns compulsively aggressive, KN becomes too
serious and rather mechanical in his relations with others. The hatred for his father and what he has done to them makes him give up his father’s name and adopt the name of his mother’s village, Navilur, as a surname. His deprived childhood – of love, care, security and money – compel him to do with the barest minimum, a habit which becomes an essential part of his personality. It is because of this that his room in his palatial house is very simple and has minimum required furniture. If the look of his room shows that he has lost interest in enjoying luxuries and comforts of life, his marriage with Rani, an actress, and his riches earned through his business seem to be an attempt to cover the feelings of shame, humility, and deprivation and prove himself a successful man to the world. This disparity in his life-style reveals the split in his inner self. Inspite of his worldly possessions and material success his seems to be a lost-to-himself personality. Even his family members – Rani, Neha and Rohan – fail to provide him emotional succour and fill the vacuum in his heart, as he is never seen talking to them in the novel. To cope up with his inner emptiness he remains busy in his business affairs.

Emptiness and loneliness are the words that can describe the whole life of Rani - KN’s wife and Devyani’s friend – who has shifted from California to Rajnur. She is an actress who, after her marriage with KN, has left her film career. Their marriage seems to be a marriage for convenience. If KN marries her to display her as a prized possession, Rani has his money in her mind on which she can lead a fairly comfortable life after her retirement from films. It is because of this lack of genuine feeling of love and attachment that they talk to each other, even in privacy in a very formal manner. Absence of warmth in their relationship is clearly perceptible from the fact that both of them move in entirely different circles. This distance between husband and wife affects Rani more than KN who has his business to keep him busy. The feelings of emptiness and loneliness born out of her cold marital relationship are aggravated by the boredom she feels after moving away from her film career: “She was missing – not being a star – but the active working, the companionship, the camaraderie” (33). Deshpande has, time and again, suggested in her earlier novels also that women should have some work to do outside home to keep the frustration born out of relationship at bay and to have the feeling of self-fulfilment. Rani’s work as an actress – a potent means to fill up the vacuum in her life – being no
more available to her makes her irritable and moody, clear signs of her feelings of dissatisfaction and meaninglessness.

Shashi Deshpande, in her earlier novels like *The Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine* has shown that a dissatisfied woman – in personal and professional life – fails to establish healthy and warm relationship with her children. Rani’s failure in her attempts (two times) to get love through marriage and abrupt ending of her film career make her so self-centred that “she seemed almost uncaring, content to let her children spend most of their time with Lakshmi, an illiterate servant girl” (29). Neha and Rohan both desperately want their mother’s love and attention which she hardly notices. In this way, she deprives not only her children of motherly love and care but herself also the satisfaction a mother can draw from loving her children. This indifference on Rani’s part alienates her from her own children who could have helped in healing her bruised heart.

Deshpande uses the technique of comparison and contrast to bring out the various facets of human nature and the varied responses of human beings to the onslaughts of existence. If on the one hand there is Rani who suffers due to her inability to appreciate the value of what God has given her, there is Sindhu, Devi’s Aunt, who in spite of her breast cancer lives life with full zest and gusto. Like Leela of *Small Remedies*, Sindhu’s personality is a beautiful blend of tradition and modernity. Like a traditionalist she believes in the necessity of marriage and sacredness of relationships. Like a modernist she believes in that marriage should be based on love, not on convenience. It is because of this feeling of love and for the sake of gratification of her body’s desires that she marries Keshav after the death of her first husband. She urges Devi also to get married as society does not allow a woman to fulfil her desires outside this relationship of marriage. Through Sindhu’s radical views on marriage and sexuality Deshpande suggests that women should shed their inhibitions and accept their sexual desires as natural ones. Like Baba in *Moving On*, Sindhu too, understands the importance of body, a potent source of fulfllness and in order to save her body, she undergoes the painful treatment. After effects of therapy – falling hair, loss of memory and easy infections – fail to dempen her spirits. Instead of brooding over her illness she busies herself with meeting new people, reading, watching T.V. etc.
Like success, suffering and disease too make a person narcissist. But Sindhu's is an altogether different personality. Like many other invalid persons, she does not hanker after the sympathy and attention; rather, participates in and cares for her loved ones like her daughters, son, daughter-in-law, Devi and Savi. Her concern for Devi's marriage shows that even during her illness she is worried about the welfare of others. It is this quality of goodness in Sindhu's character — love and concern for others and zest for life — that makes life possible for her as well as for her loved ones.

The reasons behind the ease and comfort with which Sindhu lives her life is the genuine and intense love, which she shares with her husband Keshav. Through the example of two couples — Sindhu and Keshav, Savi and Shree — Deshpande brings out clearly how genuine feelings of love, faith and sincerity can work wonders for a marital relationship which further prepares the sound foundation of happy families. A happy and satisfied wife as Sindhu is, she proves to be equally good and helping mother for her children who understands their needs, desires and demands. That's why, all her three children Tara, Vidya and Gundu are happily married and well settled. Same is the case with Savi who marries Shree out of love. Their's has been such a wonderful relationship that relatives call them beloved of Gods. This satisfaction and fulfilment in her marital life paves way for happy motherhood. As against Rani, Savi is an indulgent mother who always remains worried about the welfare of her children. Thus, through the experiences of Savi and Sindhu, Deshpande suggests that one strong emotion, i.e. love is needed to create happy individuals and families.

What distinguishes this novel from all the earlier novels of Deshpande and makes it the most affirmative one is not the presence of those figures — Savi, Shree, Keshav and Sindhu — towards whom God has been gracious but the grit, courage and will of those persons — Rani, Kusuma and Devi — who have been denied the succour and satisfaction which love — a life giving force — can provide. Though after marriage Rani's career in films is over, her nostalgia about films shows that she still has some spark to revive that glory of her earlier days. Her friendship with Devi, who according to Rani, can write story for her film, makes her firm in her decision to try once again in films. This effort on her part clearly shows that she won't passively accept the boring life she is compelled to lead by her circumstances. Rather, she very enthusiastically starts meeting producers to
The very idea of beginning of the shooting of the film fills her with a new vigour and brings a positive change in her perspective: “Yes. Thing pass, ... things change. We lose things but we also get things we never expected” (242).

Deshpande seems to have come a long way from her novels of earlier phase to the latest one, In the Country of Deceit as it is for the first time in this novel she has created such a strong character in Kusuma, a woman belonging to the lower class. Kusuma’s optimism, will power and her decision to live life on her own terms separates her from her earlier counterparts. Characters like Jeeja, Tara, Manda, Shakutai and Sulu in earlier novels have been portrayed as weak personalities who accept meekly and submit cravenly to their fate or destiny. But Kusuma is bold and courageous enough to resist and fight against the injustice done to her. Unlike Jeeja and Shakutai, she does not accept the presence of other woman in her husband’s life. She refuses to bear the humiliation and walks out on him the day he raises his hand at her. Instead of reveling in self-pity and asking for sympathy from her family members, she decides to earn her livelihood by working as a cook. Besides being self-reliant, she takes on the responsibility of taking care of her mother. The way Kusuma takes control of her life and steers it in the direction she wants clearly shows that she believes in moving forward and has the potential to make life livable, whatever may be circumstances.

Devi, too, believes in moving on the life but only on her own terms and conditions. Like Manjari of Moving On, she is courageous and decides to fight, single handedly, against Naik, who wants to usurp her land. She is guided by her own thoughts and desires regarding her decisions in life and loves her independence jealously. That’s why, she decides to stay alone in her house, ignoring the gently voiced disapproval of her decision by her relatives. High principled and thoughtful person as she is, she earns her living by teaching English and through her translation of a book. This honestly to her own self gets revealed in her decision of not marrying, in spite of all the pressures from her family members: “If I felt about any man the way Sindhu feels about Keshav, I would get married straight away” (29).

When she feels the same way for Ashok – a married man – she enters in relationship with him, fully aware of the fact that this relationship is against social norms.
and that's why has no future. Her honesty to her own desires makes her carry on this relationship. When rebuffed by Shree for this illegal relationship, she vehemently defends herself by revealing the futility of loyalty when there is no love between partners. Compassion and acceptance, according to her, are the necessary ingredients of a relationship. But her traditional upbringing overshadows her radical thinking and makes her feel like an adulteress and cheap. The humiliation and shame connected to these words and the guilt of doing wrong to the woman married to Ashok compel her to put an end to this relationship.

Though for a brief while she feels very low and even thinks about death, her inner strength and Rani's words, "things pass, things change," bring a change in her perspective. She feels that she has to get on with her life whatever may the circumstances. This, she finds, is possible when she actively participates in the lives of the people who love her: "And I will have to join them, I will join them" (258). Moreover, she feels that the memories of her mother and father will remain forever with her, providing her inner peace and comfort. Besides this realization of the value of familial ties, her decision to keep the memory of her experiences with Ashok in her heart and never to forget it is an attempt on her part to keep her individuality intact.

Thus, in *Moving On* and *In the Country of Deceit*, Deshpande reaches the highest point of her creative art as far as the theme of alienation and affirmation is concerned. If in the earlier novels we come across a long line of alienated characters, here, in these novels, the spirit of affirmation of life and its values seem to imbue the life of most of the characters from the very beginning. Though the dominance of body over soul, puritanical austerity, sibling jealousy, betrayals and treachery within close family relations mar the placid life of almost all the characters causing loneliness and disappointment in their life, the overall environment of the novels seems to be charged with positive energy. Unlike earlier novels, here, some of the male characters such as Baba and his father and characters belonging to the lower class such as Kusuma, emerge as dynamic figures rather than static ones. They display some commendable qualities of head and heart which make them see their life with detachment and accept their own responsibilities for their failures and sufferings. But the protagonists, Manjari and Devi surpass all the male and female characters of earlier novels by Deshpande as far as the courage and positive
outlook towards life is concerned. If their independent spirit enables them to live life according to their own will then their rationality makes them bold enough to accept the responsibility of their actions. Instead of feeling guilty or blaming the others for their predicament they believe in moving on in life, without ever looking back. This quality of their personality makes them winners in real sense.
NOTES

2 Ibid.

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.


11 Ibid.

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.