Shashi Deshpande's writings have addressed several social issues, worked through historical and traditional contexts and explored psychological conflicts and inner spaces. She has been acclaimed for her realistic portrayal of the life of the Indian middle class woman. Critics have focused on Deshpande's women protagonists and issues related to feminist concerns and modes of resistance. Mukta Atrey and Viney Kripal in *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of Her Fiction* (1998), for example, consider her writing to be women-centred. R.S. Pathak's *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande* (1998) works through a dominantly feminist approach. These and several other edited volumes of critical studies do not take into consideration Deshpande's own stand that the impulse behind her work is more than the 'woman question'. They do not take seriously Deshpande’s own observation, that "to apply the tag of feminist, is one way, I've realised, of dismissing the serious concerns of the novels by labeling them" (Pathak 230). In her article "Writing from the Margin", Deshpande points out,

The way I see the world is coloured by this fact of my being a woman, by the historical and social
circumstances of women's lives. My themes, therefore, my characters and possibly, to a certain extent, even my language may differ from a man's . . . . Nevertheless when I sit down to write I am just a writer – my gender ceases to matter to me. I am concerned with the same problems of language, narrative, structure and continuity … (144)

The essay critiques the idea of a "woman writer". Deshpande goes on to narrate her personal experience of having her own works treated with condescension. She recalls having tried to overcome the socially biased attitudes towards the woman writer by consciously giving space to male narrators in her works. She adds:

It was with a short story 'The Intrusion' that I broke out this wall I had built around myself as a woman and wrote in what I recognized only much later was not only a woman's voice, but my own authentic voice. (147)

In her novels, Deshpande has engaged in "pushing back frontiers, letting the light into hitherto dark, ignored areas" (152). She however rejects the idea of being governed in her writing by a solely feminist ideology. She does not consider 'rebellion' "generally understood to mean walking out on a marriage" as a liberating process. She believes that inner awareness is a
positive attribute, ". . . it is always clear that an understanding of oneself is what really liberates, it is this that opens out a number of possibilities. To walk out, or away, is to carry the old self within oneself" (159). She chooses not to comply with the expectations of literary critics who categorize writers on the basis of the 'ism' they are expected to propagate. Her appeal is: "For God's sake, I'm a novelist, I write novels, not feminist tracts. Read my novel as a novel, not as a piece of work that intends to propagate feminism" (159). The essay concludes with Deshpande's own view of 'margins'. She claims to begin her writing after leaving 'a huge margin, a larger, blank space' (165) which quickly gets filled up with corrections. Gradually the margin overflows and creeps or encroaches the centre until, ironically, "the margin takes over, it becomes the real text" (165).

One is thus faced with the question of whether Deshpande really wrote from the margin / about the marginalised, or crossed over centre stage (un)consciously to study women's predicaments as 'human issues'. In her essay "In First Person," which is a self-analysis, she avers, "people were, still are, more important to me than theories and when I wrote I always saw an individual, a human being, a woman – I never saw a class called 'women' (Margin 10). Deshpande rejects outright the feminist label. Her concern is the 'human being' and her fiction may not create female enclaves either. Her women protagonists do not revel in the otherness of women but view themselves as part of the societal whole. Indu, in Roots and Shadows (1983)
says 'Women, women, women. I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of Narcissism. As if we had locked ourselves and thrown away the key' (78).

In an interview with Ranjana Harish, Deshpande rejects the 'feminist writer' label since this would/might put her writing in danger of being read in a limited kind of way. She adds "... when I am writing I am purely a novelist . . ." (Harish 28). She goes onto clarify her position: "My idea of feminism is simple. It means that I see men and women as two halves of a whole. In every way, we have been created to complement each other, and together we can fulfil our roles in life" (28). Nearly all her protagonists go through a period of self-evaluation and emerge enlightened, with a clarity of vision that makes life more meaningful and worth living. Jaya in *That Long Silence* (1989) and Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) come to terms with all those selves they reject resolutely in the beginning. The fragmented selves that defy mutual coexistence subsequently become whole-

... all those selves she had rejected so resolutely first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the involving wife . . . all persons spiked with guilts. Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again. (Dark 201)
Deshpande's concern is 'human' in the sense that she delves into interpersonal relationships. Social and cultural norms, nevertheless, govern these relationships. Desired behavioural patterns and expected role-plays are discussed at length. As a perceptive novelist, she zeroes in on individuals and sets about analysing their selfhoods. Her enduring concern is for human relationships. One cannot pigeon-hole her novels as feminist since they are not concerned solely with man versus woman issues.

Deshpande's narratives work through interiorized journeys into the past. Her works deal with interior spaces both literally and figuratively. Her writing can be placed broadly within the framework of realism since it engages with actual life situations. As Jasbir Jain discusses in *Gendered Realities, Human Spaces: The Writings of Shashi Deshpande* (2003), Deshpande’s writing

…works through the medium of characters, who evolve as they go along and evolve through self-reflection, psychological questioning, blame and guilt, who work through memory and reveal ambivalent attitudes and act in ways that they themselves may not understand. It is through these ambiguities and interfacings with subconscious drives that both the idea of romance and the structure of myth are dislocated. (242)
The really strong women in her novels are the ones that cross boundaries, deviate from social codes and work their way to selfhood. They define their selfhood, freedom and personal space in highly individual terms irrespective of the compromises they may have to make. Savitribai and Leela "knew the price they had to pay for it" (Small Remedies 224).

Seen from a feminist perspective, Deshpande’s narratives open out in multiple ways as they rewrite earlier narratives of womanhood. These narratives explore the way a woman writes and go on to explain the way a woman lives, discovers herself, relates to society and in the end, succeeds in extracting a meaning to confirm her idea of self. Deshpande's novels are densely peopled. Relatives and friends and distant memories vie with one another for attention. Jasbir Jain who critiques Deshpande’s novels within the frame work of realism, comments in Gendered Realities, Human Spaces that Deshpande

works through the medium of characters, who evolve as they go along and evolve through self-reflection, psychological questioning, blame and guilt, who work through memory and reveal ambivalent attitudes and act in ways that themselves may not understand. (242)

The 'strong' women cross boundaries, breaking social codes to attain selfhood in highly individualized ways. In the final analysis, the woman is
not victim, but challenger. As Jain points out, the choice is “no longer between either captivity or exile but is guided towards personal transformation and external restructuring” (271). A reworking of both these takes place in order that a new pattern may emerge. In the process of this transformation the responsibility of the individual is given as much importance as her emancipation.

*Small Remedies (SR)*, Deshpande's sixth novel presents a daring break from the pattern of her earlier stories. She handles unwieldy material in a masterly fashion. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her essay, “On Her Own Terms: A Reading of Shashi Deshpande’s *Small Remedies*”, lauds the novelist’s expertise in narration:

The author is in no great hurry to get on with the story.

The narrative unfolds leisurely like a raga, beginning with aalap, continuing with vistaar, gradually gaining momentum in a quickening spiral of suspense eventually to achieve a cathartic calm. (Bharat 173)

*Small Remedies*, is concerned like all of Deshpande’s previous works, with issues that beset a convention ridden society. But as Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks, none of Deshpande's previous novels gather up as this one does
in one large sweep, the plurality, diversity and contradictions of contemporary culture. She cuts across cultures and religion, incorporating many social nuances in an introspective novel dealing with abstract questions.

(Bharat 175)

*Small Remedies* tells the story of three women: Savitribai Indorekar, the doyenne of Hindustani music, Leela, the social activist who spends a lifetime working with the factory workers of Bombay, and Madhu, the one who is commissioned to write a biography of Savitribai. Madhu the narrator, is emotionally shattered by the death of her only son Adit in a bomb blast, and her estrangement from her husband Som. The assignment to write the biography is meant to be therapeutic for Madhu. The multiple narratives serve as peepholes into the lives of not just these three women, but also of others like Munni, Lata and a host of male characters. Savitribai and Leela are unusual women who have left the beaten track. They have forged radical alliances across cultures and have ventured upon unconventional careers. At the heart of the narrative is Madhu, trying to come to terms with her grief and guilt. The past and present intermingle, fates criss cross, parallels and contrasts emerge, as Madhu embarks upon the writing of the biography. She says: "We see our lives through memory and memories are fractured, fragmented, almost always cutting across time" (*SR* 165). Writing the
biography in a sense helps Madhu to cope with her bereavement and also to
get away from her husband Som. Even as Madhu begins to analyse or sum up
Savitri's multidimensional roles: as daughter, daughter-in-law, lover, mother
and singer, she becomes aware of the many similarities and contrasts in their
lives. If Savitribai rejects her only child Munni, and blots her out of her
memory, Madhu is still nursing the deep wound that the death of her son Adit
has inflicted on her. Ironically both Munni and Adit die in the same bomb
blasts that rock Bombay. Madhu marvels over how Savitribai can turn her
back on her own child, while Madhu is herself so absorbed in 'putra moha'.
She agonizes over why her “seventeen year old son had to die such a horrible
death” (SR 5) and struggles to make sense of “this freakish thing (SR 5) that
had shattered her life with Som.

Memories crowd into her mind and Madhu examines them threadbare.
At the upanayanam ceremony that she witnesses at the Bhawanipur temple,
when the mother babies her son for the last time, she realizes that she had
never let her son go, until he was snatched away by death. All the small
remedies that one resorts to in order to make life bearable prove futile;
wishing for forgetfulness is just as absurd. Madhu asks:

How could I have ever longed for amnesia? Memory, capricious and unreliable though it is, ultimately carries
its own truth within it. As long as there is memory, there
is always the possibility of retrieval, as long as there is
memory, loss is never total. (SR 324)

(SR 324)

Madhu also speaks of many couples in her narrative. Savitribai and Ghulamsab, Latha and Hari, Leela and Joe. These analyses in turn help her understand her relationship with Som and give her insights into the crisis in her own marriage. Could she be responsible for the rift? Could she, then be the cause for Adit’s leaving home? Should she be accused by Som for something that happened years ago? These are the questions that Madhu tries to grapple with. But at the centre of it is the search for the real Savitri Bai.

Small Remedies is also about the creative process. The protagonist as writer is recurrent in Deshpande's novels. Madhu is a successor to Indu (The Dark Holds No Terror) and Jaya (That Long Silence) who are confronted by the angst of writing. Madhu also examines her role as a writer. Writing about the life of one who is still living, whose "life is still fluid, inchoate and incomplete' (SR 169) becomes a cruel process. As the biography progresses, we see Madhu's journey through childhood, adolescence, marriage and the sorrow that engulfs her. Madhu compares the act of writing to a musical
performance. ". . . plans go awry, rules are scattered, new discoveries lie in
wait" (SR 280).

The entire narrative of *Small Remedies* is markedly different from the
previous novels written by Deshpande. Deshpande gives up the first person
narrator and uses, instead the omniscient narrator; here Madhu whose
perspective makes the narrative tightly and strongly structured. The lives
discussed (Bai’s and Leela’s) are treated speculatively and objectively. There
is no hidden anger, only an acceptance of the unknown. The plot goes beyond
a documentation of personal lives to embrace socio-political issues as well.
Communal violence and fatal bomb blasts form an integral part of the story.
Savitribai’s act of rebellion in walking out of a traditional marriage from
within a conservative Brahmin household, to her lover a Muslim tabla-player,
problematises the socio-political implications of an inter-community
marriage. Besides, Bai defies her traditional Brahmanical upbringing by
taking up music as a vocation, parenting an illegitimate child, in short by
throwing respectability to the winds.

Leela the other strong women in the novel is the "black sheep of the
family. A widow who remarried. And what was worse, infinitely worse,
moved a Christian man" (SR 46). The family keeps these memories alive
while Leela’s good work as teacher and social worker are conveniently
forgotten. "Her years of teaching, her role in the trade unions, her work
among the factory workers - these were blanked out, they did not exist" (SR 46). This is a woman who is ahead "not only of her own generation, but the next one as well" (SR 94). Leela spends the best part of her life living in the chawls, wearing coarse saris, in very modest circumstances, waging war against oppression of any kind. She courts arrests and imprisonments. Unlike Bai she does not yearn for the limelight.

Leela appears to successfully combine the roles of the public hero for Hari, and the personal hero for Madhu. The passionate, independence-loving Leela is the hope for the women of the future. Her heroism is the fixed symbol at the novel's centre of female potential and human possibility. She is a vibrant public figure. She balances that role superbly well with that of a loving wife and mother. Madhu cannot dream of writing Leela’s biography since she claims that one needs to be detached, objective and even ruthless to be able to assess a life. Her intimacy with Leela forecloses the impersonal scrutiny that the writing of a biography entails.

*Small Remedies* may also be viewed as a novel that has motherhood and mothering as one of its themes. Two strands in the story run counter to one another. On the one hand we see Madhu, the self-sacrificing mother, totally, perhaps even abnormally absorbed in her child's world. She is hopelessly smitten by “putra-moha.” On the other hand, the figure of Bai looms large over the narrative as an indifferent mother who is reluctant to
acknowledge her daughter in the course of her meteoric rise into fame. The relations between mother and daughter have been reappraised by several theorists. Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow and Luce Irigaray place emphasis on the pre-Oedipal attachment between mother and daughter. Chodorow points out that the mother, while treating her son as an autonomous individual from a relatively early age, tends to cultivate a symbiotic bond with her daughter since she seeks unconsciously to re-create the intimate bond she enjoyed with her own mother. The consequence is that boys grow up possessing a strong sense of autonomy, whereas girls are likely to feel a greater sense of interdependence and connection with other people (Palmer 114). When viewed from this light, Deshpande's text hardly touches upon any mother - daughter relationship that can claim intimacy at all. For Madhu, her mother is just a picture of a girl with two thick plaits, displaying a trophy, "scarcely a mother figure" (SR 101). Munni consciously avoids speaking of her mother and expresses open disdain for her father, Ghulam Saab. Obviously there is no love lost between the mother and child. She chooses to identify the lawyer in Pune as her father. When Madhu unexpectedly meets Munni, a mature woman by then, she (Munni) retorts defiantly "My name is Shailaja - Shailaja Joshi" (SR 76) cutting out her past and erasing her link with Savitri Bai. There is no evidence of any kind of maternal protection/attachment/concern whatsoever.
The 'mother' in Deshpande's *Small Remedies* gets a raw deal. Madhu confesses; "I know nothing of Mothers" (*SR* 101). Looking back, the mothers she knew were ever "harried creatures in drab saries, forever in the kitchen, endlessly preoccupied with food and children" (*SR* 33). They were "drab, badly dressed mothers of (her) friends" (*SR* 14). Groomed as she has been in an all-male household, Madhu cannot relate to the boring game of ‘house-house’ that little girls played. It is the man-servant Babu who initiates her into 'girlhood' with its baggage of dos and don'ts. Lata too has unhappy memories of her mother. She tells Madhu the story of a jack tree that was cut down in the compound of her home at the instance of her superstitious mother. She gets it felled since the bats that occupied the tree disturbed her. Lata remembers that it made her mother happy but in a month's time she killed herself. Strangely though, there is not a single photograph in the house of the woman. Lata's recollections of the incident is coloured with distaste and a deep anger.

However, when motherhood comes to Madhu she undergoes a transformation. She realises mother's love meant "a small centre, a vast exclusion" (*SR* 144). Her new role absorbs her entirely. Covered with the thick haze of motherhood" (*SR* 148), she enters a new world. "As far as I am concerned, there's only Adit and me in this new world I've entered. The others are mere shadows. Som is part of our world, but he is on the periphery" (*SR* 146).
Simone de Beauvoir has written extensively on the mother-child relationship. Of a mother de Beauvoir says "in her son she looks for a god; in her daughter she finds a double" (de Beauvoir 600). The mother seeks for salvation through a son or daughter, but she bases her fondest hopes upon the son. This is how de Beauvoir describes the advent of the son:

Here he is, come to her at last from the depths of the past, the man for whose glorious advent she once scanned the distant horizon; since the first wail of her new born son she has awaited this day when he would pour out all the treasures which his father had been unable to shower upon her. (596)

The anxiety that Madhu experiences is an expression of the mother's desperate dependence on the son for validating her own existence. There is evidently here an irrational obsession verging on the neurotic. She is overcome with the constant fear that Adit might be orphaned and broods over who will be his guardian in the event of their death. One may attribute this over protectiveness to Madhu's ignorance of 'mothering'. "My mother remained a blank space through childhood" (SR 171) she tells us. But she does not hesitate to add:

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

In fact according to Madhu real life mothers are a contrast to the 'reel' life "white-clad, sacrificing, sobbing mothers" (SR 183). She lists them: "Munni's mother who ignored her daughter; Ketaki's mother, stern, dictatorial and so partial to her sons; Sunanda, sweetly devious and manipulating; Som's mother, so demanding -" (SR 183). Ironically when Madhu dons the same role, she finds herself in the centre of a new universe, a stable centre/destination for her child's searching eyes. She begins to believe that "mother love is one of the greatest wonders of this world" (SR 184).

De Beauvoir describes the complex relations between mother and daughter:

. . . the daughter is for the mother at once her double and another person, the mother is at once overweeningly affectionate and hostile toward her daughter; she saddles her child with her own destiny: a way of proudly laying claim to her own femininity and also a way of revenging herself for it. (309)

The relationship between Munni and her mother, Bai, is left unclear in the text. De Beauvior's statement may to some degree resolve the mystery: “She [the mother] projects upon her daughter all the ambiguity of her relation
with herself” (de Beauvoir 32). The mother detests her own femininity and the hardship that it has entailed, so she plays out her disappointment and even frustration on her daughter. Maternity is often looked upon as saintly and perfectly genuine whereas, "Maternity is usually a strange mixture of narcissism, altruism, idle day-dreaming, sincerity, bad faith, devotion and cynicism" (de Beauvoir 529). It can be surmised that Bai's experiences on her road to fame embitter her. De Beauvoir avers that maternal instincts are also socially constructed.

While Deshpande plays down the glory of motherhood on the one hand, she simultaneously attempts to assert the 'unquestionable' superiority of 'mothering' and 'maternal instincts'. Madhu, the biographer, is determined to give Munni a place in the written life story of her mother. In Bai's journey to success and fame, she had chosen to erase the names of her daughter and her husband. Madhu cannot stop wondering how Bai can sleep turning her back on that part of her life. "Does she not face the stark truth at that time, the truth that confronts me every moment of my life - the futility of life without children?" (SR 154) Madhu launches on a sermon of the gift of children, which is obviously a eulogy of motherhood as well. "The desire for a child, the anguish of childlessness - these have been a part of human kind since ancient times". She says the child is "the single most important factor of human life… A child is a beginning, a renewal, a continuation, an assertion of immortality" (SR 168).
The whole narrative hinges on Madhu's attempts at coming to terms with the reality of Adit's death. She juxtaposes this process with Bai’s story - trying to find answers to her own queries. At one level she sees in Bai a fellow sufferer, having lost her only child on the same day, in the same way that she has been robbed of Adit. In the depths of her quest for a rationale for all that has happened she says,

\[\ldots\text{my mind has been ceaselessly exercising on the treadmill of this one thought: how does one live with the knowledge of a child's death? It is our children who reconcile us to the passing of time, to our aging, to our irrelevance, our mortality, without them the world makes no sense, without them we have no place in it. How then does one live without them? Can Bai give me the clue to this? Has she found the secret?} \] (SR 155)

In writing Bai's biography, Madhu gets emotionally involved in Munni's absence from Bai's journey down memory lane. The ellipses and fissures that show through are attributed to a yawning 'lack' - Savitri Bai the mother. Without touching upon the mother-daughter relationship, the life story of the singer never seems to attain completion. Madhu says:

I have to negotiate my way between this woman and the cruel mother of my memory. Between this woman and
the dazzlingly beautiful singer with her lover, whom she kept purposefully in the background. \((SR\ 170)\)

Madhu's search for the real Bai forms the crux of the narrative. Bai's narration projects an image of herself that is far from satisfying and convincing. Her silence about her personal life is tantalizing. The mystery, and the darkness invite interest and a genuine curiosity. "I know it's in this darkness, that the woman I want resides," thinks Madhu \((SR\ 177)\). She sets about probing this darkness. There are moments when Madhu expresses intense dislike for the artist - her arrogant, aggressive behaviour makes her exclaim: "This nasty, tyrannical creature . . . Is this woman going to be part of my book?" \((SR\ 61)\). The dislike evidently springs from Bai's evasion of motherhood and her calculated efforts to keep the Munni question at bay.

In Small Remedies one is confronted by the portrayal of two extreme images of motherhood: Madhu's stifling obsession with her son and Bai's cold indifference to her daughter. An attempt is on, apparently, to justify Madhu's stance by critiquing Bai. Deshpande at this point is in danger of being trapped in conservative paradigms of womanhood. One cannot help noticing Madhu's projection of the image of a deviant who does not live up to the image of the culturally stereotyped mother, who in blotting out a child from her memory becomes guilty of an unpardonable crime. In the attempt
to burden Bai with guilt regarding her atypical attitude to mothering, the agenda of patriarchy that the text indirectly promotes stands exposed.

Deshpande's text is also guilty of occasionally stereotyping women. She may have etched the picture of a powerful woman, a careerist who follows her dream with determination. “The entire household is organized around Bai's needs, her imperatives” (SR 28) we are told. The power Bai wields at home is amazing. She makes the rules, while the others - be they male or female - follow them unquestioningly. She is pompous as she displays her album to Madhu. Bai has come a long way from that day when her grandmother put an abrupt end to her singing with a discouraging "That's enough, child" (SR 28).

Bai’s mother encouraged her as a young girl to sing, but she does not mention her mother's death. Ironically she speaks enthusiastically about her father who, in fact, stood in the way of her music lessons. Madhu imagines the rough road Bai must have traversed to reach her present height. The elopement - from an orthodox Brahmin family with a Muslim tabla player may have caused an upheaval in the household. The very fact that her father-in-law had magnanimously arranged music lessons may have enraged other women folk at home. Her attempts to enroll under Pandit Kashinath Bawa becomes a long drawn out painful process of requests, entreaties and unashamed pleadings. In a weak moment Bai confesses "... it became a
curse, my being a Brahmin woman. My belonging to a respectable family" (SR 130). The best years of her life are spent in arduous travels to learn music at the feet of a master. She may have come into a lot of bitter criticism. It must have taken remarkable courage to survive the hostility, the animal cruelty to the deviant. There is no protest. Bai does not declare war on anyone to break conventions. But she tramples over other lives to gain her ends. She makes use of Ghulam Saab, of whom she says nothing at all, to reach the lime light. Bai's narration of her own story is linear. Her only concern is for the spotlight to be focused upon 'I-me-myself' (SR 167). Perhaps Bai is determined to highlight the victor instead of the victim. Bai's designs are however clear to her biographer:

It occurs to me that like her daughter, Bai too is into denial. There is no Munni in her life, no illegitimate child, abandoned husband, no lover . . . she is presenting me with her own illusion of her life. A life of success and achievement. Nothing lacking; no unreconciled child, no dead daughter. (SR 78)

Bai's rise to fame may be deemed a saga of victory, of a woman who defied society. The iron woman's sternness and indifference, her unswerving focus on self advancement is sometimes overplayed. Is Bai attempting to mimic the male, one is inclined to suspect. But the carefully built image is
subverted by the one question upper most in Madhu’s mind "... what kind of a woman are you, denying your own child? Only the lowest, the meanest kind of creature could do such a thing" (SR 78). Madhu, as biographer, is articulating, perhaps unconsciously, the importance of motherhood as a passport to womanhood. Women can attain fulfillment only if they accept and live out their roles as mothers, the narrative seems to suggest.

In an interview with Vanamala Viswanathan, Deshpande says:

It's necessary for women to live in a relationship. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing. What I don't agree with is the idealization of motherhood - the false and sentimental notes that accompany it. (13)

*Small Remedies*, needless to say, gets side-tracked in the attempt to make an anxious reassessment of a woman’s life, through relentlessly teasing out the elusive mother in Bai.

Madhu had never known what a proper 'family' is. Even the time spent with Leela, her aunt and Leela’s husband Joe did not give her the experience or the sense of being part of a 'proper' family in the conventional sense. Her marriage to Som proves to be the gateway to this much sought-after experience. Her dream family consisted of: "The dignified father. The
nurturing mother. The serious, responsible oldest brother. The eldest sister, a surrogate mother to the youngest two” (emphasis added). The family photograph that she etches is complete - gender roles are assigned in the very adjectives used: dignified, 'serious' and 'responsible' males; 'nurturing' 'surrogate mother' females. Statements such as these which occasionally surface through the unconscious of the text seem to endorse patriarchal formulations and in doing so contradict the professed stance of the author.

Lata, in whose house Madhu stays when she goes to work on the biography on Savithri Bai, is to all appearances a 'liberated' woman. She stays on in her family house at Bhavanipur even after her marriage to Hari. "Hers is a pervasive presence" (SR 41) while Hari is like a guest in the house. He takes over household chores - cooking and cleaning, playing the concerned host and devoted husband. On a Sunday, Lata is seen cleaning her scooter with gusto while Hari goes to buy breakfast and later lays the table. It is Hari again who lights the diyas on Diwali eve. This is overtly an instance of gender crossover - a device the author perhaps employs to break stereotyping and culturally inscribed roles. However, Lata is still unhappy about not being free to travel - of the job that stands in the way, a job she cannot afford to give up. It is at this juncture that Madhu makes an observation:
This naivety seems endearing to me, the naivety that makes her unaware of the fact, or makes her ignore it perhaps, that the burden of earning the money should be Hari's, not hers. That she does not have to take on the responsibility of being the wage earner of the family.

(SR 94)

Thus Deshpande seems to unintentionally promote the very essentialist attitudes to gender that she seeks to challenge.

Deshpande explores the whole notion of masculinity which rests on the idea of strength, superiority and power. Her range of male characters is fairly wide encompassing also passive fathers and nearly absent father figures. Some are sensitive, even artistically inclined. "Deshpande projects peripheral men into the central consciousness of the reader and seeks to redefine masculinity and free it from the heroic mould" says Jasbir Jain (105). Even the worst of men in her novels are granted redeeming qualities: they are hardly ever aggressive and dominating.

Ashis Nandy in "Woman versus womanliness in India: An Essay in Social and Political Psychology," observes that the polarity between the masculine and the feminine is not as marked in India as it is in western tradition. He states, "The concept of adya shakti, primal or original power, is entirely feminine in India. It is the male principle in the god-head, purusha,
that is . . . relatively passive, weak, distant and secondary" (72). In India, unlike as in many western societies, the softer form of creativity and the more intuitive and introspective styles of intellectual and social functions are not strongly identified with femininity. There is masculinity that is closely linked to forceful, potency-driven, 'hard' and 'hard headed' modes of intrusive behaviour. Sex-role specific qualities here are differently distributed. In fact, the concept of potency in Indian high culture has always had a private, introversive quality about it (75).

The men in Small Remedies are mild and toned down: Madhu's father, her father-in-law, Chandru, Joe (who loves literature), Ghulam Saab, and Som. Som may be the cause of Madhu's grief, but he is no thug, on the contrary he is a sensitive husband. While the text undercuts several mothers, fathers seem to be more accessible, less stifling and menacing. Savitribai speaks warmly of her father inspite of the fact that he objected vehemently to her pursuing music. Lata also has happy thoughts of her father. Madhu is brought up in an all male household. She appears totally at ease in any company since she is not gender - conscious. She says, "Brought up by a father, I never felt the strangeness, the otherness of men myself, nor did I feel the need to be part of a female group" (SR 37). One cannot help noticing the narrator's awe when she speaks of her father. De Beauvoir's comment on the father - daughter bond may be relevant here:
The life of the father has a mysterious prestige: the hours he spends at home, the room where he works, the objects he has around him, his pursuits, his hobbies, have a sacred character. He incarnates that immense, difficult and marvelous world of adventure; he personifies, transcends, he is God. (314)

Munni's fondness for the man she claims to be her father also is in a sense, a deification of the male.

Madhu finds women inscrutable. A sense of alienation creeps in as she speaks of her own kind:

The truth is I'm comfortable with men, I've grown up among men - my father, Babu and the Kakas, my father's friends. I understand men. Its the women I find harder to understand. At times, like when Ketaki's mother speaks to me, I think I need someone to translate the language for me. There seems to be some disjointedness between her words and what she means. (SR 88)

She takes the stance of a detached observer as she exclaims in fascination, "The women were a revelation to me" (SR 137) since without men, they explode in gay abandon through their masks of assigned roles. It is the voice of the outsider that comes through Munni is the only female
companion that Madhu seems to have had in her childhood. She admires the beautiful Savitri Bai - but does not miss a mother. Her world is the male world - her haven, where the odour of cigarettes "meant security to [her]" (SR 138). Later, when she takes up a job at Hamidbai's office, she is again comfortably placed in a male world.

Traditionally myths and family structures have been fed by accepted notions of masculine strength, superiority and power. Deshpande seeks to redefine masculinity and free it from the heroic mould. Joe, whom Madhu idealizes, is a hero in her eyes for all the 'right' reasons: his love for literature, his gentleness, concern and care. As Madhu claims it is Joe "who led [her] into the magic of language and words" (SR 79). Joe appears almost super human, even sublime - "his lovableness radiating outwards, touching everyone" (SR 3). Her first job at Hamid's 'City Lights' takes her into the heart of an enjoyable camaraderie with Chandru, Som and Tony. Madhu dotes on her father, while Munni unrelentingly attaches herself to her lawyer father Sadhasiv Rao at Pune. She however detests Ghulam Saab - accuses him of kidnapping and ill treating her, whereas the neighbours know that, it is Bai who scolds her, beats her and its her 'father' Ghulam Saab who keeps a watchful eye on her all the time. Much later, Hasina, the granddaughter of the tabla-playing accompanist, gives a revealing picture of a great human being, an already married Muslim man who fathered Bai's daughter out of wedlock, the one who made Bai what she became, the one who "... held his
own art in rein, kept it tethered to the singer's needs, never impinging on the
singer's right to lead . . . did not play the game of one upmanship so many
tabla players do. . ." (SR 273). This artist finally ignored and abandoned by
Bai at the height of her fame, and rejected by Munni, is driven to lead the
dissipated life of a drunkard. None of these men fit into the image that
traditional patriarchy marks out for the man. In fact some of them
complement their partners so well that they present a picture of perfection.
Hari and Lata, Leela and Joe, even Bai and Ghulam Saab display "the
seamless union between the voice and the instrument" (SR 276). At the sub
textual level one becomes aware of an unconscious valourization of the male.

In the novel, there are two instances that touch upon female sexuality
wherein the narrator recounts the male-female encounter on a physical level.
When Tony first chances upon Madhu while she is changing into her night
dress, he makes an attempt to physically touch her. Madhu strikes him. Tony
blames it on his "hormones". The incident is treated as inconsequential, and
Tony formally becomes her brother after a ‘bhau-buj' ceremony. The second
instance, recalled much later in the novel, is when fifteen year old Madhu
learns that something serious has happened to her father and she locks herself
in a room to pour out her grief in solitude. When she opens the door after
persistent call and knocks, a young man - the artist, enters to console her. But
as sorrow erupts again and the artist holds Madhu close to him in a bid to
"stop the desperate, convulsive movements" of her body, they encroach upon
forbidden territory. "Nothing is unknown, nothing is strange. An ancient memory, waiting to be released all these years, in directing (her) body's responses, making (her) aware of the pleasure . . . “(SR 268). The whole episode, treated as an instinctual response to each others' bodies does not disturb Madhu through all her growing years until much later, when Som hears about it. This becomes the starting point of the rift between the husband and wife. The whole question of marriage now hinges on this issue of physical chastity. Madhu does not make much of this premarital sexual encounter and it does not take on the colour of molestation or child abuse. The text seems to underplay the seriousness of the issue. In other contexts, this incident would be a commentary on the patriarchal outlook. However in the eyes of Som, it is a blot on his wife's purity. Madhu carries the burden of a secret guilt of being responsible for the strained atmosphere at home that gets complicated with the 'cause' of Adit's death. The guilt stands in the way of coming to terms with the premature death of her son.

A closer look at *Small Remedies* reveals an intense power struggle at work: the struggle is between Madhu, the biographer and her subject of research, Savitribai. The ‘subject’ is used to mean the ‘individual.’ The term carries with it a sense of one who is unified, whole, the source of conscious action. This individual is the subject of much psychological discourse. To be a subject is also to be 'subject to' and as such, is positioned in term of ideology as well as language. The subject position is thus related to this situation of
being 'subjected'. This position may be governed/conditioned by race, gender, ethnicity, amity, region and various other factors. Each of these subject positions is a part of the individual who inhabits them. This is elaborated by Michel Foucault.

Foucault suggests that in order to study power we must look at it relationally: what happens in the process of power being exerted by one individual over another? Power is an exchange, a moment; it exists only in action, in between, in struggle. In between the interviews with Bai and the actual writing of the biography, is an area of uncertainty - a tussle as it were between 'versions': that of Bai's and that of Madhu's.

As Foucault says in “The Subject and Power” (1984):

In effect, what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future.

(Faubion 340)

Foucault's "Subject and Power" is a genealogical study with reference to his archaeological work on man as the object of knowledge and the subject who knows. One of the methods he advocates to understand power relations, is to use forms of resistance taken against different forms of power. Foucault
suggests that a starting point in analysing power relations may be to look at a series of opposition.

For Foucault, knowledge is an integral part of the power/subjectivity nexus. A will to knowledge is a will to power. Madhu as the biographer of Bai seeks for the privilege of knowledge. She bides her time to enter those fissures and incompletions in Bai's account of her own life. Bai however puts up a not too obvious, but palpable resistance to her biographer's hidden agenda. Perhaps Bai is also aware of Madhu's 'knowledge' - partial, if not complete - of her past life and her relationship with Munni, her daughter. While Madhu picks her way through her "subject's" life to arrive at the "truth", Bai attempts to project her own version of the "truth". A struggle surfaces and as Foucault says, the main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much such or such an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power.

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him out by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "Subject": subject to someone
else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (Faubion 348)

Now for Bai to refuse the kind of subjectivity imposed on her by Madhu would be not to fit into Madhu's version of the truth.

Madhu is on a quest for truth - the quest for the “real” Savitribai. Savitribai, on her part is determined to draw a picture - that is satisfying to herself. Through selective amnesia, she chooses to blot out certain important/controversial events in her life-memories of her daughter, how she related to Munni, how she took Munni’s death, how happy her life was with Ghulam Saab. These are all the unasked, unanswered questions that puzzled Madhu. Madhu muses:

. . . which is the real Bai? The pampered child? The young girl who discovered what her life was going to be? The young woman who abandoned her child and eloped with her lover? The great musician, the successful Savitribai Indorekar? (SR 283)

Madhu is convinced that she has before her "... a palimpsest, so many layers, one superimposed on another; none erased, all of them still there" (SR 283). She knows that she is under pressure to delineate Bai's life story.
There are three possible versions of this doyenne's life: (1) Bai's book, with the spotlight on her, without any area of darkness. (2) Maya's and Yogi's book which is sensational with a feminist slant - a book that will 'sell' and fetch good returns. (3) Madhu's book - the one she's still looking for - the one that eludes her.

A major issue that the text discusses is how Madhu, the writer, is going to negotiate the process of writing. Savitri Bai's alacrity to get her narration and answers tape recorded 'in style' obviously shows her yearning for the spotlight. Her narrative is linear - focused on herself, her Guru, skimming on the surface, never venturing to dive into the depths. "I have to fill in all these blanks myself" (SR 129) says Madhu. A linear narrative cannot convincingly capture the essence of a person's life. One sees one's life through "memory and memories are fractured, fragmented, almost always cutting across time" (SR 165). But when Bai persists in glossing over the ellipses, Madhu has to chalk out a method of narration that will bridge the gaps. She says, "Invention, creation, is sometimes the greater, possibly the best part of reality. Even to write our own stories, we need to invent. Like fiction writers, like historians, the teller of the story needs to construct a plausible narrative' (SR 165).

The biographer in Madhu now decides to take things into her own hands, she realises the power vested in her, the power she can exercise over
her 'subject.' Bai's 'image' or 'representation' is at her mercy. "I can trap her into an image I create, seal her into an identity I make for her. The power of the writer is the power of the creator" (SR 166 Emphasis added).

The text throws up a struggle - a power struggle between the 'object' of the narration and the narrator. Savitribai plays hide - and seek as it were, like a riddle that teases the seeker. The biographer Madhu, having tired of the game, decides finally to 'frame' her subject. This is a clear case of an unequal power struggle where the biographer/author has the upper hand. And she will exercise her power through words. For artists who express through music and painting words don't matter. "No, words are not important to Bai," observes Madhu, "And I have to work on her life, to sculpt her with words" (SR 164). This is in a sense, a forceful intervention: into the private life of a woman. This venture to "seal [Bai] into an identity" of the author/creator's choice is very much akin to a phallogocentric exercise of power.

Madhu's act of writing Bai's biography and Bai's own version of her life at times run counter to one another, causing friction. The biographer, however, will have the last word - and as we have seen the 'blank spaces' will be filled with the issues relating to Munni and the pursuit of Bai as the erring, deviant mother. What one comes to notice is the reaffirmation of the humanist (may be 'male') "subject-who-knows". Small Remedies then is the textual search for the woman. What the text does however is to inscribe some
rather traditional representations of woman's femininity, thus pointing to unconscious use of the phallogocentric principles within the discursive space.

In an interesting paper titled "Beyond the Sheltering Tree: The Politics of Silence/Gaze in Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence," P.P. Raveendran argues that "the specific ways of saying and seeing promoted by Deshpande's novel also foreground a particular narrative mode which in effect undermines the feminist agenda sought to be set by the novel" (10). He detects "the presence of a pervasive gaze" reaching into the "nooks and crannies of the society to animate them ideologically with its authoritarian gaze" (12). The centrally controlled voice picks, chooses, sifts and discards as it wills in the course of the narrative. Ultimately, Madhu’s story which supposedly is founded upon an ideology that voices the suppression of women, ends up mimicking master narratives.

In an interview with Chandra Holm, Deshpande was asked to comment on what she thought about the literary critics' penchant for reading between the lines. The writer replied:

. . . a novel is not mine when I have finished it. They have every right to see things in it. It need not necessarily be the way I mean it to be. Nor did I perhaps mean all these things they see. But perhaps there is so
much going on unconsciously in writing . . . May be the unconscious part is found by the critics . . . (8).

The “unconscious” part that this reading of Small Remedies tries to foreground is the unmistakable patriarchal strategy woven into the narrative.