SENSE OF LOSS

Realism permeates the writing of Shashi Deshpande. In itself it is not a simple act of observation or a recording of the same. It needs first to dispense with the romantic it also needs to go beyond the flights of imagination to look at the pain and ugliness of life, to look for a meaning in the absurdity of existence. Moreover, it is birth and death that compel the individual to confront the existential loneliness. Bereavement brings life to a standstill before it pushes the individual towards self-questioning and introspection, as relationship, morality and the meaning of life are all revalued and realigned.

In Deshpande’s fiction-her stories and novels death is a major concern. It appears through its actual occurrence in the present or through the memory of the narrator drawn back to the past. Thus, it spans both present and past, affecting the lives of the bereaved ones in manifold ways. The actual task of physical living takes place in the present, but our actions and dreams are shaped by the human ability to
work sequentially. Disruptions in the imagined future are brought about by unforeseen happenings. The complex web of human relationships weaves itself on the strands of a variety of material emotions, lineages, irrational responses and losses. The past is always with us, no matter where we begin. There are no immaculate births. And the burdens we carry are both unknown and unidentifiable. The process of life does not allow the individual the facility of observer status, though a retrospective assessment or rejection makes this possible.

Death and loss by death affects people in different ways. It may cause bereavement, acute pain of loneliness, rejection and sometimes the individual finds himself/herself on the horns of a dilemma. The sense of loss at moments of crucial choice acquires greater poignancy and intensity. An awareness of loss and its consequences and bearings may transform an individual overnight. A negative aspect of death may be found in suicides that mask the stories like 'Waste Lands' and 'The Day Bapu Died'. Besides, there are several other stories which might be as narratives of loss and human responses of coping with it. Death is used as an incident to set the other events in motion, but it also leaves behind a trail of its own a trail of guilt and pain and shared memories. It leads to self knowledge, to acknowledgement of the other's presence. One of the stories, "Lucid Moments", is ostensibly about a mother's death but to touches upon other issues like a woman's identity, the ways in which a woman's life is marked and the experience of being childless. Sujata is
the childless daughter who has always kept a respectable distance from her, she is unwilling to discuss her private life even with her mother. Her ailing mother, Sumati is suddenly overcome by a need to know her own mother's name which she had never cased to find out earlier. The narrator depicts her mother's illness which sometimes lapses into a kind of dementia:

"These past days her mind has after been disoriented. She moves from the present to the past and back again, some times confusing the two, at times wandering in no man's land in between. She has called me vasanti, after Baba's sister who had lived with thaw years back, sometimes I have been the child sujata, sometimes the girl sujata who so troubled her....But now she seems clear-eyed, except for that shadow of suffering which has become part of her. In fact, this seems to be one of her most lucid moment. And yet she is asking me, 'Suja...what is....my mother's name? She is looking at me urgently and waiting for a reply." (Vol. II p.21)

The narrator, know that her maternal grandmother died giving birth to her, but she has never spoken to of her. On her death bed, matrilineage suddenly gathers weight, perhaps because women are largely invisible; their names are not chanted in rituals like marriage or last rites in the family. These are three generations of women-Shilpa, Sumati and Sumati's daughter Sujata. The long dead grandmother becomes important to them. Sujata has never been responsive to her
mother's needs. Now when she finds her mother on the brink of death, a sense of loss overwhelms her and she reflects with a feeling of loss on her own childlessness:

"I have never known her needs, never spoken to her of mine. Once, when she spoke to me of my childlessness, showing me her grief, I twined on her in anger. I would not let her intrude into that desk world of mine. I felt she wronged me by showing her sympathy for my grief. Grief? No, that is not what I feel. It is an emptiness, a feeling as if the core of me has been scooped out, leaving a black hole behind. Often watching Shilpa with her children, I feel unreal, my life seems to be without any substance." (Vol. II, p. 22)

Obviously, the fact of childlessness weighs heavily on Sujata's consciousness and she is aware of the loss and insubstantial nature of her life. Her account of her dying mother's fetuses is marked by vividness: "My dying mother in now in her mid-fifties. She always was a small woman, now there is even less of her, as if her disease has been steadily growing away at her body. Since the metastasis, there seems to be nothing of her old self left. The shadows that began under her eyes have captured the whole of her face, the lower portion has caved in, her eyes have sunk into two deep, dark wells." (Vol. II. p.22)

Sujata's description of her dying mother and the pain of comminute bereavement is further expressed when she draws a picture of her sleeping mother. Her mother sleeps through the afternoon, if it can
be called sleep, this drag-induced pause in her being. She is still sleeping
when the woman from the next-door comes to invite them to her
daughter's wedding. Even this woman has regard for sumati's illness:

"The woman has toned down her finery and gaiety in deference to
Akka's illness, nevertheless, af the sight of Akka in bed, mouth open,
breathing ostentatious by, her but on gravity deserts her and she looks
frankly frightened. She tiptoes out without a word. She is wiping her
eyes when I join her." (Vol. II. p. 24)

It is the fear of in pending death and the consequent bereavement
that makes the woman lose her composure. when the neighboring
woman leaves, sujata informs her mother of the wedding next Tuesday
but her mother is indifferent and disinterested to every thing else except
the memory of her dead mother. He sense of loss stored up for so long
wells up in her per distance or knowing her dead mother's name and
identity. She even tells sujata that she is different. Sujata understands
what sumati means: 'I look like my dead grandmother. There is a curious
stirring in me to be linked to that nameless warren who died giving birth
to her first child.' (Vol. II. p. 24)

This sets into motion a series of questions, the chief one being
'Why don't the priests call out the names of women or per-wedding rite
when they do call out the names of couple's ancestors, father,
grandfather, great grandfather?. This vital question interrogates the
justification for the invisibility of women from the family tree. Sujata
identifies not only with her mother’s fate but also with that of entire woman race Deshpande has arrested the most trying moments for sujata as sumati is on the point of breathing her last:

“I hear the moans even before the nurse docs. I am also as finely tuned to her suffering as a mother is to her child’s. My body grows cold; my insides begin twisting into coils. I can’t go through it again. I won’t, I will kill her myself. “(Vol.II.p.28)

Clearly, Sujata has identified herself with her mother’s suffering and pain to such an extent that unable to withstand if she grows desperate. In her dying moments, her mother looks pathetic:

“She looks as if she is pitting all the strength of her frail body against her pain......These are only two of us now, my mother and I. I feel I am sharing it with her, the pain of dying, as we had once, perhaps, suffered to get her pangs of my birth. I cannot go with her all the way this time, but I feel I am easing her out of life. Go gently, mother, don’ struggle’ go gently.” (Vol. II. p. 28)

At the time of sumati’s death, sujata is so extremely overwhelmed with grief that she faints. On recovery she decides and takes necessary steps to keep her alive in the family tree by getting a photograph of the mother framed. Memorabilia is another story which is concerned with a sense of loss at the mother’s death by her widowed daughter. As a widow she lives alone in her house at Bangalore and shares her time
with each of her four daughters by staying with them. However, the daughters decide that their mother should dispose of the house, and the responsibility of conveying this unpleasant message is entrusted to the youngest of the daughters by her sisters. When the mother gets the message, she agrees without making any frets or angry response. But she remains silent all through the process of sorting things out. Among the thugs sorted out, there is a kumkum box, and the mother clutches it with the cogent passion of a child. Though the mother apparently said nothing, she was uneasy with the memories associated with the box which was given as a gift to her by her mother. Her pain expresses itself even in her sleep during the night and her daughter wakes up. The mother recounts her dream to her daughter in the dankness as she orbited the lights to be snatched off:

“...I get this dream often. The same dream. I see my mother on the four, she’s lying down, eyes closed. She’s dead. I think and suddenly she wakes up and looks at me. I want to go her but I can’t, my feet keep slipping. I look down and see it’s blood..... her blood. There’s blood everywhere.” (Vol. II. p. 106)

This was not a mere dream, her mother had really died at time of her last (seventh) child birth. ‘My mother died in childbirth. As she spoke, the narrator (her daughter) had a sense of her retrieving her memories, from her mother’s kumkum box, it seemed, where they’d been stored for all those years. After dilating an elaborate detail about
her grand parent's house where her mother went once a year, the mother remembers with a feeling of loss:

"We went to our grandparents once a year...yes, my mother went home for her delivery every year. She had a baby each time we went there, a baby every year. And I was always with her, because I was the oldest girl, I could look after the two or three. Youngest one's who had to be with her." (Vol. II. pp. 107-108)

While narrating the story of her mother's painful and tragic death, the old woman recalls the last few moments of her mother's life:

"...instead of going to my own bed, I went straight to the room my mother was in. They were lifting something, something that looked to me like a bundle of old clothes, until I saw the long hair streaming down to the floor. And then I know it was my mother... these was blood every where. She must have died only just then. She bled to death. The baby was born dead." (Vol. II. p. 109)

As a child, the narrator was puzzled when members of her material house held her dead mother in the wrong. She wondered why they blamed her for dying. But years later she came to know the answer. She was told then women went to their parents' home for the first child. But as she had no mother, that was not possible for her. Her youngest aunt came for a month to be with her. This was indeed, a rare generosity
shown to her, to have her child in her in-low's home. Her aunt saw this, of course, she was sorry for her.

In the second story within the story, the aunt told her about her dead mother. Her in-lows did not want her to go to a village where there was no other help than a village wildlife. Specially, that last pregnancy everyone know it was going to be difficult; She was not in good health then. They told her not to go, to stay on. But she did not listen. In fact her mother is supposed to have said, "If I get away, I'll get some more time between babies. Six months away means that the next baby will come six months later." (Vol. II. p. 111)

During her last pregnancy the narrator's maternal grandmother had been extremely desperate. She, feet like an animal and preferred death to childbirth. Her sense of pain and loss reveals the miserable plight of women in Indian society where women are treated as childbearing machines, with reproduction as their main task. And the mother died as she had wished for it and it happened. Once the old mother has finished her tale of her mother's suffering, pain and death, the first narrator, her youngest daughter has fully understood her agony that has seeped through her memories. These fore, she feels guilty at having to ask her mother to leave the home. At the same time she has been to identify herself with her mother's wounded psyches: "My mother is still the same person, ageing, isolated, friendless incapable of living alone yet reluctant to give up her home." (Vol. II, p. 113)
Thus, the story charts out a map of suffering, pain and bereavement which are the offshoots of death with the memory acting as a catalyst. It is true that widowhood is the biggest handicap for a woman if she is unemployed and without sufficient means of subsistence. In her book, 'Caste as Woman', Vinda Nabar has devoted a full chapter to the discussion of widowhood in India she states:

'From easiest times, such joy in existence as was permitted a woman was supposed to end with the death of her husband'. Quoting Manu, the ancient Hindu laigiver, Nabar adds that a woman should remain celibate forbearing fill her death. She is graciously permitted to fast as much as she likes, is presided a vegetarian diet, and is warned against even mentioning mother man's name. Chastity, restraint and life long endurance are the other qualities she is advised to cultivate, but or no account can a 'virtuous woman' ever marry again. 1

This reveals the inhuman treatment of widows in orthodox Hindu society. According to the s kandapurana, the widow was more inauspicious than all the inauspicious things. The sight of the widow meant certain failure in any undertaking. Except for one's own widowed mother, all other widows' were tainted with this characteristic of inauspiciousness. The wise man was advised even to 'avoid their blessings like the like the poison of a snake. 2

However, male widowers are free to remarry if they want. The life of a widower is not circumscribed by social strictures like that of a
widow. I solution and loneliness may sometimes be a common lot for widows and widowers, depending on the circumstances of life and their ability to make adjustments. The story 'Independence Day depicts the loneliness and isolation of a widower. Narrated by his daughter other his last rites are over, the story combines several themes together: part ion of India, communal cogence, the problem of refuges, excitement of independence and the rape and murder of a young girl. Wading through the past memories of her father, the narrator thinks that it is well that the participants in the last rites of her father have left her alone. It is worthwhile that her father's death evokes strange feelings in her. She feels relieved now: "Perhaps they were being tactful, leaving me to grieve over my father's death by myself. But there is no grief; how can you sorrow for someone who looked death steadily in the face, a person to whom it was but the next step of a journey." (Vol. II. p. 121)

Notwithstanding her narrates denial of any bereavement, the narrator's recourse to memory is in itself an attempt to divest and sublimate her sense of loss: Each time I came home in the last few years, I found the house denuded of a few more things. I never asked him where they had gone, reticence has always been a part of our relationships, And living alone, in the years after my mother's death, he had retreated even more into silence, It is his silence and solitude that seem to enclose me now, they are both welcome and contacting. And there are the memories. (Vol. I. p. 121)
Apparently, though the narrator is foisting her memory on her father, her earlier claims of composure and comfort turn out to be false as the absolute silence in the house makes her strangely restless. She goes to sleep quite late and wakes up in the middle of a dream in which people were speaking a language she did not know. But this dream has a real background for her mind is carried back words to the memory of refugees who came and took shelter for sometime at padma's house before they were finally settled elsewhere. A picture of the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan and its aftermath in communal violence and refugees flooding on either side appears on the screen of her memory:

In any case, to us in the south, so far away from where the brutal division of the country was taking place, the steady stream of traffic that went through padma's house those months before Independence and after, was only a curious phenomenon. The bloodshed and the tragedy were happening two for away to register with us. But the sight of the men and women sitting on the string beds under the name tree in padma's house was a spectacle to be gaped at. (Vol. I. p. 122)

At the time of partition, the narrator was young girl and hence she could not comprehend the enormity of loss which occurred in the wake of partition. Deshpande, here, seems to have shifted the focus on public spaces and public sorrows, otherwise most of her stories bring to fours the public/private spaces and private sorrows. She has managed to place
the public and private sorrows which reflect on one another. When the narrator had an opportunity as a grown-up woman, to see a shot of partition she was disillusioned with the romantic picture of fight for Independence by our leader. She thinks: "It's as if we've stashed away all the ugliness the uprooting, the killing, the raping in some dusty forgetter archives, and retaining only the more sanitized pictures we are more comfortable with." (Vol. I. p. 123)

This evidently revived her old memories of her childhood days when she had seen a flood of refugees. She has found it impossible to suppress her memories because they are not records; they refuse to be enclosed within covers. Her father called the refugees 'flock of birds, where as padma said, "They have lost everything". But the memory of one particular woman still haunts her consciousness: "And I can see the woman I have not thought of for years, I can hear the indescribable sounds emerging from her open mouth, her hands flat or her thighs, rocking her violently faster and faster..." (Vol. I. p. 123)

This woman staying in padma's house was called 'fat aunt' she gave any, a long drawn-out mournful wail, like the howling of a dog in the night. She had come to know that her only surviving daughter, who had been missing all these months, was dead. Dead, if seemed in some terrible way, from the manes in which the adults spoke of it looked and whispered. However, the impact of the woman's loss was enormous on the narrator's mother:
"My mother went next door in the afternoon. And when she returned she wept aloud, so rare a thing that I was frightened. Even my father hovered around her as if he wanted to do something, to say something. I felt the weight of woman's loss through my mother's weeping. Still if was hard to connect the woman, who to us was a figure of fun because of her bulk, to this enormous tragedy." (Vol. I. p. 127)

Similarly, "The Day Bapu Died" has the theme of Gantt ion ideals in the background but it foregrounds the death of the narrator's mother by a sudden heart attack and the suicide of a young woman called Amanda. Both these deaths evoke a sense of loss which is poignant and lingers on for a long time. Here the narrator recalls a momentous day in India's political history, 30th January, 1948 when Mahatma Gandhi was shot dead by Nathuram Godse. At the time the narrator was a 12 year old girl. Her father, reportedly a true Gandhi an, was a principal of a college which office he hot as a reward for his participation and subsequent imprisonment in Quit India Movement. In practice, he tries to be a devout Gandhion as tea, gaudy clothes, sumptuous food and films are strictly prohibited in the family. What is more, in order to display his commitment to Gandhian principles he sweeps the front two rooms of the house and has kept a Harijan Kalappa within the compound of his wife, though in a separate corner. His wife is a fat, plump woman who is competent at a single thing- working. To aid his wife, the father of the narrator has called Tungi, a girl of sixteen (his wife's distant relation).
Ashok, the son of kalappa, is a 14 or 15 old by who works at mahesh talkies and recounts the stories of films to both tungi and the narrator. Her sense of outrage at thin neglect and deprivation filled her with a profound sense of loss and apathy towards her family. Since then the narrator was hated by her father for he hold her as a conspirator in causing her mother's death and betraying him. This tragedy the mother's death created an unbridgeable gap between the father and the daughter. Not only this, she also snapped her relations even with her brother. Hence, she scarcely visited them and never talked to them. When she got the news of her father's critical illness with her brother aging her to come, she relents but she is unable to share their feelings of grief or bereavement at the father's death.

The title of the story "Lost Springs" gains much of its significance through the narrator's account of her memory, her sense of loss still further accentuated by her sense of guilt. She feels guilty of having caused her mother's death with the relationship falling into a new pattern. The springs of familial affection and mutual bonding had been lost in her and she found herself bereft of any tender feelings of affection either for her father or for her brothers. Thematically the story seems to give the impression that a single incident may cause a very serious rift in family relations, particularly if the incident is a tragic one. Such painful experience persists as a sense of loss throughout the life sensitive or closes to the event. This happens in the case of the narrator protagonist.
of this story. Suicide is supposedly the worst form of death an individual opts for. Sometimes excess of emotions and passions may lead a person to neurosis. In such a mental state, the individual is reduced to a slapstick or posse rive being with a myopic vision of reality. The story "Waste lands" is once again, narrated by a young woman. A professional journalist, she is commissioned to report on the plight of female convicts under sentence. When the narrator visits the premises, she is struck with the depressive, suffocating atmosphere in which the prisoners have to live. To aid her in the task of interacting with the convicts, the jail-warden, a sturdy woman with a stern look, guides her into the prison-ways. While interviewing the female convicts many of whose are lifers, she finds an opportunity to explore the psychology of criminals' minds. Nearly all the convicts swear that they are innocent and they have been wrongly and unjustly punished. Soon after this the interviewer is moved to visualize the criminal acts of the interviewed convicts.

Subsequently, the narrative switches over to a train journey undertaken by the narrator. She was especially embarrassed by looking at a young woman who was to be her companion on the journey. But thanks to Tushar, her friend, who joined her at the penultimate moment. It was, after all, a big relief to her Both of them had known each other only for six months, meeting twice a week in the classroom of their past time journalism course. Interestingly, the unknown young woman becomes a ground for their reflection and conversation. It is Tushar who
quotes a line from T.S. Eliot's 'Waste Land' equating the married young woman with 'third who always walks with us'. This statement is pregnant with irony for the woman is by no means a Christ figure; she is a neurotic and possessive woman who was suffering from a sense of deprivation and loss in marriage. Move ironical, however, is this woman's obsessive attention given to Tushar. Perhaps she wanted to possess him like some supernatural spirit. As the narrator puts it:

"But she was oblivious of everything – of their jokes and not very subtle hints, as well as of our embarrassment and annoyance. What was even more astonishing was that she made no attempt to hide the fact that it was Tushar she wanted to be with. I was flabbergasted by the openness with which she displayed her feelings. And yes, I confess, disgusted as well." (Vol. I. p. 174)

After the working part of there tour was over, the narrator along with Tushar decided to visit a famous temple some fifty miles away. Once they arrived at the place, the narrator was almost nonplussed by looking at the stone carvings. At the same time she was drawn to an involuntary sensual feeling at the sight of absolutely primal male female link on the stone. While they were busy watching the stone work, they were suddenly startled by the hysterical cries of that married young woman who, under an irresistible force, had been drawn to the same sight. The narrator draws a graphic picture of the situation:
"At first, I thought she was laughing; it sounded like a snort of laughter, escaping after long suppression. But when I turned to her, I saw she was crying ugly, painful sobs that would not stop. I tried to soothe her, I tried to hold her contorting body, but she kept pushing me away, as if she could not bear my touch. And suddenly she broke out of my grasp, ran to a tree and was violently sick. I waited her until Tushar came with some water, then helped her wash her face. She calmed down after that" (Vol. I. p. 176)

However, when the woman had recovered from her fit, the narrator proposed to stay with her but the woman insisted that Tushar stay with her. On her part, the narrator thought it proper to stay away from them as the three of them could not be together on account of the woman's extreme obsession with Tushar. Later, she had arguments with Tushar for having attended to the woman. And in her resentment, she kept away from Tushar till the next day when it was time for them to go to the station.

When the train was about to leave, Tushar went out of the compartment to bring something, perhaps food. Not finding Tushar there, the married woman become tense and frantic. she kept looking for him all the whole, an unlovely desperation showing on her face. Finally Tushar came to his seat just before the dinner halt. As the narrator refused to have the meal, Tushar walked away from the compartment and since the train was about to depart, the woman began to search him
frantically. However, Tushar had come in time with a food packet for the narrator which both of them shared. From then on, Tushar turned to the narrator, while the married woman kept on talking to the 'auntie'. When the narrator woke up in the night, she found the 'woman' missing from her seat. Her mind was filled with confusion and apprehension but she only thought of the possibility of her being somewhere around the compartment. When the narrator woke up in the morning, she found the woman's berth still empty. Both she and Tushar got off at their station but the woman was seen nowhere around the compartment. As they stood there in silence, a Railway official broke the news that they had found a body on the tracks, just before the station where the narrator had woken up in the night. Now she was convinced that the 'woman' had exercised the option of suicide in her desperation. There remains little doubt about abnormal personality of the married woman. Perhaps she was a victim of emotional deprivation and hence sought alternatives as a compensatory move. Her sense of loss at her grinding emptiness and emotional starvation motivated her to take the most dangerous leap of her life.

With the married woman's story over, we come to the final observation of the narrator. Both she and Tushar belonged to different religious faiths and she had decided to marry him. Her mother had already warned her of the consequences and problems that were likely to afflict her. But a reading of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste land" brings home to
her the quintessence of all religions 'Damayata, Datta, Dayadhwam-self control, charity and compassion. She notes wryly that there stayed a vast waste land between them, implying nothingness.

Despite this nagging and depressive feeling the narrator contends that this is still a space, a world both of them share. To discover the truth of life both of them needs each other as it is truth which survives till the end. Each one has to invent his/her own truth, or else life would be a terrible burden. In the story, Deshpande has tried to probe the human psychology that everyone longs to seen, acknowledged and understood as a real human being. It was, perhaps, this desperation to be recognized, loved and accepted in the married woman which finally led to her nemesis through suicide. It seems that she grew neurotic to prove the truth of her feelings for Tushar; she found him as an anchor in her adrift state of mind. But the fact remains that death is in evitable and love is not a passion to impose upon regardless of the obsession and possessiveness accompanying it. True love is based on trust, understanding, sharing and caring and above all a feeling of togetherness.

Apart from death in its various forms and dimension, alienation and loneliness may also lead to a potential sense of loss. 'Ghosts' is such a story which projects the isolation and pain of a newly married young woman in a foreign land. In fact, the title of the story is misleading in its literal denotation, it has rather metaphorical connotations. One may
easily jump to a facile generalization that its contains or might contain a superstitions or real account of some supernatural beings or occurrence. But a close reading of the story suggests otherwise. It is a moving and powerful story which records the acute sense of loneliness in a young Indian woman who with her new born babe has gone to England to stay with her husband. The physical dislocation is not the singular problem for her; she suffers in silence and loneliness which haunt her like a ghost.

Houses in Deshpande's stories often convey the protagonists' mental map with all the complex feelings embedded in it. In this story too, the woman finds her rented house in England an abode of silence. The sepulchral silence around the place made both the house and street bear a strange look. Her loneliness appears to seep into her body also for she thinks of 'an unnaturally isolated infancy.' While she is busy doing her chores in the household, a thought nagged at her filling her with uneasiness and a vague disquietude. Suddenly she remembers that there is no bread in the house and reluctantly dress herself and her baby to move outside to the market. Even the act of putting on a pile of warm clothes seems to her a hateful exercise. As she is susceptible to cold, she finds the cold weather and the wind as her enemies that were intent upon annihilating her body.

Her alienation from her husband and her yearning for a sense of belonging and for companionship form the thematic texture of the story.
Suddenly she is aware of a train of memories traversing the tracks of her mind. The experience of dislocation goes on to intensify her embittered feelings of humiliation when the plane landed on Heathrow Airport. Recalling how the man checking her passport at the airport who used an abusive and humiliating term 'bloody women,' she feels desolate. Only her ill luck had brought her in this alien land which had humiliation, loneliness and alienation in store for the likes of her. Her diasporic experience gives rise to nostalgia and homesickness. Past memories accelerate her sense of desolation:

"It was strange how deserted she felt, desisted not by the other, but by the myriad beings that had gone into the making of her..." (Vol. II. p. 153)

In fact, the woman had no contacts in this place with her husband staying away from her on his duty. Her anger is directed not only against her husband but also against English people:

"A nation of shopkeepers...where people walk around her, not seeing her at all, their faces knit in concentration as they stared, as if hypnotized, at the shelves...." (Vol. II, pp. 154-155)

Her response to the commodification of culture and life in a western country like England is altogether negative. At least, it is not a place meant for the likes of her for she did not exist for them. Nobody took any notice of her, let alone the contact. Even her husband was cold,
indifferent and unresponsive. All this fills her with humiliation in so far 
as she is a self-respecting individual who wishes to be recognized, 
accepted and appreciated by others. However, she is obliged to adjust 
her self-respect with social attitudes and reflects on the falsehood of 
keeping up appearance lest others might jeer at your humiliation: "Neven 
let anyone know your humiliation. Neven several how shamefully, 
humiliatingly isolated you are. How, utterly lonely in enjoying myself 
terribly..." (Vol. II. p. 155)

The term terribly is loaded with ironic implication as it if brings 
out the isolation and pain of a diasporic Indian. Hence she is carried 
away by a nostalgic feeling for the lost homeland: "She felt suddenly 
nostalgic for a curious medley of odors. Jasmines summer. The night 
queen. Ripe mangoes. Fresh ghee, liquid and brown spices (Vol. II. p. 
156)

Her longing for the niceties and delicacies of homeland are set off 
against her almost regular headache. Perhaps, this was not the end of her 
miseries; she receives little consolation from her husband even as she 
tries to drown her loneliness into physical passion. Her husband is 
invariably tired and withdrawn and is passive enough to share her 
suffering. Her deprivation continues to mount up as her husband remains 
insensitive to her physical as well mental suffering. Her frantic overtures 
were completely embarrassing of him. She feels alienated from her 
husband who fails to provide fulfillment to her. Having now none to
anchor on and feeling ignored by her husband, she gathers all her inner powers and engages in the act of trying to be her own self, still she finds no reassurance. For her, the silence becomes more deafening than the noise which she braes to counterbalance by watching TV all the time. She identifies the visual images of people on the TV screen with the real people; to her they become an alternate humanity.

In the case of the protagonist, the diasporic experience and individual crisis coalesce or dissolve into each other, assuming a dreadful feature that haunts her psyche invariably regardless of whether she is inside the house or outside it. Even the outer world is little more than a visual topography of human shapes with whom she never interacts. To her, the figures of men and women on the TV screen seemed to be more convincing, real and lifelike than the living people with blank faces straddling the external world. Therefore, she uses TV as an ultimate key to resolve her crisis and peoples her world with the images on screen. The story seems to endorse the view that alien lands and alien people, displacement and diasporic experience impinge on the mental well being of an individual.

In the like manner, 'The first lady" is a moving story based on the memory and a sense of loss. The story portrays a seventy year old woman who is the wife of an eminent political leader, presumably a governor. Although she enjoys all the privileges and modern comforts due to her as the first lady, she is distraught and disillusioned with her...
present life. Often she recalls the past, contrasting it with the present with all its ugly realities. Having witnessed the Independence movement, she is a misfit in the present political ambience with its toady culture and sycophancy.

Much of the story's content surfaces through memory as Deshpande has used flashback technique and interior monologue to depict the alienation and loss on old lady's part. The old lady has to mask her true feelings in public for fear of upsetting her husband. This story also displays Deshpande's flair for graphically describing the small details of a woman's life. The old lady feels bored, lonely and tired as she suffers from obesity. At times she grows petulant, unselfconscious and even irritable. It is not that she is absorbed in her own thoughts, on several occasions she lets her husband know of her feelings that all these trappings, glamour and paraphernalia are futile and meaningless. To her anger and surprise, her husband, a true Gandhian once, retorts aggressively that there is nothing wrong in being comfortable. On such occasions, she suffers from a feeling of loss and ruefully admits that it is the living ones who have betrayed those who laid down their lives for the sake of independence. These who surround the politicians do so with vested interests and their sycophancy becomes intolerable to her. What she desires in the old age is simply rest and calm.

The story unfolds the old lady's irritation and discomfort at a party which she has been forced to attend at the behest of her husband. In the
midst of all obsequies and scraping, she long for freedom to do what she wished:

"...sitting in my own room, with my feet tucked under me, and my bra, that is constricting me so, off and my petticoat strings loosened and my false teeth out." (Vol. I. p. 10)

The old lady remembers her past wryly, especially her father, who smoked expensive and fragrant cigars: "I am my father's daughter, yes, I love my comforts. But the whole price has not yet been paid. For me, this is part of the payment for those comforts, these public functions that I'm finding more and more irksome.

Gracious and dignified! No, I'm only a tired, old woman, whose feet swell up to grotesque proportions after an evening like this... When they know, and I know, that the real trouble is I'm too fat. And I'm fat because I eat too much. And I eat too much because I'm bored. And I'm bored because there's no truth in anything we do or say. (Vol. I. p. 14)

It is obvious, then, the old woman feels a sense of loss and pain about the falsehood of the entire life, its patterns and the society in which she has lived and seen the reality. After all, she is fed up with this very long rehearsal of dignity. Her recollection of her married life of forty years is suffused with irony and pain.

Coming from a rich family, she fell headlong in love with a young Gandhian patriot lecturing in public meetings. She married him against
her father's wishes, giving up silk saris for simple khadi wear. She adapted herself to the family of her in-laws, where even asking 'for a up of tea, particularly during pregnancies would have been blasphemy. (Vol. I. p. 14)

Swept away by the frenzy of the freedom struggle, the husband had been frequently in and out of jail, leaving the household and other responsibilities on her shoulders. It is after long that she comes to realize the self-centered nature of her husband, "the passionate and dedicated face she had fallen in love was incapable of loving another human being." (Vol. I. p. 15)

After the birth of her third child, her husband shocked her with his intention of practicing celibacy (abstinence from sex). Despite its serious implications, she had, however, agreed. There had been, in those days, a kind of perverse satisfaction in denying oneself pleasure, a hysterical urge for self-denial, to which she had succumbed long back. When the sexual stasis was formally announced and then put into practice, a devoted disciple of her husband comes to her house at the critical juncture. Her deprivation makes her sensitive to his admiration of her beauty 'Through surreptitious looks and nebulous signs she is aware of her passion for the young man that she desires him "to touch her, hold her and have her". (Vol. I. p. 16) He dies, however, in a police firing. Though she is not 'able to distinctly recall his features, she is nevertheless caught up by a sense of human loss:
"And now he lived on in her mind, eternally young, eternally loving and admiring her. And how glad I am, she often thought, that he's dead and can't see me as I am now. It's not that I am old and fat, it's what I have become, what we all have become the, I. All of us, we've betrayed all those dead." (Vol. I. p. 16)

Evidently, the old lady's sense of loss extends from private to public spheres, the whole lot of martyrs. Indeed, the story unravels her inner world. She feels bored, exhausted, isolated and finds the world of outer reality meaningless. Her physical as well as psychic state is genuinely pathetic and evokes our sympathy. She seems to be a melancholy soul amidst all her comforts, honors and dimity not entirely due to any spiritual inclination or detachment but because of her disillusionment with the reality.

Incidentally, this is one of the few stories in which Deshpande takes recourse to exposing the hollowness and sham of the glamorous world of polities. A lover of truth like, the first lady is bound to feel trapped and agonized in such a milieu. Spaces emerge as powerful metaphor is some of Deshpande's deals with sense of loss in family which is forced to live in cramped spaces. With a first person narrator Megha, the story unfolds the life and aspirations of a middle class family. For want of space or better accommodation, the family has to live is a single room, with a small gallery and kitchen appended to it as minimum or barest of requirements. Both husband and wife work to
keep the family going on. While the mother has a job, the father runs a
small scale business of his own. Since he is busy from morning till night,
he can spare little time for his children In their one room
accommodation, there is a large curtain partition that divides the room
into two parts on either side of which sleep the three girls and their
parents.

Rains in the night become an evocative symbol in the story.
Silence is linked to privacy which in turn presupposes space. And space
here means individual self sufficiency in economic terms. A person can
have a room of one's own only when he/she can afford it. Thus,
metaphorically though silence, as the narrator feels, is synonymous with
individuality and a distinct identity at economic and social level.
Besides, several other concerns of a middle class family surface in the
story involving hopes, fears, aspirations etc. It is best exemplified when
the mother recalls that she had a big parental house with a tiled roof
where with rainy nights she could hear silence. To her eldest daughter
Rashmi, this appears to be a bogus lie.

Thus, Deshpande has deftly shown how the members of a middle-
class family yearn for space and individual identity which is offset in the
back drop of Tarabai's reference. She is a cross tempered working
woman who suffers a sense of loss not in bereavement at the death of
some close to her. Instead, her loss is caused by the decay and
disintegration of her own family. She is always under the pressure of
living in an uglier world with a drunkard husband, 'her son who is with the 'daru wallas' as she says, her daughter who goes sneaking out with boys...' for a conventional woman like Tarabai, this situation is a living death, an unceasing torture. She is specially fond of Chhaya in the household where she works and their intimacy lets chhaya get acquainted with all Tarabai's problems.

Severe forms of illness are commonly supposed to be a prelude to death. Madhu who is the eponymous protagonist of the story 'Madhu' finds herself suddenly transformed into a caring and sincere daughter when her father is admitted to hospital following a heart attack. She takes a pledge to sacrifice one of her mort precious possessions, her long hair once her father gets well. In the story "Awakening", Alka who is ambitious suddenly finds her path blocked by the death of her clerk father who succumbs to a heart attack:

"And then the world had shattered with a shocking impact. Breaking not into pieces, but into dust, into nothingness". (Vol. I. p. 118)

Alka's sense of loss turns to anger at her father's failure but behind this anger her feeling of loss at the thwarting of her ambition may be a prime factor:

"My last way of escape had been closed up. I would never get out of the trap now. I had to shoulder his burdens. I would go on doing it till
I died. A huge anger filled me. He wronged me by dying. He continued to wrong me even after his death there was no help for us. There are no fairy grandmothers and rich uncles in real life. Not even a god... All nonsense, there's no God. Only us (Vol. I. p. 119)

However, when Alka opens her father's battered briefcase a month later, she finds two letters one of which was meant for his elder brother. In the letter he had written about Alka:

"Alka will be starting her job next month. I still feel guilty about that. But what can I do? And then, I have this confidence in her... that she will make something of herself, in spite of us all. She has some guts, some spunk in her. If only one of my children achieves something in life, my own will have been worthwhile." (Vol. I. p.120)

These feelings and her father's trust in her bring about an 'awakening' in Alka, her anger gives way to tears of pity, pain and love for her lost father. Now her sense of loss turns into a new resolve to fulfill her father's expectations of herself. But more than most of the stories considered in this chapter, the sense of loss is most acute in "My Beloved Charioteer". Three generations are locked in a situation of grief and hopelessness, the grandmother who is a widow, the daughter who has recently been endowed and the granddaughter who is a child. The recently widowed mother is absorbed in her grief, indifferent to the world around.
The grief associated with widowhood, an emotion that has absorbed the daughter has another aspect to it and the grandmother's story of her own married life (in which she was a mere submissive automaton) comments upon the hollowness of the whole relationship if it is only the body which is the basis of marital life. In the old woman's sense of loss, there is a rare poignancy when her daughter (herself a widow) calls both of them 'a pair of widows.'

"She did not mean to be cruel to me, I know that. Nor was I hurt by the words. What pained me was her calling herself a widow. My mother had been widowed when I was girl and I can only remember her as one, her head shaven, wearing coarsened saris and shorn of all ornaments. While Aarti after neglecting herself for days suddenly dresses up, makes up her face and does up her hair. But it is her face that has the arid look of a desert. no smile, no happiness even blooms there. Life has been cruel to her. It was her father whom she had loved and he died, while she lived. It was her husband whom she had loved evens more the child, and he died, while Priti is lost to her." (Vol. I. p. 184)

The foregoing discussion of the stories shows how Deshpande has woven the fabric of human life with sense of loss emerging as a dominant pattern. It is characteristic of human temperament to long for joys as no body wants either sorrow or pain, but all human beings are destined to suffer such a fate sooner or later at some crucial moments of life. The road that lies between life and death is strewn not only with
happiness and gain, it is equally filled with risky gorges of pain suffering and loss. Deshpande's concern with human loss and predicament informs the stories which have mythical figures at their centre. And she looks at them more as human beings than remote super human characters. A discussion of these follows in the next chapter which also happens to be the penultimate chapter of the study.
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