OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

Novels in general and Indian novels in particular deal not only with the family but also the extended family of the protagonist or the major characters. If husband, wife and children constitute a family, grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings, cousins, and in-laws constitute an extended family. Minor characters in a novel are normally the members of the extended family, though of course, they may also include friends, lovers, neighbours and others who live beyond the extended family and form the part of the larger social circle. These minor characters play a vital role in shaping the attitude and the actions of the protagonist or the major characters in the novel. Hence their relationship with the protagonist or the major characters is no less significant. This chapter undertakes to study such relationships as ‘Other Relationships’—other than those which could not be covered in the study of Filial, Conjugal, Extra-marital and Professional relationships in the preceding chapters.

Shashi Deshpande has devoted a due space in her novels to the depiction of basic human relationships i.e. filial and conjugal relationships, but as her novels revolve around the theme of the family, mostly a joint family, the members of the extended family play significant roles. Her novels are inhabited by many other men and women apart from the leading male and female characters. According to Deshpande, nothing could be more universal than the family unit and no relationship more fundamental than that between the members of a family. In an interview with Geetha Gangadharan, she says,

Person to person and person to society relationships—these are the two primary concerns of a creative writer and, to me the former is of immense importance. My preoccupation with interpersonal relationships and human emotions. (1998:252)

As her novels mostly deal with the middle class joint family, we have a host of minor characters who weave various kinds of human relationships apart from the basic human relationships. Her novels are woman centric and the female characters play a dominant role as protagonists in her novels, but the roles of the male characters who appear in the narrative mainly
as relatives or friends of the protagonists are no less significant. A host of both male and female characters who revolve round the protagonist are mostly flat characters and their representation emerges entirely from the protagonist’s point of view. They are the socially recognized ‘other relatives’ of the protagonist—other than her parents, husband and children and hence ‘other relationships’ may be grouped as follows:

1. Grandparents of the protagonist—grandfather and grandmother both paternal and maternal.
2. Uncles and aunts of the protagonist.
3. Siblings and cousins of the protagonist.
4. Friends of the protagonist.

It is worthy to note that these other relations play a vital role in shaping the character and response of the protagonist in the novel. Many of these characters are not drawn fully, but they do affect the life of the protagonists. If the grandparents, uncles and aunts work as a bridge between tradition and morality and function as guide and supporter for the protagonists in their growth and development, the siblings and cousins, mostly in form of brothers and sisters, reflect on the working of patriarchy in the Indian social system and the effect of the gender bias practised by parents, particularly by the mother, against the female child in shaping the personality of the protagonists.

I

Among Deshpande’s novels, Roots and Shadows is the first one to take up the granddaughter-grandmother relationship in detail. Indu, the protagonist, was brought to the house of Akka, her father’s aunt, as a fifteen day old motherless child and brought up there under her care. In her eighteen year long stay in the house, she developed a deep bond with the family but she hated all that Akka, a grand old matriarch and the presiding deity of the house, stood for. Akka was autocratic and she loved authority and discipline. Her autocratic ways and iron rule had offended all the members of the family including Indu. She believed only in surrender and submission. She did not accept defiance and disobedience. She was angry with Indu because she had defied her authority first by joining English medium school and then by marrying the person of her own choice and out of her caste. Indu had left the house to marry Jayant and never come back because of this hostility. But at the time of her death Akka chooses Indu as the heiress and wiils her entire property including the house in
her name. She sends Indu summons for coming back home immediately. She feels hurt when Jayant tries to dissuade her from going back to her family saying, “Do you have to go? After all she is...What is she of yours? Your father’s aunt, isn’t she? Rather a distant relation?”(20) She gets furious in her response as she says: “Akka? A distant relation? It has sounded treacherous, disloyal. At that moment I had decided...I will go.”(20) The deep bond which she had developed with the family tickles in her despite her anger against Akka and a strong urge for family reunion brings her back to her natal home. Akka’s eyes welcome her with a quiet dignity. Indu recalls: “There was a triumphant gleam in them I could almost see her thoughts...I made you come home, didn’t I? Brought you back, didn’t I?”(18) Akka who was angry with her till now for marrying Jayant, was now angry that she had come alone and not brought her husband with her. The ensuing conversation between them is quite significant:

“I had something important to tell you both.”

“You will have to put up with me.”

“And I wanted to see him, what kind of a husband you have

At that I had to laugh. “Oh, Akka, still intent on approving him, are you? Three years after our marriage? And what if you don’t approve him? Do I give up him?”

Her eyes showed hurt. “You think, that what you do is no concern of ours, do you Indu? You think your life is none of my business? You haven’t grown up, child.”(19)

Commenting on the effect of these words on Indu, Manjari Shukla comments: “These are the last reprimanding words that Akka speaks to Indu, these words of hospitality and gentleness which set Indu thinking about the nature of relationship with Akka.”(1998:98)

Indu is bound to review her relationship with Akka as she comes to know the facts of Akka’s past life. She discovers from Narmada that Akka had her own share of misery. Married to an old man in her tender age, she had suffered marital rape on her unwilling body and endured her husband’s mistresses. She had come back to this house, her natal home, as a widowed young woman, bringing her dead husband’s wealth with her. After her father’s death, she had looked after her parasitic nephews and docile nieces with the care and attention of a truly compassionate mother. Narmada’s narration of the full
story of Akka’s life leaves Indu surprised and amazed. She regrets why she did not try to know about her life earlier. She is now able to see “what Akka was, why she lived the way she did, why she behaved the way she did.”(69) Akka’s sacrifice for the family had mitigated her arrogance. She had passed on the legacy to Indu because with all her anger at her defiance and stubbornness, she secretly admired her granddaughter, so educated, emancipated, gifted with creativity and ability to stick to her decision. Indu feels proud of her own ability and Akka’s wisdom when Narmada expresses her opinion on why Akka had chosen Indu as her successor: “Poor Indu. But your shoulders are strong. Akka knew that.”(72) She feels herself reconciled with Akka as she says about her experience during the performance of Akka’s funeral ceremonies; “And there was one moment of perception when I felt like Akka herself, seeing the family as an entity, beautiful and living. It is one of those memories that will stay with me all my life.”(58-59)

Indu pays a befitting tribute to Akka by doing as her successor what Akka had expected her to do but with a difference. She did exercise her own discretion as well. Before her death Akka had fixed the marriage of Indu’s cousin, Padmini, without consulting the bride. She had also earmarked a portion of her wealth for this purpose. Indu honoured Akka’s wishes, although she tried to persuade Padmini to marry Naren. Padmini and her parents did not yield to her persuasion as they did not like Naren. She also sold the old house because house and Akka together stifled and suffocated creativity and dynamism in the name of collectivity, family pride and family prestige. Her cousins, the self-seeking younger generation, were all for the sell of the house as they needed money to settle in their lives. Her uncles who opposed the sale were guided more by selfish considerations than by loyalty and commitment to Akka. Being fully aware of the winds of change, she ultimately did what Akka would have liked her to do-to sell the house and make the parasites stand on their own feet. She founded a trust from Akka’s money and jewels for the benefits of Akka’s extended family and she made the first monetary donation from the trust to the poor but promising Brahmin orphan boy, Vithal, breaking her promise to Naren who believed that Akka’s money would taint anyone, because she felt that it is the living who need our loyalty, not the dead.

The relationship between grandparents and granddaughter is presented in That Long Silence in flash back. Jaya, the protagonist has a few scattered memories of her ajji (paternal grandmother) and other-ajji (maternal
grandmother). Her ajji lived in the old family house at Saptagiri, three miles into the town. Her father, the youngest and most beloved son, had left that house to marry a Marathi girl of his choice, and not a Kannada girl of his community. But he cycled to his mother daily taking Jaya along with him. Her ajji was a shaven widow and her life was devoid of all those things that make up a woman’s life. Her room was a memorial of ajja. She sat on the ground and slept on a straw mat. Jaya did not go inside her room as she felt uncomfortable there. She used to sit in ‘outside sitting room’ reading paperbacks from the locked cupboard. She once went inside her room only when her father called her inside.

Jaya remembers her ajji as a stern woman who singlehandedly kept the family together. She was orthodox and dominating. She did not allow her sons to do what they wanted to do. She had not allowed Jaya’s father to join Gandhi Ashram. She did not approve of his decision to send his daughter, Jaya, to English school. She told him, “No good will come out of sending your children to a Padre school. They’ll forget all our customs, they might even become Christians...”(90) She once told Jaya that she felt sorry for her husband whoever he was because she thought that Jaya who had a question for everything and retort for everything must make her husband miserable. Jaya also remembers her ajji as a difficult mother-in-law to Shantakaki and shamed her into taking care of her youngest child, a hydrocephalic boy. But she was also soft and loving. She wept bitterly and felt the most miserable to see her son, Jaya’s father, going away from her and when he died, she gave up her single meal and died within six months. She had pushed Jaya to go and touch the feet of her father and seek his blessings for the last time. However, Jaya held her ajji as much responsible for her father’s death as her own mother. She reflects: “Yes, that’s right, they were responsible for his death, those two women. Ai and ajji.”(136-137)

Jaya remembers her other-ajji also as a dominating woman. She had thrown Makarandmama out because he had defied his family to become an actor and join the bad world of films. She spoke about him with anger and disgust even after his death. Her another son Chandumama who wanted to do his F. R. C. S was turned by her into a small town doctor, filling his life with shoddy affairs with all kinds of women including Kashibai, other-ajji’s trusted maidservant. She was very tough to Vanitamami, her daughter-in-law, and even chose saris for her. Jaya’s mother, the only daughter of her other
would often ask Jaya to be nice to other ajji so that she could win jewels from her. But she gave all her jewels to Chandumama, the Son, except the pearl bracelets and the one string of pearls. Other ajji had suffered strokes of paralysis and had been bedridden for fifteen years before her death. Jaya, the narrator and protagonist, sums up her relationship with both of her grandmothers:

My two ajji’s, two entirely different women, had been alike in the power they had wielded over their families. Looking back, it seems to me that their children lived their lives reacting against them; lives that had turned out to be, ultimately, a battle-field of dead hopes and ambitions. (82)

In The Binding Vine Urmi, the protagonist, had spent her childhood not with her parents but with her grandparents, Baiajji (grandmother) and Aju (grandfather), at Ranidurg. After her grandmother’s death, the young teenager had coped with the problems arising out of the bereavement and looked after her aged grandfather. She is the one who sits waiting at the threshold when the door of his room is bolted and later, when the door is forced open, to learn that he had hanged himself. She regards Balkaka, the grandson of her great grandfather’s mistress, as a family member.

In A Matter of Time, Aru, the daughter of Sumi, the protagonist, has a bitter-sweet relationship with her maternal grandmother, Kalyani. In fact, they are two human beings having an undefined relationship. Initially, Aru is said to have had a troubled relationship with Kalyani. But with the passage of time, her relationship with her grandmother changed and they unknowingly “forged a partnership.”(197) Towards the end of the novel, Gopal notices “a curious resemblance” between the two of them; they both have “the steady watchful look in their faces, (and) the smile of encouragement” for him.(246) According to R. S. Pathak.

Probably the most important point about Aru is her finely individualised unconventional relationship with her grandmother, Kalyani...Through Kalyani’s accounts Aru relates herself to their ancestors, realising that the ‘people Kalyani speaks about are a part’ of Aru’s life.(116) The novelist has tried to show that human relationships tend to have continuity and human beings, despite intergenerational shifts, have potential of corresponding with each
other in certain significant respects. It is this continuity of relationship that gives meaning to life in the long run. (1998:162)

II

Aunts and uncles play a very significant role in *Roots and Shadows* in the life of Indu, the protagonist. She had lost her mother at the time of her birth but her aunts and uncles gave her so much love and care that she could not realise the absence of her mother till other had told her. She received tender and loving care from Atya, deep affection from Kaka and perfect understanding from Old Uncle. Her own father only makes an occasional appearance and he dies when Indu was barely fifteen but she feels no gap, nothing missing.

Narmada Atya, Indu’s father’s sister, is a poor childless widow who lives with her brother in her father’s house. She has a short lived marriage behind her and a life of submissiveness in front of her. She wants to die in her parental home. She displays strength and courage in her oppressive circumstances. Sunanda Atya, who had an irresponsible husband who had long periods of joblessness, also lives in her parental house. She does not want the house to be sold because she wants to have the option of coming back here when her husband is unemployed or unsettled. She reveals the deviousness of a woman. Initially, Indu who prefers freedom and choice to obedience and acceptance, regards these women with contempt because they are traditional—they “cleaned up the mass with their bare hands after every meal... even ate off the same dirty plate their husbands had eaten in earlier.” (73) But later she gradually recognises the security and happiness that characterise the acceptance of their existence within limitations.

Indu’s uncle, Kaka, is the epitome of the benevolent patriarch trying to maintain unity and peace in a divergent household. He represents the old order, passionately attached to his old heritage and way of change and progress. He is not aggressive or dominating. He attends Indu’s marriage and brings her the traditional bangles as a wedding gift. It is difficult for him to accept Indu’s modern idea of demolishing the old house and constructing a hotel in its place. Indu admires his determined efforts to keep the house running but goes ahead with her plan of dismantling the old house as she
does not wish to perpetuate a decadent system which makes parasites out of its dependents.

Indu’s relationship with Old Uncle is quite smooth as he is more philosophical and adaptive to the winds of change. He seems to represent a bridge between tradition and modernity. He has been a guide and father figure to fatherless Indu. She always consults him about her problems and seeks his guidance for their solutions. Even though he belongs to the older generations, he displays rare sensitivity to her problems. Indu who thinks that marriage has robbed her of her autonomy and independence receives consolation and illumination from him when he tells her that there is nothing wrong in being dependent on her husband explaining: “(T)he whole world is ...made up of interdependent parts. So why not?”(117) Similarly her resentments to the norms and mores of conjugal life vanish when he explains to her that the norms which she finds restrictive are really components of a disciplined way of life. He tells her, “There have to be some rules so that life can have both dignity and grace. We can always find measures of freedom within these rules.”(116) His advice makes Indu realise that responsibility is an important element in marriage and autonomy and responsibilities go together in a marriage. When his grandson, Naren, commits suicide, he is overwhelmed with the feelings of guilt and failure. He watches with “glazed eyes” his body being brought home. He is the only blood relation of Naren. He responds to his death through silent suffering. Indu finds him lying in a bed as if asleep. But he is not. Indu sees “that he had been weeping. His face crumbled into a blotchy mass of wrinkles.”(195) He is overcome by doubt, uncertainty and guilt and asks the question: “Did he...do it deliberately?” Then he talks to Indu the whole night but does not reveal his heart-felt grief. Indu understands his sentiments and listens to him without consoling him. She explains: “I did not attempt to comfort him. I knew there was no comfort. I could offer him ...he always spoke of Naren in the present tense, never in the past.”(195)

In *Small Remedies* Madhu’s relationship with Leela, her mother’s sister, is a relationship of love and compassion, care and concern. When Madhu’s father dies, Leela takes Madhu under her care and Madhu gains a family. Commenting on Leela-Madhu relationship, Amrita Bhalla says:

Leela, her mother’s sister, is seen by Madhu as her guardian and protector, as a mother figure who had looked after her and brought her out of the terrifying emptiness of her father’s death and who was
Leela’s past was an inspiring story of struggle, emancipation and empowerment. After her husband’s death, the widow Leela had refused to return to her father’s house and to a life of comfortable domesticity and anonymity. She had instead joined the Communist Party, achieved economic independence, supported the striking mill and railway workers and women T. B. Patients and fought for justice on behalf of the weak and deprived. Madhu always draws inspiration from her.

Moving On presents Manjari’s loving relationship with her father’s elder sister, Gayatri. Initially they lived at the same place in Bombay and had forged a close relationship. Manjari recollects: “I loved her and in an easier, more uncomplicated way than I loved Mai. Mai was jealous.”(230)When Gayatri married R. K. and shifted to Bangalore, her family visited her at Bangalore occasionally before they shifted from Bombay to Bangalore. Gayatri had come to Bombay to attend Manjari’s wedding. Manjari reflects: “It was she who did what Mai should have done: she got me my wedding sari, the mangalsutra, the silver toe rings.”(250)She had again come from Bangalore to Bombay just to meet her on the occasion of Mangala Gauri worship.

In the Country of Deceit depicts a very comfortable relationship between Devi, the protagonist, and her father’s sister, Sindhu Kerur. Sindhu feels more comfortable with Devi and her sister, Savi, than she does with her own three grown up children. She tells Devi: “I can talk to you about everything and anything. I don’t have to weigh each word; I don’t have to be careful all the time not to hurt you. I know this is because our expectations of each other are much less.”(117)Sindhu writes regularly to Devi and tries to persuade her to marry a person of her choice. She is worried for her advancing age: “You’re only twenty-six. After a certain age you can say that it’s too late to have children because Nature has her timetable.”(25)Citing her first marriage as example, she tells her that marriage is a step into the unknown and one has to take one’s chance with it. She says: “Marriage is a gamble, Putta. One has to take chances.”(26) In fact, she had promised to dying Pushpa, her sister and Devi’s mother, to get Devi married and now that she was herself diagnosed for cancer, she wanted to fulfil her promise. She writes to Devi:
I had promised your mother I would take on the responsibilities of your marriage after she was gone. I can’t take your place, but I will do my best. I don’t have too much time myself now, and I feel a little impatient. No I’m not using my illness to blackmail you. (20)

But her ardent wish is to see Devi married and settled in life. She tells her: “I’m not going to die until I see you married.”(145) When she learns from her son, Gundu that Devi was working with a film actress, she warns her against the glamorous world of films: “...I am little frightened of you. You are too innocent.”(118) When she and her husband planned a trip to Europe, she invited Devi to join them. She wanted Devi to visit the place where her favourite writer Jane Austen lived and worked. She offered to pay for her ticket but she honestly and frankly expresses her selfishness that they needed someone younger like her to carry their luggage. Obviously, their relationship is one of the most intimate and informal ones we come across in the novels of Shashi Deshpande.

III

The relationship between siblings and cousins is mostly depicted as a problematic human relationship in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. There are both the same-sex siblings and cousins(sister-sister or brother-brother) and the hetero-sex siblings and cousins(sister-brother). Some of her novels depict the brother-sister relationship. In fact, brothers have not got very important place in her novels yet they represent the male society and somehow or other affect the character of the protagonist. Her novels often present a brother as a loving and compassionate companion but sometimes he becomes a means of exploitation. Likewise, the same sex siblings or cousins may also have a sweet or bitter relationship between them. Parents’ gender specific or gender neutral attitude goes a long way in shaping the relationship between the siblings and the cousins and making them friends or rivals. There are very few same sex siblings except in A Matter of Time, Moving On and In the Country of Deceit but there are friendships between sisters and sister-in-law as in The Binding Vine.

There is sibling rivalry in The Dark Holds No Terrors. The parents favour their son, Dhruva and discriminate against their daughter, Saru.
Eight year old Dhruva is three years younger than his sister but he receives so much parental care that Saru suffers from a sense of deprivation. She always feels neglected and ignored in favour of her brother. Saru feels hurt and thinks of blotting Dhruva out of the family. The struggle for importance is seen when she thinks after seeing one year old Dhruva sitting in his father’s lap: “I must show Baba something ‘anything’ to take his attention away from Dhruva sitting on his lap. I must make him listen to me not to Dhruva. I must make him ignore Dhruva.”(32) She resented being placed second to Dhruva except once in a year at the time of Pooja that she was “more important than Dhruva.”(50)

Initially, Saru loved Dhruva very much. She was a careful and loving elder sister to him. The relationship they shared was very sweet and passionate. She recalls how she enjoyed him calling her ‘Sarutai’ yet forbade him to call her by that name. When four year old Dhruva was made to sleep alone in his room by his mother, in order to inculcate the manly qualities of courage and toughness in him, he was afraid of nocturnal darkness. Saru tried to drive away his fear of darkness saying “What’s there to be scared of?...Look, there’s nothing.”(186) But Dhruva did not feel assured. He held on to his fear. So he used to wait until his mother was asleep and then crawled into Saru’s bed waking her up from her sleep. She felt disgusted at his touch and asked him to keep away from her lest she should reveal to mother that he was scared of dark. Dhruva prayed to her not to reveal this secret and she obliged. She could never reveal the truth that Dhruva was scared of dark. She loved him so passionately. Dhruva too loved to be in her company and ran after his beloved sister. He was completely loyal to her in all respects. But she spared no occasion to assert her authority over him on every little opportunity. The novel reads: “Just three years between them. But what immense advantage those three years gave her. She had ruled over him completely. No dictatorship could have been more absolute.”(53)

Later Dhruva drowned in a pit full of muddy water. He had insisted on going with Saru when she, angry with her mother, had left the house and gone to a lonely place. He had followed her and got into a local pond. She had made a valiant attempt to save him by stepping deep into the waters, plunging and groping as fast as she could to hold his arm or leg, or shirt or whatever, but eventually failed. But she had vehemently denied any knowledge of him when asked by her parents. The childhood experience of watching her brother sink into water and die gave her a sense of guilt that she was responsible
for the death of her brother-the guilt that she failed to respond immediately to Dhruva’s call for help and simply watched him dying. Dhruva’s demise had always been her subconscious desire but his death did not restore her to her parental love and care despite her being their only child left. Rather it further alienated her from them by putting a guilt consciousness permanently in her psyche. She never denied or confirmed the charge of her mother: “you killed him.”(191) According To Charu Chandra Mishra: “Throughout the novel, this guilt consciousness seems to act like a fatal flaw at times driving her to a mental state bordering on schizophrenia.”(2001:82)

But her sibling rivalry with Dhruva continued even after his death. She did not even remember Dhruva’s birthday and keep company with her parents in observing a fast on that day which they did as an annual day of remembrance of both what they had possessed and what they had lost. Her parents had fasted on that day. “But she had not. She had eaten her food defiantly, aggressively knowing that her mother was looking at her in astonishment, thinking perhaps...How can she?”(180) Her dead brother’s presence along with her dead mother clouded her entire life. Shashi Deshpande has deconstructed the story of Dhruva and Uttama in the Puranas to mark Saru’s parental rejection and her sibling rivalry. Jasbir Jain makes an important observation in this context: “In the story in the puranas it is Dhruva who is displaced by his brother, Uttama, but in the novel, he displaces his elder sister, reworking the myth in a way where the focus is on parental rejection and sibling rivalry.”(2003:228)

If I Die Today presents brother-sister relationship in a different light. Vidya, the Dean’s sister, was obsessed with her incestuous love for her brother and had gradually moved towards insanity. She grudges her brother’s any role independent of her. Her incestuous love for her brother leads to the deaths of Guru and Tony. But brother-sister relationship between Kshma Rao and her younger brother, Pratap in Deshpnde’s another novella, Come Up and Be Dead is a relationship of jealousy and rivalry resulting from gender discrimination. When Kshama’s father dies, she notices gender discrimination in the performance of his last rites. Only Pratap performed the last rites, not she. The rituals undermine her importance in the family and raised that of Pratap. She finds herself sidelined as she recollects:

Yet after Appa died, it was all Pratap’s show. No, not Pratap really, but “the son”. Even Pratap’s shaven head had outraged her; it so
obviously linked him to the dead man. While I? There’s nothing left of all that there was between Appa and me...d(95)

There were comparisons made and Pratap paled in the shadow of his intelligent and dominating sister. She resented her parents’ attention given to Pratap. She hated her mother for giving birth to Pratap:

She had been sixteen when Pratap was born. It had been a disaster to her; and for some reason her rage had been directed against her mother. The sight of her nursing the baby, the smell of the room in which she lay, had filled her with disgust. (92)

She was jealous of Pratap because she believed him to be a threat: “My son...the way Appa had said these words somehow diminished her. It had struck terror in her. Didn’t I matter at all? Don’t I count anymore?”(92) She was not inclined to send for Pratap when her father lay dying and went on asking for him. She did so rather reluctantly. She hated Pratap for this: “She it was who was always close to Appa, she on whom Appa had pinned his hopes and ambitions. And yet, in the end, it was Pratap he had wanted and Pratap who had lit the fire and set him free.”(96) She resents the fact that Pratap was the one to carry on the legacy of her father when she believed that she had the right to do so, as she was closer to her father than Pratap. Pratap becomes dependent on her and she has to keep her cousin, Devayani as housekeeper to look after him. In the end Pratap’s death leads to her resignation from the post of the Head Mistress of the exclusive Girls’ School.

Indu, the protagonist and the narrator in Roots and Shadows, is not very close to her cousin, Padmini alias Mini but she sees her as a foil to herself. Mini is a victim of sexist bias that is ingrained to the joint family system. She looked upon as a burden by her parents who are anxious to get her married off. Mini is aware of her status and is willing to marry any man chosen by her parents. Indu has to pay her wedding expenses as desired by Akka who is now dead. Indu does not like the match arranged by her parents and advises her to marry Naren. But her parents do not consider Naren appropriate for her. Initially Indu resents Mini’s traditional outlook and acceptance of her limitations as a woman but later on she acknowledges the security and happiness that characterise Mini’s acceptance of her existence. Indu reflects:

A woman’s life, they had told me, contained no choices...The woman had no choice but to submit, accept. And I had often wondered...have
they been born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through lifetime of disuse? And yet Mini, who had no choice either, had accepted the reality, the finality with a grace and composure that spoke eloquently of that inner strength. (6)

Jaya, the protagonist in That Long Silence, does not have a happy relationship with her two brothers. She always feels deprived of parental love because of her mother’s extreme love for her brothers. She refers to her elder brother, Dinkar, ironically as ‘Ai’s Son’, the one to whom her mother was most attentive while she was ignored. And though he did not need the Bombay flat since he was settled abroad, it was he who got it from Ai. Referring to her mother’s gift to Dinkar, she frankly says, “I had been resentful and hurt when I had heard this.”(41)Dinkar whom she called ‘Dada’ was her guardian after her father’s death when she was fifteen and her uncle always reminded him of his responsibilities as the man of the house especially that of marrying his younger sister. But Jaya felt that he was in a hurry to be free from his responsibility of an unmarried sister, so that he could go ahead with his own plans though he pretended not to impose anything on her saying, “I know I’m only your brother, I know I have no real right to tell you what to do, if only Appa had been here.”(93)After her marriage, he went away from home and household responsibilities and settled abroad.

Jaya’s younger brother, Ravi, was six years younger than she. But she felt inferior to him because of his good appearance. She says, “He was the best-looking of the three of us, having Appa’s height and sharp features and Ai’s clear complexion.”(101)Even when he called him ‘Jayatai’ he seemed to be parodying the elder sister. Her proud and stubborn brother never sought favour but his mother always favoured him at Jaya’s expense. Jaya felt hurt as is evident from her recounting a childhood incident of their struggle over a window seat while travelling in a train:

I had captured it first but Ravi, determined to wrest it from me, had tried to push me out. It had seemed the most important thing in the world at that moment to have that seat, not to let him have it; would have died before surrendering it. Yet when Ai had seen us struggling-Ravi himself had never appealed for help, he had fought his own battle-I had to give it up. (102)
Ravi always avoided family responsibility but he took full advantage of his mother’s love and insinuated himself so fully into his mother’s affection that she ignored Jaya completely and bequeathed all her jewellery to him. Ravi being irresponsible and Dinkar being far away, the responsibility of the family and the extended family fell on Jaya, which she did not like.

Unlike Saru and Dhruva in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Kshama and Pratap in *Come Up and Be Dead* and Jaya and Ravi in *That Long Silence*, Urmila’s relationship with her brother, Amrut in *The Binding Vine* is rather warm, loving and passionate. They are not only sister and brother but also friends. They discuss things openly and correct each other. Once they talk on the superiority complex in men, and Urmila corrects Amrut’s presumption that women do not want to be dominated. She tells him:

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

Urmila’s relationship with Vanna, her husband’s half-sister, is also important. They are sisters-in-law but they are very close friends. Their relationship goes up and down on several occasions. A chill descends on their friendship when Vanna protests against Urmila’s meddling in the Kalpana incident and disagrees with her ambition of publishing the poems of Mira, Urmila’s dead mother-in-law who suffered rape in marriage, which involved the exposure of Vanna’s father’s behaviour. At this point their friendship stands threatened. Urmila too feels irritated at Vanna’s submissiveness before her husband, Harish, and her being always in attention mode to please him when he is around. She finds Vanna contradictory when the latter complains about her daughter’s rude behaviour while her own remarks drive her mother into silence. Urmila, however, works on her relationship with Vanna without compromising her principles. She stands her ground and convinces Vanna that innocent Kalpana was wronged by a brute and she needed help; and that Mira’s poems cannot be put under the carpet for the fear of exposure. She wants Vanna to see reason and assert some amount of authority in her family instead of trying desperately all the time to cope with everything. She runs to Vanna’s help when her children need care. The clouds of misunderstanding are driven out and their friendship remains intact. A. G. Khan makes an important observation as regards their relationship:
The Binding Vine is a work that can be read as a projection of such ideas as woman’s solidarity, female bonding and value of sisterhood in a male dominated culture, the basis for their bonding, however, being shared oppression and victimization. (2005:162)

The pain and grief that Urmila suffers after the death of her baby daughter, Anushka, motivate her to reach out to other women who have their own tales of suffering to tell, despite their differences in social status and relationships. She reflects over why certain things happen to her and her near and dear and such awareness and sensitivity make her indentify with other women and share their sufferings. In this way feminine solidarity is created in the hour of crisis. Vanna, her mother Akka and Urmila’s mother Inni rally round Urmila in her woe and grief at the death of her daughter. According to Vijaya Guttal, “The novel (TBV) celebrates woman’s coming together with other women as friends and companions, sharers of life rather than rivals for approval of men.” (2005:17) Basavraj Naikar too supports this view when he says:

In *The Binding Vine* is shown the perennial truth of how all the human beings in life-parents and children, relatives and strangers, men and women-are bound by the vine of emotional attachment and struggle to enjoy the beauty of life and overcome ugliness in various ways. One may describe the emotional bondage among the human beings as part of *maya* of mortal life. (2001:122)

In *A Matter of Time* Sumi, the protagonist, receives immediate attention of her siblings and cousins when she faces a very difficult situation in her life after her desertion by her husband, Gopal. As she returns to her natal home, they come together to comfort her and reach Gopal for reconciliation. Ramesh, Gopal’s nephew, finds out where Gopal is living. Devaki, Sumi’s cousin, throws a party to bring Sumi and Gopal together. When Gopal refuses to come back, they pool their resources to extend all possible support to Sumi and her children. Gopal’s sister, Sudha, marries in order to provide her half-brother, Gopal with a home, Ramesh sells off his flat to give money to Sumi, Sumi’s younger sister takes up the responsibility for paying Charu’s fees for Medical School. When Sumi wants to have an independent establishment for her family, Nagraj, a broker, helps her in finding a house on rent. He joins her in house-hunting and they begin to understand each other in
the task of house-hunting. He acts as a therapist for her and his presence allows her to work out her restlessness as she goes along from one house to another.

*Small Remedies* brings together a host of people other than blood relatives who help and support Madhu, the protagonist in the hour of crisis. When she loses her teenage son, Aditya in a bomb blast and separates from her husband Som, her maternal-aunt’s step-son Tony dons the role of brother and his wife, Rekha stands by her. Chandru, Som’s friend, finances the biography of Savitribai Indorker she is commissioned to write, and Hari, her sister’s grandson and his wife, Lata offer her a home when she is planning to interview Savitribai. They gave her the freedom of their house so that she could have a sense of belonging. Her friends, well wishers and kin, they all not only relate to her needs and help her in rehabilitation but also work for her reunion with her husband. These other relationships give a positive message that if suffering and woe may come from any corner of life, help and support may follow from all corners, even from the unexpected ones to mitigate them. These acts of coming together and standing together in our common inheritance of pain are the small remedies that give us hope against death and trauma of life and makes life worth living.

*Moving On* is one of Deshpande’s novels which present same sex sibling relationship between Manjari and her younger sister, Malvika alias Malu. Malu’s birth had given Manjari her pet name ‘Jiji’ and a new identity along with this name. She recollects:

I was the first-born, but I had to wait for Malu to come to find my own name, as well as my place. With her entrance, I became a foil to Malu. I was strong while she was delicate; I was practical and she was dreamy and absent minded. I was the son of the family, the tough one while Malu was the daughter, gentle and to be protected. (41)

In childhood, Manjari had rivalry with Malu but it was a difficult proposition. She says: “Yet, I always knew I had to work harder than Malu if I wanted to be loved. In fact, Malu didn’t have to work at all, she just had to be.”(44) And she chose not to be a rival. So, there is no sibling rivalry between them. Once when Manjari was crying out of fear of being lost in the crowd and her father put down Malu to pick her up and console her, she insisted that he should pick up Malu too in his other arms and was happy facing each other in their father’s arms. Whenever she saw Mai holding Malu in her arms
she tried to find a place with them and loved to be a part of Mai and Malu. While travelling she gave up her window seat without protest to Malu. They were so attached to each other that Raja once told Manjari, “I can never imagine you without Malu. You were never Jiji, you were always Jiji and Malu.”(152) They lived in a close and impenetrable togetherness. She had the clue to Malu which even their parents did not have: her silences, her fears, her withdrawals, etc. Manjari reflects:

The tie between us was much stronger than the casual link between siblings. Malu and I were never apart, she was always with me, behind me, holding my hand, holding on my dress so that a bit of it, close to the hem, was always crumpled. I was the one who spoke on her behalf; no, I spoke for both of us, because I knew what she wanted as clearly as I knew my own desires. Malu’s statement that the two of us would marry brothers and always live together, became a family joke brought up at every family gathering. (152)

Manjari was a role model for her younger sister. Malu always wanted to follow her. She insisted on having two plates of her hair just like her ‘Jiji’ and felt enormous joy at being “like Jiji”. She was always eager to join her in whatever she was doing. They wore identical clothes. They slept together. Together they were complete; together they formed a whole.

But Malu’s illness(asthmatic attacks) affected their relationship. Malu refused to continue her dancing lessons with Manjari. Parents no longer allowed her to run around. She stayed at home. Then came another blow to their relationship when parents left Malu with her maternal uncle and aunt-Bharat and Medha-at Bangalore. When Manjari rebelled against this decision, Malu did not join her. She became ‘Malvika’ in their home. She no longer called her “Jiji” but “my sister”.(157) Manjari reflects on her separation from Malu:

But it was Malu who defined my role, Malu who made me ‘Jiji’. So that when she went away and I was left alone at home, I felt unreal like a shadow...all the drive and confidence in me was gone, as if without her to be protected and looked after, there was no longer any need for these things. (153)

Manjari’s relationship with Malu took another dip when Manjari decided to marry Shyam. Malu, like her mother, was opposed to her
marriage with Shyam. Her hostility was the hardest to break through. She refused to hear Manjari’s arguments and talk to her. She did not even turn up at her wedding. Manjari found her response unbelievable. She reflects: “Malu who had followed me about, Malu who had held my hand and clutched at my dress—she said she didn’t care about what I was doing! She wouldn’t come for my wedding!” (249) In fact, Malu had become self-absorbed after living with Medha and Bharat; she was alienated from Manjari because of her association with Sophia and Ritu and Amy and Gulnaz. But she reconciled to Manjari when she went to meet her and stay with her at Ocean Vista. She came out of the bathroom screaming ‘Jiji’ at the sight of a cockroach; she watched in awe as she cooked; she lay with her head on her lap. Their old days revived. Manjari recollects: “…during dinner we turned children again, giggling at things, not knowing why we were laughing, but unable to stop...we were back now in our childhood...playing games like children.” (268-269) Malu went away happily. But when they met after Anand’s birth, the same could not be repeated as Malu had sealed herself against Manjari because of her preoccupation with studies and examination. When Malu returned home for good after Bharat’s heart attack, she wanted to remain out of the circle, to herself. She objected to her sister’s enjoying intimate moments with her husband in her room and warned Manjari against having sex in her room. She also did not like to see her feeding her baby with open breasts. Next time when Manjari took ailing Anand to her parents Malu did not share her room with her.

The sibling rivalry crops up in Manjari-Malu relationship as Malu could not bear not being the focus of Mai’s attention; she did not like Shyam and she could not bear to see Manjari with Shyam. Their relationship takes a further dip when Malu was discovered to have become pregnant with Shyam and they had moved to Laxman’s flat where Malu could deliver her baby secretly. Malu would not talk to her, and when she tried to talk to her, she would say “Go away, Go away.” (320) They were like two separate units in one house: Anand and Manjari, Mai and Malu. She did not even allow Manjari to see the new born baby. Soon it became quite clear to Manjari that Malu did not want her sister to do anything with her. But the two sisters were reconciled before Malu died of a post-natal complication. She had cried ‘Jiji’ and gripped her hand hard before her death. Manjari suffered from a sense of permanent loss after Malu death. She reflects: “A part of me died with her; the part she had defined was lost forever.” (158)
In the Country of Deceit like Moving On presents same sex sibling relationship between Devayani alias Devi, the protagonist, and her elder sister Savitri alias Savi. The novel does not tell much about their childhood and their relationship as children. Savi who was five years elder to Devi had married Shree and left with her husband for the U. S. A and for that she always feels guilty. She thinks that she escaped the problems at home-the financial problems, Appa’s death, Amma’a illness-and left Devi to face everything alone. She accuses Devi of having kept the seriousness of Amma’s illness from her saying, “I had a right to know, you didn’t tell me because you wanted the world to say what a good daughter you were, you wanted everyone to think what a bad daughter I was.”(184) She thinks that it was because of all those problems that Devi did not get married and it is her duty to correct that wrong by getting Devi married to a suitable person. She gets upset when Devi rejects Alex, a prospective groom suggested for Devi by Sindhu, their mother’s sister. She thinks that it was a mistake to build the house at Rajnur for Devi to live in it happily, as Devi now felt so comfortable in it that she did not want to move out. She is always worried for Devi’s future. She wants her to get married and lead a happy conjugal life. She gets irritated when Devi takes her concern lightly.

Savi is very caring and protective to Devi. She lives in Delhi but she visits Devi every year with her children. She did not want Devi to go to her cousin, Kshama and live with her in Bangalore. She and her husband had asked Devi many times to live with them in Delhi. But Devi stayed at Rajnur. She always trusted her sister more than anyone else. When she is disturbed with her growing intimacy with Ashok, she rings Savi up after 11-00 P. M. and tells her that she was frightened and she had a nightmare, and Savi assures her she would take the morning flight and reach Rajnur. When Savi comes to know about Devi’s affair with Ashok, she feels hurt and starts weeping. She does not accuse Devi but herself for letting her live alone, for not making more efforts to get her married. But then she rages at her: “You should have told me...you want to get married, you could have avoided this, this disgusting thing you’re doing. I never thought you would do such a dirty thing, just for sex.”(184)She asks her to give it up immediately and get married as it was reckless, foolish and ruinous on her part. When Savi meets Ashok at a railway station in Pune, she asks him categorically to stop meeting Devi and leave her alone saying, “You’re hurting her. She doesn’t understand what she is doing.”(221) But she is taken aback when Devi intervenes and tells her that it was not her business to say such things to her love, Ashok in her presence: “Stop talking about me as if I’m not
here. And Savi, I’m an adult, I can take my own decisions. I know what I’m doing. You can’t protect me, Savi, I’m not a child.”(221) But Savi does not stop; rather she becomes more aggressive and tells Ashok: “If you hurt her, I’ll kill you, I promise you I’ll kill you.”(221) And later Devi herself tells Ashok about Savi: “She’s very protective of me. Since our parents died, we’ve only had each other...”(222)

IV

Friends of the protagonists also play a very significant role in shaping the thoughts and actions of the protagonist. Friends are not necessarily the members of one’s family but those who are close and familiar, who have common views and interests, who help and support in times of need, and who give pleasant company and valuable contribution to life. It is human nature to enjoy helping and co-operating with others and to seek help and cooperation from others in times of need. A friend is a companion of one’s choice with whom one could share one’s mind and heart and without a friend one feels isolated and helpless. Friendship brings people closer together and develops understanding between them; it helps dissolving misunderstanding with others and restoring goodwill and cordial relationship. Obviously, friendship is a kind of individual, social and emotional need and one does not know when a friendship will grow with someone. Deshpande’s protagonists do have friends who influence their life in many ways. However, in her early novels their important friends are often associated with them in extra-marital relationship which is not the case in her later novels.

Manjari, the protagonist in Moving On, has a very good relationship with her Land Lady, Ba and her daughter-in-law, Neeraben. She had hired a single room on rent from them for her accommodation. Ba had a family of five-three adults and two children-living in a single room. Manjari paid them a small sum as rent but they very carefully let her have the room to herself and refused her offer to have the children or Ba sleep in her room. When she did not have work, they let her help with the cooking and packing the dabbas, though she was both clumsy and slow. They looked after her son, Anand when she went out for work. Anand slept by the side of Ba and when Manjari got home, Ba would hand Anand over to her with a smile saying, “Here’s your Balkrishna.”(212)When she offered money for Anand’s food, Ba would tell her, “My son will die of shame if he takes money to feed
Shyambhai’s son.”(212) Manjari reflects about Ba and Neeraben’s concern for Anand:

They were good to him, those two women, Ba and her daughter-in-law Neeraben; I was only a tenant but they loved Anand and treated him like their own...yes, they were good to him. And generous, refusing to take money from me for the child’s food. (212)

Manjari’s relationship with her tenant, Abhishek, was also very cordial. He was a young man from a small town, who had lived with her father for more than a year. Her father liked him. So, she allowed him to live upstairs after her father’s death. Abhishek respects Manjari and is always ready to help her. Manjari lived alone in the house and she was shocked and traumatized when the intruder had attacked her. Abhishek brings water for her, comforts her, makes a cup of tea for her and tells her that she should have called him for help. Later an electric bell is installed in his room to warn him if Manjari is in crisis. Manjari suffers from a sense of loss when Abhishek leaves for Singapore for a three months assignment and then there is the possibility of his moving on to the USA for another two months. But Abhishek being well aware of Manjari’s living alone in the house under threat brings in Raman Joy Kumar to stay in his room until he returned, only after seeking her prior consent. Raman was known to Manjari; he had helped her with the computer. Abhisek does not make a come back in the story but he does leave a loving memory of his care and concern for his Land Lady.

Manjari’s relationship with Rajendra alias Raja was different. This is a relationship between two people who are cousins and who have grown up together. Both are married and have children from their marriage but both have lost their spouse. So they are a widow and a widower. They are neighbours and have a long time family association. Raja, an upholder of patriarchal norms, is protective towards Manjari, a young woman left alone-prematurely widowed, parents being dead and children away-and wants to marry her for physical, financial and emotional considerations. But Manjari who does not feel love and attraction for Raja refuses his repeated proposals to marry him. So, they remain just friends. Chanchala K. Naik makes an important observation in this context:

She turns down Raja’s repeated proposals to marry him and to make the two establishments one, because marriage without the foundation
of love and only as a means of social security for a single woman is not acceptable to her. Besides, she is too familiar with the curves of his body to feel erotically aroused, as they grew up together. (2005:222)

Besides, her knowledge about her parents’ conjugal relationship and her experience of her own marriage with Shyam, give no encouragement for a remarriage. She did not want to be hurt again if she could help it. She has thus reasons to refuse marriage which never insures a happy life. She asks Raja, “Knowing what happened to our parents’ marriage, knowing how both ours ended so abruptly, leaving us bereft, how can you believe in a happy ending?” (341) Raja accepts her stand not to marry and both reconcile to what Manjai’s father used to say, “...we will never find what we are looking for, we will never get what we’re seeking for in other humans. We will continue to be incomplete, ampersands all of us, each one of us.” (343) They come out of the impasse and find some way to move on as friends, family, comrades and companions.

Manjari enjoys a healthy friendship with Raja and turns to him for help only in time of need. When she is attacked in the night by an unknown assailant and is terrified, she automatically rings up Raja for help. Raja rushes to her house and puts her at ease. He calls the police and contacts his relative—an IPS as DIG—for effective police action in the matter. He arranges for the carpenter to fix the window grill and makes other security arrangements. All these show his unconditional love and care for her. He has a protective concern for her. He is a man set on doing his duty as if Manjari’s Baba had said to him, “Look after my daughter when I’m gone.” (180) But she is not dependent on him. She learns to drive her car and even tries to run it as a taxi; she learns to operate a computer at home and types out manuscripts for others as a means of self-employment when she fails to find out a satisfactory job for sustenance. Even when the property mafia assault her physically and subject her to psychological pressure to coerce her to sell her ancestral house, she disapproves of Raja’s role of a protecting male in her life. She says, “I want the brakes under my feet, not someone else’s. I don’t want a duel control; the control should be mine, mine alone.” (88) When her sexual relationship with his tenant, Raman, stands revealed to Raja and gets reflected in his obvious ambivalence towards her, she sees in him the anger of the rejected male ego and the grief of the lover: Raja loved her from her childhood days but he could not
reveal it and Manjari could not see it. But she holds her ground and moves on to live her life without being dictated by Raja. The novel ends symbolically when both of them part ways at the end of a long journey and she starts her car and is back on the road again to be free.

Manjari presents Raja to other people as her brother. She tells the prospective buyer of her house about Raja, “My brother is an architect; he’s going to renovate the house for us.” (217-218) Raja always entices her to do things she was not supposed to do. They always fight over different issues but they are always together. They come together after a quarrel as if nothing had happened. He is so close with her children that he and not Manjari can influence them. As friends they have a very easy, informal and comfortable relationship which has, according to Rashmi Gaur, “the openness and trust of mature friendship.” (2004-2005:36) Deshpande endorsed such friendly and intimate male-female relationship outside marriage in her interview with Pallavi Thakur saying that such relationship gives a woman the freedom to be herself, and that it need not necessarily be an affair.

Devi’s relationship with Priya Ranjan alias Rani in The Country of Deceit is a friendship between the unequal. Sindhu, Devi’s aunt, finds their friendship strange and awkward as she tells Devi, “…I am surprised about your friendship with the actress. What do you have in common?” (118) They are poles apart: Devi is a simple middle class spinster and English tutor and Priya, a glamorous actress of Bombay film world now living with her second husband of high class society. They came into contact with each other by chance through Rani’s children, Neha and Rohan. Rani had come straight from California to Rajnur and Devi was the first person she knew in Rajnur apart from her husband’s family. Their friendship was forged at Rani’s initiative, perhaps it was her need. Their friendship continued as Rani showed interest in Devi’s life and visited her and invited her to her house frequently. Devi enjoyed the company Rani and her children, the experiences of high society life and the expeditions around Rajnur with her. It was through Rani that she met Ashok Chinappa with whom she started a new chapter in her life. But their relationship remained more formal than intimate. Their relationship became more formal when Rani asked her to write a film script and the visit that she made with her to Chandrapur to meet the director and the producer of her forthcoming film in a resort on the Goa highway, left her with a feeling of alienation as Rani behaved more like a moody film star than a sincere friend.
Their friendship comes to a sudden end when they are together injured in a car accident and Rani goes to Bombay for better treatment. Devi wanted to go to Bombay to see her but Rani did not pick up her call. Later she learns from her husband that Rani did not want to talk to anyone except Roshni, her daughter from her first husband. Rani was going to the US and there was least chance for Devi to meet her again but certainly her friendship with Rani had filled some void in her life.

Most of the aforesaid other relationships in the novels of Shashi Deshpande are woman to woman relationships cutting across the barriers of class and socio-economic status. These relationships, whether blood relationships or otherwise, give mental and moral strength to the protagonist and provide space and opportunities for confidence, caring and sharing in life. However, these relationships also reflect the unwritten restrictions imposed by the society on human aspirations and endeavours.

Other relationships as man-woman relationships in Shashi Deshpande’s novels give a larger space and emphasis on brother sister relationship at least in her early novels: her later novels are mostly concerned with sister siblings and sister bonding. The novels show that there is less sibling rivalry between sisters than between brother and sister. The rivalry or the adversarial relationship between brother and sister, though invested with hatred, conflict and mistrust because of gender-based parental discrimination, remains somehow a happy relationship because the protagonists show love and care for their brothers despite their irritation and direct their anger against their parents, particularly their mothers.

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