In novels after novels she knits her stories around the tangled lives of parents, children, grand children, aunts and uncles and everything else that illumines domesticity. In her novels she explores togetherness and separation, presence and absence, recurrence and reunion, in fact everything that is related to psychoanalysis of relationships.(298)

II

THE AUTHOR AND HER MAKING

Shashi Deshpande is one of the leading figures among the Indian Women Writers in English today. Her writing career spans over four decades as a writer and three decades as a novelist. As a representative of India and contemporary Indian Literature she occupies a very significant position among the Indian Women Novelists in English. She has been a prolific writer and, in her long literary career, she has unraveled the mysteries of human mind and heart through various characters in her novels and short stories and portrayed human relationships in various shades and colour. Undoubtedly, she has emerged as an outstanding women novelist on the Indian literary horizon of the 21st century.

Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwar, a small town in Karnataka. She was the second daughter of a famous Kannada Sanskrit scholar and writer of play of ideas, Adya Rangachar, better known as Sriranga. According to Shashi Deshpande he was “dominant, never domineering” but he was “somewhat detached” and he “never guided “his children to do better in life.”(1957:9) But her father’s personality had a deep impact on her literary career. Dr.R. S. Pathak makes a relevant observation in this context: “From her father nevertheless, Shashi Deshpande must have acquired an intellectual bent of mind and love for reading and scholarship, which have won for her degrees in Economics and English and a diploma in Journalism.”(1998:12) Her work of translating her father’s plays and memoirs bears testimony to it. As regards her maternal legacy, her mother, born in 1910, hailed from a very well-known and well educated family of Maharashtra. Her father, Shashi Deshpande’s maternal
grandfather, was a famous lawyer and he wanted his daughter to be educated, but Shashi Deshpande’s mother had to face a lot of problems while going to school and college because other women in the family used to ridicule her. Shashi Deshpande’s feminist postures may have an influence of her mother’s life and experiences.

Shashi Deshpande grew up in Dharwar and received an English education at a Protestant Mission School. As a school girl she read the great British classical novels in English and liked particularly the works of Jane Austen. At the age of 15, she went to Bombay (now Mumbai) and graduated in B. A. Economics Honours from Elphiniston College Bombay in 1956. Then she moved to Bangalore (now Bengaluru) and acquired a Degree in Law from Mysore University winning two gold medals in 1959. She did Diploma in Journalism from the Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan’s R. P. College of Mass Communication winning three medals including The Times of India Gold Medal in 1970 and worked for a couple of months as a journalist for the magazine Onlooker. Meanwhile she also did M. A. in English literature. She is married to a pathologist and lives in Bengaluru.

Shashi Deshpande’s writing career started in 1969 when inspired by a visit to London, she wrote and published an account of her experiences. But her literary career began in 1970 with the publication of her short stories in famous magazines like Femina, Eve’s Weekly, etc. Her first independent literary publication, a collection of short stories, The Legacy, put together at the behest of her father, appeared in 1978. Gradually, she switched over to writing novels and two years later, her first novel The Dark Holds No Terrors was published. It was, however, not really her first novel to be written, the first being Roots and Shadows which was completed in 1978, a year before The Dark Holds No Terrors, but published only in 1983 and also awarded Thirumathi Rangammal Prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-1983. Her second published novel If I Die Today (1982) is a crime novel of short length. Her next published novel Come Up and Be Dead (1983) although a crime novel set in a school stands between children literature and adult fiction. It followed the publication of three collections of short stories in quick succession: It was the Nightingale (1986), It was Dark (1986) and The Miracle (1986). Her next novel That Long Silence (1988) won her the Sahitya Akademi Award. Her other novels The Binding Vine (1992), A Matter of Time (1996), Small Remedies (2000), Moving On (2004), In the Country of
Deceit (2008) and Ships That Pass (2012) were published almost at a regular interval of four years. Meanwhile, her other collections of short stories, the third volume The Intrusion and Other Stories (1993) and the sixth volume The Stone Women and Other Stories (1998) also appeared. It is worthy to note that If I Die Today, Come Up and Be Dead and That Long Silence were published by the British Feminist Publishing House, Virgo; her novels have been translated into several languages in India and abroad and even turned into feature films; and her short stories have been widely anthologized in ‘best Loved Indian Short Stories’ and ‘Collected Short Stories’.

Though Shashi Deshpande’s major works are novels and short stories, she also wrote children books and non-fiction pieces. She started writing children stories for her two young sons. She recreated her own happy childhood in a small town in her first children book A Summer Adventure and subsequently wrote two more adventure books The hidden Treasure (1980) and The Only Eyewitness (1982). Her fourth children book The Narayanpur Incident (1992) was based on the 1942 Quit India Movement and the role of children in it. All these books published by India Book House are read and appreciated by avid readers. Besides these, she has written literary and feminist pieces for magazines and newspapers and the script of a feature film ‘Drishti’. Moreover, she has, over the years, given several interviews and delivered lectures at seminars and conferences, which have been recorded and published and which throw light on her choice of themes, organization of her materials and her background. There has been a gradual but steady rise in her name and fame as a writer and in the popularity of her works. She has been on the Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi and the Chairperson of the Jury for the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize, 2000. She was awarded Padma Shree in 2009.

Shashi Deshpande became a writer not by choice or compulsion but by the sheer force of destiny or by chance. She says:

I never decided that I was going to become a writer, it was never a conscious decision. I got married, I had no definite career, I had two children. I was restless with being just a housewife and mother, I was looking for a job. Then we were in England for a year, my husband was a doctor. I was very isolated there because he was at work all day and I had these two children and no friends. So then we returned and he said “Why don’t you write about our year there?” Then I joined a journalism course. I loved writing. I felt at home with it. So I think in
one way I stumbled into it but I really think of it this way as writing was something which was waiting for me along the line and then I reached that point, and then I knew what my life was going to be about. (*Literature Alive.* 1/3, 1987:9)

Shashi Deshpande is familiar with Marathi and Kannada as the first was her mother language and the second her father’s language, but she choose to write in English, the only language she felt comfortable with and confident to write in. Her mother’s and father’s languages remained for her more or less spoken languages. According to Shalmaloe Palekar: “Shashi Deshpande, as a contemporary Indian novelist writing in English, uses English like any other Indian language. In fact, she does not want any special quality of Indianness to be recognized as a separate aspect in any way contrasting with her medium.” (2005:46) But she felt alienated as a writer in English. She herself admits it when she says: “Writing in English in India, one feels sadly out of the mainstream” (1998:229)

Though Shashi Deshpande has often been labelled as a feminist writer, the core issue in her novels and short stories is the portrayal of human relationships which men and women forge at different stages of their lives. The range and variety of human relationships portrayed in various shades create various fascinating mosaic patterns in her novels and it comes from Shashi Deshpande’s own observations of learning from life. She herself speaks about her novels:

Each novel is a voyage of discovery for me, a discovery of myself, of other human beings, of our universe. There never has been any huge enlightenment, only an understanding of the fact that as we go on living, we learn to cope, becoming each day a little more understanding of human frailty, a little more compassionate. Knowing that if we can’t do this, we’re sunk, because humans have nothing else, no one else, but themselves. Writing is for me part of the endeavour to understand this process, to articulate the human struggle, the human triumph. (2003:29)

*The Dark Holds no Terrors* is the story of Sarita alias Saru, the protagonist, who defies her mother to become a doctor, defies her caste to marry Manohar alias Manu for love, defies patriarchal notion to become a bread earner, and defies social conventions by using Boozie to advance her career. But
her love marriage takes a sadistic twist as Manu feels offended and turns a rapist husband at night. She escapes for a while to her parental home when her mother dies unreconciled, but her mother’s curse echoes still, the ghosts of her past haunt her, her children pull her emotion, and her parents need her expert attention. However, she draws on the evolving relationship with her father and rids herself of her self-deception, guilt complexes and emotive illusions to face her home again. The novel which is a moving tale of filial and conjugal relationship, happens to be Deshpande’s favourite work as she once told an Interviewer in 1987: “It(DHNT) has a simple theme, and fewer characters. It gripped me so much that I whipped through the writing” (Literature Alive.1/3(1987)10)

*If I Die Today* is a detective fiction of short length. The narrator is a young college lecturer who is married to Dr. Vijay and they live on the campus of a big Medical College and Hospital. The arrival of Guru, a terminal cancer patient, describes the lives of the doctors and their families. Old secretes are revealed and two people are murdered but the tension in the families is resolved after the culprit is unmasked and it is found that Dr. Vijaya, the sister of the Dean and an abnormal woman living a disturbed and secluded life is behind the murders. But after a series of deaths, life sprouts again through the narrator who gives birth to a baby girl, the after the terrible night. The novel looks like a campus fiction(the centre of action being SDM College and Hospital) which was very popular in Britain during 1960s and 1970s. It is considered a marginal work as it does not break any fresh ground from *The Dark Hold No Terrors*. But Awadhesh K Singh, an eminent critic of Indian English literature, considers it as one of the mainstream novels of Shashi Deshpande because of its theme and other features. To quote him:

But in my reading of the text, I have looked at themes which Deshpande is preoccupied with, say death and relationships, and in that context this work is central not because it discusses death and relationships but also because of its intricate nature where the reader is possessed with a quest to unravel the truth which is always already deferred.(2005:150)

*Come Up and Be Dead* is also a crime fiction of revenge, lasciviousness and proneness to commit murders. The novel is set in a large old exclusive girls’ school somewhere in India in the post-independence era. Verma, a member of the Board of Governors of the school, treats the whole
female sex as his enemy and wants all young women to suffer because his own wife had deserted him soon after marriage. He avenges himself by making school girls serve as call girls. Miss Kshama Rao, a spinster, is the Head Mistress and Devayani, also a spinster, is her cousin and housekeeper. Pratap, her brother, also lives with her. Other characters-Kshama’s colleague like Mrs. Jyoti Raman, her students like Sonali, Bunny, Sharmila, her mentor, Matthews, Police Inspector and Dr. Girish gravitate around Kshama and the school. The action is set in motion when Mridula, one of the school girls who had got pregnant despite being unmarried, is found dead. Speculation is rife whether it is a suicide or murder? The needle of suspicion is pointed to Pratap because of the friendship with that girl. But Pratap is next to meet a tragic death. The mystery deepens after the murder of Mrs. Jyoti Raman and the school becomes a hot bed of fear and suspicion. Finally, Devayani confronts the murderer risking her own life and lifts the veil that Dr. Girish, the town’s good doctor who was a part of a call girl racket and was immensely profiting by it, was the murderer. The novel sounds like a crime thriller, but it goes beyond that as Rama Gautam puts it:

One of the dominant themes in this novel(\textit{CUBD}) is “human relationships” not the traditional but the redefined human relationships. What is seen is not the identical and the fictionalized but the perceived and “felt” human relationships between sisters, mother and child, father and daughter, brother and sister, between woman and society and between women and men with whom they live. (2005:150)

\textit{Roots and Shadows} describes the breakup of a joint family held together by the money and authority of Akka, an old aunt, a childless widow. When she dies, she leaves the wealth to Indu, the protagonist, a modern educated and assertive girl who had left home to marry Jayant for love, defying Akka. She becomes a journalist but a series of problems puzzle and baffle her and the failure of her own marriage makes her realize that her freedom was illusory; that she had broken family norms not for her principles but for self-pleasure as she had exchanged the orthodoxy of the village home for the conventions of the “smart young set” of the city where material well-being has to be assured by sacrificing principles if necessary. She returns home when her great aunt dies after more than 12 years of absence to take charge of her legacy and find out if her roots lie there. But her search leads her to conclusion that
there are no ‘roots’ but only ‘shadows’ which haunt her. Nevertheless her discovery of the strength and resilience of Akka she had previously dismissed as weak and her invigorative extra-marital relationship with Naren make her realize that she must work out her personal salvation and she decides to return to Jayant. The novel explores various kinds of human relationships in a traditional joint family. However, the novel was not intended as a domestic novel as, speaking to M. D. Rati in an Interview, Deshpande points out:

... I began Roots and Shadows which was to be a detective story with an old woman being murdered for money. Somehow, character of Indu took control of the novel, pushed out all the other elements and made the book what it was. (1998:239)

That Long Silence deals with Jaya’s relationship as daughter, sister, wife, mother, daughter-in-law, friend, mistress and writer of genteel feminine newspaper articles. She is a middle-aged upper-middle class housewife with two teenage children. Being the narrator and protagonist, she is forced to take stock of her life when her husband, Mohan, a government employee, is suspected of fraud and they have to move from their luxurious house in Church Gate, Mumbai, to a flat in Dadar. She feels suffocated in her narrow ambit of life. Even as a writer, she has not achieved true self-expression. She is like other women in the novel such as Kusum and Jeeja who are trapped in their self-created silence and are incapable of breaking away from the supportive yet stifling extended family. Her married life is described as “a pair of bullocks yoked together” and recalls her relationship with her numerous relatives and friends with compassion and understanding. The novel ends with Mohan’s rehabilitation to his job and house and Jaya’s resolution to seek liberation from mediocrity in self-expression and to write about herself and family breaking out her long silence. Shashi Deshpande herself makes a valuable comment on this novel:

What I see in it is Jaya’s critical look turned on herself, the ruthless analysis of life that the book contains. The woman’s intellectual self-grappling with her emotional self. A terrible painful honesty in the way a woman is able to see her own relationship with others. (2003:18)

The Binding Vine which was initially titled ‘Cat’s Cradle’ after a German novel, is a path breaking novel in Deshpande’s own words: “The
"Binding Vine" was for me my first departure. The earlier novels were internalized—what had been in my mind. So it was very puzzling for readers and critics” (1998:259) The novel which opens with Urmila alias Urmi trying to cope with the death of her daughter, Anu, and the efforts of her friend and sister-in-law, Vanna, her brother, Amrut, and her mother, Inni, to help her back to normality, presents human relationships in various shades and colours. The central symbolism in the novel is contained in the title of the novel. Urmila as a mother is like an oak and the infant, Anu, is like a creeper around her. But Urmila as a wife is a sensitive vine and need Kishore, her husband, as an oak to entwine herself around. J P Tripathi in his article “The Binding Vine and Indian Ethos” considers The Binding Vine a pure novel because of its serious depiction of human relationships. To quote him:

A serious study of The Binding Vine reveals that it concentrates on human relationships, affection and love. This type of concentration of human relationships is found in pure novels as those by Jane Austen. So technically speaking the novel The Binding Vine can be called a pure novel. (1998:152)

Mr. Tripathi also elaborates the types of human relationships in The Binding Vine when he says: “The central theme of the novel is the “binding vine” of feeling and emotion between parent and child, and between husband and wife” (153) According to Basavraj Naikar:

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 the ugliness in various ways. (2001:122)

A Matter of Time depicts a complex web of human relationships in an extended family spanning across four generations of the same family with a lineage of women—Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru—each representing a specific mode of experience. Kalyani’s parents, Manorama and Vithalrao were not blessed with a son. So Manorama feared that her husband might remarry to have a son who would rightfully inherit his property and her daughter and that Kalyani will get married and become a part of another family. So with the co-operation of her husband, she brought up Shripati, educated him and made him a lawyer. Later she exploited this indebtedness of her brother and
in order to prevent the property going away from her family, she got Kalyani married to Shripati. After this she feels secured. But their daughter, Sumi, along with her three daughters, is abandoned by her husband, Gopal, a professor who wanted to seek personal fulfilment. Sumi takes Gopal’s walking out as a matter of fact but her daughters, Aru, Charu and Seema, abandoned in midstream by their father, look at her in bewilderment. She returns to her parent’s home named ‘Vishwas’ and moves on to raise her daughters and carve out a new life for herself, to shape an independent existence for herself. But she dies all on a sudden in a scooter accident. What matters most is her struggle and not the fruits of her struggle. The novel presents conjugal relationship in a new perspective. According to Jasbir Jain: “AMT is a novel more deeply involved in the relationship of husband and wife than any of Deshpande’s other novels.”(2004:109)

*Small Remedies* is also set across generations. Madhu, the protagonist, leaves her home partly to get away from her husband, Som. Their conjugal relationship has been strained ever since he learnt of her pre-marital sex with her father’s friend. The tension between husband and wife has driven their son, Aditya, first out of the house and then to his death. Besides, the novel projects several man-woman relationships important among them being Joe-Leela, Lata–Hari, Savitribai–Ghulam Saab relationships, with the message that marriage is something larger than the sexual act, if it is to be considered a mature human relationship. *Small Remedies* is one of two Shashi Deshpande’s novels, the other being *Roots and Shadows*, in which sex outside marriage or before marriage is associated with a moment of crisis, an act of communication, a human touch and belonging, a release of tension and a restoration of balance. It happens when Madhu believes her father to be dead and her father’s young friend tries to comfort and assure her offering tender affection with sex without lust. Madhu’s role as a writer- she has written one biography and is in the process of writing another(of Savitribai)-makes this novel stand apart from other novels of Shashi Deshpande. According to Jasbir Jain: “*Small Remedies* is about a creative process more so than any of her other novels.”(2004:222)

*Moving On* is constructed largely out of the dairies and fictional writings of Badri and Vasu. Shashi Deshpande herself has mentioned that memories and pictures of the past dreams, hopes, plans for the future are as real to her as the present and stated that *Moving On* is an attempt “... to hold the past and present together in an intense and complex play of familiar
relationships.” (2005:217) Manjari, the protagonist, gives up her medical studies to marry Shyam but she suffers the trauma of marital betrayal when she discovers that her own sister, Mala, had conceived from her husband, Shyam. The death of Mala and Shyam shatters her and she moves away from her family, leaves among strangers and grapples with odds but she survives on her own refusing help from parents and relatives. It is while reading her father’s ‘diaries’ that she comes across various kinds of betrayals and violations which women had to undergo. In course of reading those diaries she gradually learns a lot about women’s problems and complexities of marriage and decides to remain single even though she is constantly provoked by her cousin, Raja, who makes repeated proposals of marriage to her. She preserves her freedom and maintains her individuality even at the cost of betraying her own body. She remains just a loving sister, an affectionate daughter, a caring mother and a good friend. Though her decision to live alone and to enjoy her freedom poses a threat in a male dominated Indian society, she is ready for the struggle and attempt to live with dignity on her own term. She has to fight strangers and mafia dons who want to grab her house. She lives under threat and on one occasion she is physically assaulted but she never gives in. The message of the novel is loud and clear- a liberated woman’s path is fraught with dangers but she must take a chance and stand her ground.

In the Country of Deceit is the story of Devayani , the protagonist, who chooses to live alone in a small town of Rajnur after her parents’ death, ignoring the gently voiced disapproval of her family and friends teaching English, creating a garden and making friend with Rani, a former actress settled in the town with her husband and three children. Devayani’s life is tranquil imbued with a hard-won independence. Then she meets Ashok Chinappa, Rajnur’s new District Superintendent of Police, and they fall in love despite the fact that Ashok is much older and married, and, as both acknowledge from the very beginning, it is a relationship without a future. They have brief sexual encounters but they lose their charms after some times. Besides, Devayani is also stalked and threatened by land mafia who want to grab her land. Through, Devayani, Deshpande seems to point out that society mistrusts single people, particularly single women. Single women in most of the cities are notoriously unsafe; they are stalked and raped. The single life despite its pulses of freedom and frolic, does not really work in the Indian society. Marriage and stability lies at the heart of Indian society. Else there is enormous emptiness inside, which can be filled with close knit family relationships.
Ships That Pass, classified as a novella because of its short length, is a story of relationships and love affairs that progress in a restrained and natural manner, adding authenticity to the middle class lives. The story of the novel which has been developed out of a short story written 30 years ago, deals with the lives of Tara and Shaan who are near stranger to each other after 14 years of their married life and Tara’s sister, Radhika who is recently engaged, almost on a whim, to someone she barely knows. Even as Radhika tries to understand how a once ideal marriage has come undone, and struggles with her own feelings for an older man, tragedy strikes: Tara dies in mysterious circumstances and Shaan is arrested for murder. In the aftermath, Radhika, the central character and protagonist, realises that while life may seldom turn out as expected, the only hope lies in finding the courage to take one’s chances. Thus a failed marriage leading to angst, anger and tragedy follows the start of a parallel romance. Radhika is progressive. She questions everything and does not accept anything easily. The novel, besides being a meditation on the nature of love and marriage brings, out that mystery of human relationship which does not rule out any possibility and never answers how and why. Anything, any change for better or worse is possible before death.

Her novels, like those of Jane Austen, seem to deal with a limited range of experience-‘an urban middle class housewife experience’ in a family, mostly in a joint family but occasionally in a nuclear family. According to R. S. Pathak: “Her novels generally centre round family relationships—particularly the relationship between husband and wife and the latter’s dilemmas and conflicts.” (1998:16)

Apart from her novels, Shashi Deshpande’s short stories too deal with human relationships. Her short stories contain the germs of most of the strength and limitations of her novels. Some of her stories were later developed into novels and share many of their concerns. According to G. S. Gaur:

Woman’s struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother, most important of all, as human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer, and this appears in all her important stories. (1978:10)

Hence, it would be appropriate to have a quick glance at some of her short stories which are relevant to the subject of study.
*The Legacy*, the title tale of the first published volume of her short stories *The Legacy and other Stories* (1978) brings out the temperamental and situational contrast between a married couple— a successful lady doctor and a frustrated lecturer devoted to his teaching. Owing to their contrastive jobs and situations, they cannot pull on well and things get out of control when a magazine interviewer humiliates him for his inability to bear the financial burden of the family. He now turns a sadist, torturing her in bed at night in all possible ways and inflicting bruises upon her tender body. The interviewer calls the doctor ‘a liberated woman’ but in reality she is totally helpless in the given situation. Her predicament is similar to Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*.

The title tale of her second volume of stories *It Was Dark* (1986) depicts the plight of an unmarried 14 year girl having been molested by an unknown young man resulting in illegal pregnancy and leading to a great shock. The enemy is dark and loneliness. She has been brought home after three days of abduction. It deals with present worries, police case and medical termination of pregnancy. The title tale of her third volume *It Was the Nightingale* (1986) portrays man-woman relationship in different footing altogether. The separation of the wife, Jaya, from her husband for two years is born with love and optimism. In another story from the same volume A Man and a Woman’ a 30 year old widow, Lalita, comes into contact with a 17 year old younger brother of her dead husband. She is full of beauty and youth but social taboos and moral concerns make her restless and uneasy. Despite suffering humiliation in the family she lives for her son, Ramesh. Being only a B. A she is not able to secure a job and live independently. The suggestion is that an effective antidote to the life of boredom, joylessness and alienation is the remarriage of a young widow and Manu’s proposal to marry Lalita is a right step in this direction. In yet another story from the same volume *The Window* which has a lesbian touch, a widow landlady living alone in her two storey building moves into her young tenant’s room when he is away and pesters his wife with all sorts of questions and while going out blurts out: “You’re pretty, very pretty. Does he ever tell you that?” (50) She invites her upstairs, and the young woman starts crying aloud.

The title story of her fourth volume *The Intrusion and Other Stories* (1993) deals with the discord between a couple on the honeymoon trip in a rest house near a sea shore. The wife recoils at every caressing initiative made by her husband. She wants to know all about him before exposing the mystery
of her body. The honeymoon trip is meant for developing friendly intimacy and establishing amiable acquaintance between the couple. But the husband loses his patience and forces himself on her in the midnight and she gives “a cry not for the physical pain but the intrusion into my privacy and violation of my right to herself.” (41) In another story from the same volume ‘The First Lady’, a lady falls in love with a young Gandhian patriot and marries him against her father’s wishes, giving up silk saris for khadi wears. But, after the birth of the third child, he shocks her with his intention to practicing celibacy. Under the hysterical urge for self-denial, she lusts for her husband’s disciple and desires him “...to touch her, hold her (and) have her.” (7) He dies in a police firing but he lives in her mind forever. Even in her old age, she laughs at her lusting for him. Another story from the same volume ‘Why a Robin?’ deals with the hostility of a 12 year old daughter towards her illiterate mother who cannot help her writing a composition on robin. She turns to her father for help. But when she undergoes the trauma of puberty, she wants her mother to comfort her and nurse her. The womanhood brings them closer. In yet another story from the same volume ‘An Antidote to Bedroom’ the wife bored of the dull and routine behaviour of her husband looks forward to an extra-marital affair with a widower and plans her holiday with him during her husband’s ensuing tour to Delhi. It is just at this juncture her husband invites her to join him during that trip but she refuses. The story ends with a flood of shame and guilt sweeping over her with a revelation that she was pursuing the mirage. Another story from the volume ‘And Then…?’ relates the plight of a widow mother. With the husband dead and the son settled away, now it is her daughter who announces her decision to go abroad. On her first day in school, the sobbing daughter had entreated, “Amma, don’t go away, don’t leave me here and go, take me with you, I want to go home with you. Now it is the mother’s turn to plead pathetically: “… don’t go away, don’t leave me alone and go away, don’t leave me alone here, I’m frightened” (150) But the daughter insists on “And it’s my life after all. Let me live it the way I want” (151) and goes away leaving the mother behind.

Thus, like her novels, her short stories generally centre round family life, human relationships and the place of woman within it. The impact of globalization and trans nationalization which have led to the consideration of same sex love, adulterous relationship, live-in relationship, etc. as accepted mode of living, and which have far reaching effects on human
relationships as quite visible in her novels and short stories. According to Rama Gautam:

Human relationships are the most mystifying, hence the most exciting for a novelist. Within these relationships, it is a woman’s place that is of greatest concern to Deshpande because of the “abyssmal difference” that women experience in relation to man. Her novels and her short stories dwell on the daily slights and humiliations that women suffer, mostly in silence. (2005:150)

Jasbir Jain, however, finds that Shashi Deshpande’s stories deal with human relationship but with a difference: “They are at times, more radical, even sexy in their themes and statements” (2004:225). According to Shashi Deshpande everybody has to live within relationship for there is no other way. She told Geetha Gangadharan in November 1994:

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

She is of the view that human relationship is still an undiscovered territory and it is of enduring interest. She feels that the subject of human relationship deserves to be thrashed properly in the Indian context and asserts that she will continue to do so. She told Geetha Gangadharan;

We know a lot about the physical and the organic world and about the universe in general, but we still know very little about human relationships. It is the most mystifying thing so far as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it , puzzle over it and write about it and still find it tremendously intriguing, fascinating. (Ibid)

The family relationship is the very nerve centre of her novels but often she transcends it and ventures out. She points out:

Undoubtedly, my novels are all about family relationships. But...I go beyond that because the relationships which exist within the family are, to an extent, parallel to the relationships which exist between human beings outside.... When I am writing about the family it is not