Chapter IV

4. Narrative Technique

Writing is an act of communication. It requires participation from the readers who bring their own cultural luggage, personal experience and linguistic understanding to the text. Language itself is an unstable medium and meaning may be in pluralities. “Given the polysemic nature of one and the multiple possibilities of the other, the unextracted and uncomprehended aspect or level of meaning may be governed by cultural, gender or social constraints. The text is by no means a finished structure, all texts or at least all meanings are not accessible to all readers” (Jain, Gendered Realities 194).

Deshpande’s work offers a double challenge. It refuses to give itself to the linguistic medium. It projects a strong undercurrent of the Indian language mind set. Her work reflects not merely a universal category of urban middle class lives but an Indianness. She has the uncanny ability to move outside the western influence and frame works of thought and place modernity in her own cultural roots. Deshpande’s world reflects a bilingualism of linguistic background. This is a quality which several of her characters share with her. Mira in Vine chooses to write her poems in Kannada, while recording her diaries in English. She liberally refers the Ramayana, Mahabharatha and the Upanishads and equally free with Shakespeare, Dickens and writers like Agatha Christie. However, Jasbir Jain in Gendered Realities, Human Spaces: The Writing of Shashi Deshpande observes: “By choosing to write about India and Indians within
the cultural context of contemporariness, Deshpande rejects the hegemony of English as well as the normal confines it prescribes for the Indian mind” (196).

Deshpande is uniquely Indian in approach. Her use of Marathi words presents the customs and traditions of the people of India. For example, words such as ‘Kaka’, ‘Kaki’, ‘Atya’ and ‘Dada’ are Marathi words. She cares more for literary qualities of her creative works than for language as such. Equally, she is gifted with an unborn literary bent of mind which matured with her experiences in life. She writes not for publicity but to mirror the society as she observes it. Her contribution to the world of literature is the presentation of the reality of the middle-class woman. She writes for women and presents their problems.

The main themes that have found expression in Deshpande’s novels are: inner conflict and search for identity, parent – child relationship, concept of marriage and sex. Above all, she also deals with the theme of silence between man and woman. She also deals with the inner working of the female psyche. However, the basic theme around which the plots revolve is a middle-class educated woman caught between the modern trends and the traditional practices.

Deshpande, like her writer heroines, is a conscious artist. She has the awareness to separate an experience from an awareness of it. She is equally aware of the need to be distant. She is objective and ruthless. She meticulously puts the narrative together and scattering clues all over the text. She makes her readers get into her mind. “The creative process is both complex and mysterious as it moves from image to idea, from involvement to detachment and to a standing outside the text, parting it, connecting the
various strands and yet retaining a sense of natural development as it submits to a process” (Jain, Gendered Realities 192). However, a narrative is never about happenings. It is about the way these happenings come to be. Narratives do not function independently. Narrative structures create a frame as the narrator in Silence narrates:

Perhaps it is wrong to write from the inside. Perhaps what I have to do is see myself, as, from a distant. This has happened to me before; there have been times when I’ve had this queer sensation of being detached and distant from my own self. Times when I have been able to separate two distinct strands – my experience and my awareness of that experience. Can I do this with our story? Do I have the necessary ruthless? (LS 22)

Commenting on the plot and narrative situation, Beena Agarwal in Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande says: “She conceives the plots of her novel speculating the position of woman in relation to social paradigms and established religious practices. The silent and subjugated position of a woman provoked strong narrative situations in her novels where she made efforts to tear the veil of illusion versus reality, idealism versus apathy of society” (84).

Deshpande’s use of dreams as a literary device may be compared to Graham Greene in their subtlety and pointedness. It allows her to describe in symbolic and artistic terms the reality about the life of her protagonists. The dream-work symbolically presents the unconscious motivations of the dreamer. Jaya’s first nightmare, coming as it does a crucial turning point in her neurotic reaction, reveals many conflicting tendencies with her. In the dream, she sees Mohan and herself walking together. Soon she is left
behind, and for some reason, has to pass through a house. She is helped into the house by a girl. Once she is in, she realises with shock that she is alone, fears that she won’t be able to find Mohan anymore. She is then led into a room where a number of girls are present. Although she feels that they are on her side none of them comes forward to help her. She feels ill and utterly helpless, and lies down like a corpse. The girls around her discuss her predicament in low tones. Not much later however, Mohan appears on the scene and asks her to hasten to a waiting taxi. But as she runs after him she realises that it is too late anyway, “we will never be able to make it, we will be never be able to get away, it is all my fault, all my fault…….” (LS 86). The dream presents, in a classic case of condensation and displacement, her entire marital experience, her present predicament and her unconscious wishes. The house she passes through is the marital edifice. She is led into it by society (symbolised here by the more acceptable and seemingly agreeable girls and later by a group of girls). Once she is inside the house no help comes forth. She has to make a home herself. She does not even understand Mohan fully. And then comes the catastrophe of the enquiry into the charges of corruption. Society, which she has thought to be on her side, suddenly turns hostile. Her degradation is discussed by everyone. In fact, she literally shivers at the mention of the enquiry by her younger brother Ravi (LS 111) and her neighbour Mukta’s oblique reference to her unusually long stay at the Dadar flat. She fervently wishes to get away from her present predicament. Tradition has it that a wife should seek her husband’s help. And so Mohan appears there with a taxi. But her belief in Mohan’s ability of deliverence is not strong enough to blissfully give herself into his care. She therefore thinks again that it is very late, the
escape route is closed. She finds fault with herself because she is unable to do anything to help Mohan in his hour of need except neurotically rave and grieve.

While Jaya’s first dream is a sort of wish-fulfilment, her second dream, occurring much later, is expressive of her utter frustration. By now Mohan has deserted her and she has already borne the resultant additional psychic conflict. She experiences a stab of anguish whenever her servant maid, Nayana, makes a direct reference to her unenviable plight. It is at that specific point that Jaya recounts her “crazy recurrent dream”.

I was looking for a toilet, I was desperate, I had to find one, I’d disgrace myself if I didn’t find one at once. And yes, there it was the immense relief, and then the over-powering shame as I realised I was in a public place surrounded by people staring at me steadily and silently. (LS161)

Jaya and Mohan have hoped to escape publicity by moving to Dadar flat. That such a thing is not possible is evidenced by Jaya’s dream. She unconsciously perceives what is at the back of the mind of most of their acquaintances and it comes alive in the dream.

Feelings of detachment from the self, experience of split personality and a sense of disorientation too are expressive of neurotic conflict. The seeds of a split personality have always been present throughout her seventeen year old married life. Her name was changed to Suhasini by her in-laws soon after marriage. Ever since, ‘Suhasini’ has been her marital identity, now that this identity is in crisis. She feels disoriented. On a secret visit to her poshed churchgate house, to which her marital identity has been almost fixed, she sees her divided self clearly.
And now nothing seemed connected me to this place, nothing bridged the chasm between this prowling woman and the woman who had lived here. I was conscious of a faint chagrin at her disappearance. Wasn’t it I who had painfully, laboriously created her? Perhaps, for that very reason, she could not evade me entirely, and she appeared to me, only a faint wraith of herself, standing near this table, hand poised over a vase of flowers.

(LS 168)

Deshpande excels in writing about the tormented psyche of a woman who has undergone nightmarish experiences. So that only M. Rajeshwar in “The Trauma of a Housewife : A Psychological Study of Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence” says:

With a gift for sharp psychological insight into the subtleties of human mind and society and aided by a richly evocative, unassuming and unpretentious style, Shahsi Deshpande is perhaps ideally suited to tread the labyrinthine tracts of human psyche and creditably represent it in fiction. Her five novels […] are an experience in the psyche of people who lose their capacity for rational thought on being subjected to traumatic experiences. (41)

In Terrors, Saru’s parental home is an inhospitable home to her as it rejects her as an individual. In her parental home, she faces indiscrimination, rejection, and marginalization. When she leaves it, she takes with her memories ridden with guilt and bitterness. In the end, she has to return to her parental home to come to terms with life. It is this house that has been hostile to her. In it, she has to recover the innocence of a
childhood home. She has to work out her anger and bitterness. In fact, she has to get rid of her silence. Saru’s parental home has an inhospitable static appearance. Beena Agarwal in *Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande* says: “Shashi Deshpande in her novels follows circular track in which there are infinite diversions without any definite conclusion. She never presents situations in a linear order where isolation begins on a definite point and culminates on another point. The narrative structure to present the idea of identity crisis phases through five stages – submission to patriarchal social tradition, breaking the silence, identifying the alternative spaces, failure to formulate new identities and to redefine the identity in the context of family and ‘self’” (215).

In *Terrors*, the narrative alternates between the first person narration and third person narration – but for the most it is Saru who remains the centre and the perceiving eye. A.K. Awasthi in “The Quest for Identity in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande” says that “The title of *The Dark Holds No Terror* (sic) is self-explanatory. The irony involved is far from being abstract. Darkness implies incapability to see things clearly and objectively. Darkness is a source of constant fear from the outside. It affects the outlook of the inside, but it holds no terror in itself” (101). Deshpande makes her novel meaningful and enlightening by using and re-visioning traditional myths and projecting how it can be used for meaningful and creative reinterpretation. Initially, Saru is unaware of her split self but when she visits her house she remembers a childhood memory. As a child she visited the temple with her mother and witnessed a middle-aged woman gyrating in front of the Goddess Devi signifying that the spirit of the Goddess possessed her. The story of the possession of woman by Goddess Devi belongs to common folk
mythology in South India. Gradually, Saru comes to understand herself as possessed of a split - self-a self possessed by her Mother’s spirit with whom she has a love-hate relationship. The two other stories used as intertexts in the novel are that of Dhrusa in the Sankrit epic Srimadbhagavathamahapuranam and that of Duryodhana in Mahabharata. This is done precisely to highlight the patriarchal nature of the myths by blending it with a story that charts the self-discovery of a woman and not a man. Here, Saru is the rejected child who is the butt of her mother’s anger since she wrongly thinks that Saru is responsible for her brother’s (who is also named Dhrusa) death by drowning.

In Shadows, narrative moves in two distinctive directions. One phase is the record of Indu’s personal life involving her relationship with Jayant and Naren. It reflects the domain of her female consciousness. The second phase of the novel presents an account of the farsightedness of Indu to settle the matters of family property. She identities herself with the family property. She says:

- The wall would crumble, the roof would crush down. Then … But what of the feelings, the emotions, the passions of the house had shattered. I had been a fifteen days old motherless infant when I had been brought in this house. I had lived eighteen years in it. Now all those eighteen years compressed themselves into one moment pain and intensity and I lied those eighteen years all over again. (RS 96)

In Terrors, the fictional rhetoric built up by first person narration reveals Saru’s continued rancor toward her mother. But, the novelist has juxtaposed third person narration with the first person perspective and together they build up a mimesis which
shows that behind Saru’s anger there is a secret remorse. Commenting on the novel, *Shadows*, M. Mani Meiti in “Subverting Phallocentrism, Feminine Discourse in *Roots and Shadows*” says:

**Roots and Shadows** is a symbolic representation of the dialectical nature of man and woman set against each other in maternal terms for power struggle. ‘Roots’ stands for tradition and ‘shadows’ signifies the marginal culture. The dying tradition is soon to become shadows against a backdrop of apocalyptic change. Also it suggests that once the root is removed, life is bereft of the binding force given way to new possibilities.

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*Shadows* is an observation made by a narrator, Indu. Indu wants to be an ideal woman. M. Mani Meitei further observes:

Thus, in **Roots and Shadows** we hear a woman speak—speak through her body, through her consciousness, and through her pen. This kind of exercise might he called ‘wish fulfilment’. Woman’s creativity is phallic action that calls for woman’s recovery of loss. With the advent of a new strategy woman enters into the symbolic order. That power castrates the child’s (Phallus’s) image of himself, and expels him from the chauvinistic identification of himself with the master narrator. This subversion of the political system of authority gives way to marginalized female culture. Essentially, it germinates feminine accent, a feminine discourse, i.e. seeking to communicate by disrupting the earlier authorial
position as may be required in a new historical context, the emphasis having been placed on what has been marginalized. **Roots and Shadows** as a feminist text questions the aesthetics of traditional theoretical assumptions with a view to reassessing the relations between author, reader and language in order to resist the criteria of phallogocentrism. And this is effectively done towards getting a signification by écriture writing that allows the subversive pre-existence of a pure discourse to deconstruct the traditional image of the signifier at the textual, linguistic and psychological level, and the patriarchal authority at the cultural level. (84-85)

**Shadows** and **Silence** use the first person narration. The narrator in each case is a participant – observer. Both Indu and Jaya interweave their personal histories with their observation of what happens to others and with description of events and lives, which do not involve them directly. Both the novels have a prologue at the beginning. **Silence** has four sections. **Shadows** goes on to work through eleven chapters. The prologue in **Shadows** begins with the ‘day before’ Mini’s wedding and the end takes the readers to the time when Indu is mentally trying to decide to pay for the wedding. The novel thus moves backward in time and the beginning and the end do not connect. “In fact a wedding, which is (a) contrasted to Indu’s own wedding, (b) gets priority over the house, (c) defines the Indian woman’s dependent status and demarcates the difference in attitudes between tradition and modernity, (d), is used as a bargaining counter by several other characters does not happen within the novel” (Jain, Gendered Realities 197). The prologue also defines Indu’s role: a frail looking girl, an indomitable woman, Akka’s
heiress, an instrument for the subversion of patriarchal structures and so on. Thus, the framing of the narrative, even as it describes a typical Indian situation, goes on to create subversive categories. In the first chapter of Shadows, the readers find Indu back in Bombay with Naren and old Uncle’s death behind her and Atya settled in her Bombay home. The very next chapter takes the readers back to Indu’s return home after several years of estrangement in response to Akka’s summons, who having got there conveniently dies. Indu is left alone with the knowledge of her inheritance and her need to catch up with her family events in the in-between periods – the marriages, the children, the family, squabbles, the aspirations and failed assumptions and ambitions of its members. Indu’s own memories surface intermittently to assess, comment or counteract what is happening all around. Thus, memory acts as an interventor in the present.

Kaki is another of the narrators who views the past differently and even her feelings about the house are different from those of her husband’s. Her priorities are different as is her relationship with the family and its past. Indu’s own reflections, her conversations with Naren, which are self-analytical, also contribute to the creation of meaning. These are the narrative strategies that Deshpande employs and through which she resists the enclosure in any single subjectivity and its consciousness.

If memories excavate the past, dreams are double edged. They work at two different levels. There is a dream that Indu dreams in the first chapter – a dream in which she is in an immensely large hall all alone. There are those dreams as well as that do not materialize, which are thwarted by death or by force of circumstances. Saroja is not able to learn music, Naren never really belongs, and old uncle began an unfulfilled life.
The first person narration of *Shadows* and *Silence* gives place to an omniscient narrative voice in *Terrors*. It has a prefactors beginning followed by a four-part narrative. The opening preface is about a recurring nightmare, which borders on reality. It is a surrealistic image of rape and a comment upon the contradictory claims of sex. The nightmare is a recurrent feature in Saru’s life. Her nightmares are all associated with fears of her own worth, of being bypassed and ignored as a girl child, of finding value only in a sexual relationship. Sex becomes the ground where her own guilt-ridden self encounters Manu’s subconscious jealousy. There is the experience of fear and panic. These nightmares are not always associated with sexual assault. They are also about Dhruva’s death and her own part in it. These nightmares haunt her and define her innermost self. They make her assume a role of a struggling woman, who is also a furious mother. As a whole, the novel is structured through dreams and nightmares inhabited by anger and fear.

Following a similar pattern of first person narration in *Shadows* with several subnarratives, Deshpande allows Jaya in *Silence* to tell her tale as she explores her relationship with her husband, the social forces which lead to their arranged marriage, her husband’s deprived childhood and Kamat’s intuitive response to Jaya’s emotional need. Jaya, in her capacity of a narrator, comments upon the essentials of the story, which amounts to birth, childhood, marriage, motherhood and abortion. The wife has to shape her dreams and desires in accordance with her husband’s. Jaya feels bound in and excluded from a whole lot of innocent things.
In Silence, Jaya, who is a writer and who used to frame narratives, narrates the story of Mohan as well as. However, in the course of her narrative she also admits:

This is not Mohan’s story entirely. In writing it down, I have put together so many things – things he told me, things he left unsaid as he told me this story, things I have imagined myself, and the expression on his face as he spoke to me. I would have left out the kick, it is hard to reconcile that crude gesture with the man I saw and knew – but I cannot, it loomed so large in his narration. (LS 34)

Commenting on the above passage, Jasbir Jain in Gendered Realities, Human Spaces:
The Writing of Shashi Deshpande says:

The passage […] simultaneously stresses several things – the role of memory, the singling out of an event, the recall, which is not always necessarily therapeutic, and which moves beyond language to incorporate unarticulated responses, the need for empathy and imagination to fill in the details, transferring oneself to be present inside the experience, magnifying to hold on to the felt experience and finally being truer to the narrator than to one’s own views of the situation. (207)

Silence opens with a brief reflection upon the ruthlessness necessary for recording one’s history before it goes on to a four-part narrative, which begins with dislocation from their churchgate house and a flight to the Dadar flat and ends with Mohan’s rehabilitation in his job and house. The stay in the Dadar flat acts as a catalytic force in the husband-wife
relationship. Jaya held Mohan responsible for the pursuit of false social respectability. Mohan’s trip to Delhi leaves her with a sense of fear of having been abandoned by him. Deshpande has gone on to record about how she begins a novel, first it is the people, and then there is the locale. S.K. Mishra in *Life and Works of Shashi Deshpande: A Critical Study* concludes that “Thus Shashi Deshpande is able to bring out the inner feelings of Indian male self and female self without any restriction to authorial self in her *That Long Silence*” (1).

*Silence* is not an autobiography. It deals with the frustrations of an unsuccessful woman writer. Deshpande, in it, presents the India of nineteen eighties. To make the story more authentic and appealing, she has used the device of first person narrative. She also makes the protagonist read her inner mind and thus representing the psyche of the modern middle-class learned woman. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan in “The Feminist Plot and the Narrative Allegory: Home and World in Two Indian Women’s Novels in English” is of the view that *Silence* is “written as an exercise of memory and catharsis, […]” (73). Kamini Dinesh in “*That Long Silence*: The Narrator and the Narrative” admits:

Jaya recalls fragments of her life enmeshed in her memory. Now revived and counterpoised they reveal a complex personality. Jaya is both the actor and the deeply involved narrator in this tale of long silence. She finds that the past she revives and relives modifies earlier perspectives and necessitates a new way of looking at things.

Shashi Deshpande has woven in Jaya’s recapitulation of her past life and experiences, sights and sounds, fables, sayings, internalized codes
about the place of women, recollections and parallelisms with myths and along with these occasionally, the other voice zone (85).

In Silence, diaries are used as another way of ‘Othering’ the self just as mirrors. When Jaya goes through an old diary, she is surprised at the woman who maintained and recorded mundane events. She takes it as a reality with which she was at odds.

The ‘Silence’ of the title is a recurring feature. It defines the lives of so many characters, mainly women:

1. Mohan’s mother and his sister, one who was a mother several times and the other who was barren and unfulfilled, each died in her own silence.
2. Jeeja, the domestic help, hid her bruises and unhappiness behind her own silence.
3. the silence that envelops Jaya and Mohan’s life in Dadar flat
4. the silence that exists between Leena and Jaya.

All these silences are of different nature. Some hide unhappiness, others represent suffering, inarticulation or the silence imposed by social disapproval. Jaya drops Leena, thus allowing herself to be guided by others. Mohan’s mother and sister are the victims of male aggression. Both Mohan and his son, Rahul, also withdraw into silence as they feel both alienated from their environment. Silence does not always mean non-communication, at times it signifies a sullen withdrawal.

Deshpande has used stream of consciousness technique artistically in Silence. A smooth linear development of the narrative facilitates the to and fro movement in time of
Jaya’s consciousness. M. Rajeshwar in “The Trauma of a House-Wife”: A Psychological Study of Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence” is of the view that

Jaya’s unfolding of her story in bits and pieces, moving back and forth with remarkable felicity, bordering on the incoherent, is necessitating the stream of consciousness technique. Shashi Deshpande’s use of the technique reminds us of Dorothy Richardson’s Pilgrimage in that there is a significant assertion of authorial voice and autobiographical under currents, of Virginial Woolf of The Waves in that both are concerned with private visions of life and private symbols in presenting character which never succeeds in becoming typical and also of James Joyce of Ulysses in that disparity between man’s aspirations and actual developments gave a comic vision to Joyce, whereas for Deshpande a tragic resignation and conscious, not spontaneous, reconciliation with the world. (58)

Ram Sharma in “Writing from the Margins: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence” says: “Jaya is not totally a silent and mute sufferer. She is an actor participant as well as an observer in the novel. She steps out of the narrative action as a witness as it were a critic to perceive the terror of the story […]” (87-88). The novel becomes Jaya’s silent stream of thoughts and feelings. Jaya’s drift of thought and her evanescent mood are captured through the broken and fragmentary stream of consciousness. “Jaya desperately needs to protect herself from dissipating and sinking in the crumbling world around her. Deshpande thus presents the subterranean and subliminal impressions of human life through digressions in the narrative” (Sharma 99).
The use of the first-person point of view provides Deshpande with the control which gives shape and significance to the intense agony that Jaya experiences. The protagonist accepts the reality of the situation, her existence in relation to her family. She shifts from past to present like sand in an hour-glass, in time. She tries to fathom her real role in life. Her awareness of her individuality is essentially healthy though she becomes physically ill. Of course, this makes her feel on one hand a sort of entrapment and she desires to be free, on the other hand it makes her visualize her life bereft of her man. The emotional atmosphere permeates the whole novel and the mood becomes the medium. The personal past, the experiences of Kusum, her own mother and aunts, Mohan’s mother and his sister and their silence in life pressurize her and mould her responses to the present situation. The idea of existing in an unrelated meaningless world, in a void, is not acceptable to her. She seeks a re-orientation of her relationship and also Mohan’s new awareness of his relationship to her. From the safety of the “toy-boat in a bath existence,” she emerges through the tension between her two worlds as a determined strong-willed modern woman who is prepared to face life, accept her responsibilities squarely and not escape from or avoid them by committing suicide as some of Anita Desai’s women do. Beena Agarwal in Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande observes: “In the novel That Long Silence, the narrative is fabricated at two levels – one represents the inner world of Jaya’s consciousness reflecting her discontent of personal life and on the other, Shashi Deshpande reflects the various dimensions of problems of woman in the traditional society of Indian (sic)” (67). Further, Agarwal writes:
In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande, besides her dexterity in penetrating into feminine psyche, maintains her grip on the shift of narrative corresponding with the events of the past and the present. Jaya seeks an unconscious synthesis of what she has faced and what is still left for her. It is the profundity of the fictional art of Shashi Deshpande that she thrusts psycho-realism to seek argument in support of social realism.

(70)

All through her life, Jaya modifies her relationship and role models according to socially accepted images. S.P. Swain in “The Unruffled Stream : Jaya in *That Long Silence*” observes:

In reminiscing about the past, Jaya succeeds in blotting out ‘that long silence’ and making future life possible. With her traditionally muted voice Jaya shuttles between the past and the present through her steams of consciousness which reveal ‘ten different faces’ emerging from ‘ten different mirrors’ (1). The movement of the stream of Jaya’s thoughts is not tied down to a rigid clock progression. Through close-ups and flashbacks, Deshpande lays bare Jaya’s psyche which is mutely unresponsive. The author’s unrelieved stress on obliterating herself form the noval as a story-teller, giving full freedom to the heroine to unveil herself using her resilient mind to dominate her vision of life has imparted an unquestionable credibility to the realism of the stream of consciousness.
She has endeavoured to make the story self-propelled without the novelist acting as a meddler and as an omniscient narrator. (102)

As Jaya’s psyche is muted, she cannot articulate her wishes. She, in fact, becomes a metaphor of silence. That is why Ram Sharma in “Writing from the Margins : A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence” comments that

That metaphor of silence under which the novel is organized helps to impose a quietude and discipline, the inner dynamics of a self cut off from human communication. ‘That Long Silence’ is not an intrusion into the world of silence but a silent communion with the oppressed self straining for articulation, for a voice, Jaya and Mohan hardly spoke to each other of love and sex. Love-making for them was silent and inarticulate affair. (92)

Jaya and Mohan are affected psychically. Jaya is affected to some extent and she cannot cope up with realities.

In Silence, irony is the chief figure of speech. It is used to explain the behaviour of the characters. Beena Agarwal in Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande admits : “The turbulent world of consciousness of Jaya in That Long Silence has become a metaphor for the silent resistance of all marginalized communities struggling against the hegemony of ruling class” (70). It is the result of a stifling social milieu. Subash Chandra in “Silent No More : A Study of That Long Silence” attributes :
Ostensibly, she relates it as the story of a particular couple, but the power relations in the patriarchal structure, the gender differentiation with all its ramifications and the typical travails of the woman struggling to define herself take on the dimension of the condition and the place of the Indian woman in society. (148)

In Silence, Deshpande uses two images. The married couple are likened to ‘a pair of bullocks yoked together’ and the husband is said to be a sheltering tree. Even Jaya rejects the image of traditional woman like Sita, Savitri, and Draupadi. Jaya wonders: “No, what I have I to do with these mythical women? I can’t fool myself (LS 11). The thought of desertion by the husband unnerves Jaya for she has not yet cast off the role of a traditional Indian woman. It is as Bijay Kumar Das in “Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence and the Question of the Reader Response” says: “Through Jaya’s character Shashi Deshpande has thus expressed the ambivalent women who can neither reconcile themselves to a new situation when their husbands ignore them and crush their ambition in life nor cast off their husbands simply because the husband is like a sheltering tree they cannot afford to live without” (130).

In Silence, typical Indian expressions are used frequently. Deshpande also uses Indian proverbs and expressions. When Jaya moves to a new house with her husband, Deshpande makes Jaya use the typical Indian expression: “The fan moved its fastest; nevertheless, we were bathed in sweat by the time we had done” (LS 13) cleaning the house. One can also come across frequent references to Indian epics and allusions to archetypal characters like Draupati, Ram, Sita, Dasarath, and Gandhari. In Silence
images are also used. The following are some of the images: “Tell lies you’ll be a lizard”, “Steal things, you’ll be a dog”, and “cheat people, you’ll be a snake”.

**Vine** once again returns to a first person narration, a feminine consciousness, and has four parts. It does not have a prologue or prefactory note. It begins with the conversation between Urmi and Vanna. They talk to each other about the subject of loss. Part I is about Urmi, her childhood, her grandparents. Part II is about Kalpana, her rape and her lying in Coma in the hospital. The theme of rape outside the marriage is interwoven with the theme of rape within the marriage, with Mira’s story. This section also describes Urmi’s growing relationship with Shakutai and her friendship with the doctor, Bhaskar. Part III expands on these themes and Part IV has confessions of failure – Shakutai wants to die, Sulu commits suicide and Inni feels a failed mother. The novel is structured thematically through the motif of rape. It has several substories which flow into the main narrative of Urmi’s coming to terms with life. Two of these stories form the parallel texts – Mira’s life and Kalpana’s life. Mira’s poems and diaries open at several subtexts, which go beyond rape to talk about marriage, romanticism, personal life and worth of a woman’s life in societal forms. Kalpana’s life also provides a perspective on the same themes but within a different background.

In **Vine**, Urmi reflects on the various events like the issue of undesirable and tortuous sexual relationship, the horrors of rape, the apathy of society and the hollowness of the institution of marriage and so on in the novel as the spokesman of the writer’s point of view to articulate the voice of other women characters who lead invisible existence in the shadows of shame and silence. In fact, in **Vine**, Deshpande controls the
narrative seeking a balance of past and present. In this novel, she reveals the predicament of the women representing three generations and three distinctive classes/roles of women. Present is represented by Urmi and the past echoes in the silence of Mira. Kalpana’s suffering reflects the future. Commenting on the novel, Vine, Beena Agarwal in Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande says:

The novel The Binding Vine has a complex structure in which Shashi Deshpande represents the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence not as an outsider but as a partaker of the whole phenomenon. The fine fusion of psychological suffering, physical pain and the exposition of social reality makes this text as a perfect voice of subaltern who pass through the stage of silence to self realization. The thesis presented in the novel The Binding Vine is an affirmation of the myth that the ultimate standards of society are determined according to male desires. The traditional social order neglects both the individuality and the femininity of women. In gender based social structure, sexual colonialism is doing a greater harm for woman than the social discrimination. The end of the novel is thought provoking where society leaves the question of women’s respect and identity eternally unanswered. (98)

Commenting on the title of The Binding Vine, K.M. Pandey in “Dimensional Depth of Consciousness : Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine” observes: “The centrality of Mira in the fictional world of The Binding Vine is further confirmed by the borrowing of the title of the novel from one of the poems of Mira which is about the womb-piercing
joy of her pregnancy, the binding vine of love” (80). Miralini Sebastian in The Enterprise of Reading Different: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande in Postcolonial Arguments admits:

Urmila takes upon herself the act of introspection, of speaking for Mira and Kalpana who are the women ‘who cannot speak’. But this speaking on behalf of others takes place only after a crisis in her own life – the death of her daughter Anusha. It is the crisis as well as her lonely attempt to come to terms with the death of a daughter that sets apart from the other woman Priti, who takes great interest in the issues bothering the woman of the Indian sub-continent. The novel is consciously raising many questions about the women in Indian society, and the story of the rape victim who belongs to a totally different class is not just a subplot. (157-158)

The narrative technique is the first person autobiographical one. Urmila, the heroine-narrator, is the pivot of the plot, who connects all the threads, in the plot—the stories of Mira, Shakutai and Kalpana, Vanaa and Harish, Kishore and Amrut, Inni and Akka, Aju and Baiajji, and the obscure figure of Mira’s husband and Bhaskar and Malcolm. It is Urmila’s agony at the death of Anu which weaves all emotions and themes into unity. The intensity of her emotions and experiences is powerfully projected by the novelist. J.P. Tripathi in “The Binding Vine and Indian Ethos” says:

The Binding Vine is divided into four harmonious parts of about fifty pages each. Each part is preceded by short poetical epigraphs as extracts from the poems of Mira, who worked all along her short life in search of
selfhood and personal identity. The structural division of the plot is on the pattern of four acts of a drama – in the present case a serious drama – involving occasionally minor humorous seems and comments of negligible nature. (151)

The novel has a multiplicity of complex themes. The predominant theme is that of agony caused by the death of Urmi’s daughter Anu, which is introduced in the beginning, runs through the two parts in the middle, and is concluded in the fourth section of the book. It dominates the consciousness of the narrator – heroine through the thick and thin of the varied experiences and sensation in the novel. The novelist gives a peep into Indian psyche by presenting characters who collectively share Urmila’s personal agony. Thus, the mother’s agony is relieved by communal sharing and affections. This agony is balance with the agony of Mira.

The return to an omniscient narrator in *Time* makes place for a male narrator to appear. The novel has three sections: The House, The Family, and The River. Each of these sections carries an epigraph from the *Upanishads* stressing the intertextuality. In the first section, the House, a family is fractured and fragmented. It is Gopal who abandons the family. The second section, “The Family”, traces the history of the marriage that has foundered when a son was lost. The third section, ‘The River’, is terminated by two deaths. Gopal’s narrative voice surfaces intermittently in the narrative in the form of self-reflections and interior monologues. Gopal behaves like Hamlet.

The novel is divided into three parts with epigraphs from historical, religious texts. Part I titled “The House” begins with a line from the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*
which runs as follows: “Maitreyi” said Yagnavalkya “verily I am about to go forth from this state (of householder),” “The House” in the novel stands as a potent symbol of patriarchy but ironically the males leave the house while the females are left to shoulder the burden of responsibility. By using the line from the *Upnishad*, Deshpande works out an entire patriarchal structure that has generated the value system in the house. Gopal leaves his wife Sumi since he cannot cope with household responsibilities. So does Shripati, Sumi’s father, who blames his wife for the loss of his only son. Part III titled “the Family” points out the craving for a son in his Hindu household who is considered a beacon-light to the family. Part III develops the story further, which is not just one of suffering but depicts the many faces of female resistance that make survival possible. The three women, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru belong to three different generations and reclaim their identities by their acts of resistance. Kalyani maintains a stoic silence; a powerful tool of resistance when her husband Shripati ceases all communication with her. She appears not “as a victim but as a woman came out of all that victimization intact” (Ramarao 257). Sumi, Kalyani’s daughter, adopts a method of resistance that is balanced and motivated towards reclaiming her identity. She immerses herself in creative activities, writes and directs plays and finds a better job. She never indulges in anger or protest even when she meets her husband who has left her. Here is restrained resistance. Aru, Sumi’s daughter, unlike her mother and grandmother, voices her protest angrily. To her, it is important that “you speak out, state the truth, that you stand up and defend yourself, that you refuse to be misjudged” (MT 143). It is significant to note that Part III begins with an epigraph from *Katha-Upanishad* where Yama asks Nachiketha not to probe the mystery of death in the following lines “whatever desires are hard to attain in
this world of mortals, ask for all those desires at thy will. O Nachiketha, (pray) ask not about death” (MT 181). Deshpande points to the male-orientation of Indian culture by highlighting Nachiketha’s questioning (and not Savitri’s who had equally strong arguments with Yama) but at the same time juxtaposes this questioning with female achievements. Thus, the importance of historical myths could not be undervalued. The characters in the novel, Kalyani and Shripati, Sumi and Gopal contrast with Maitreyi and Yajnavalkya in the Upanishad.

In Remedies, Deshpande presents a female protagonist to investigate the life of a successful professional female singer. The narrative is controlled at two levels in which the biographical investigation launched by the protagonist has become a method of discovering her own self. The objective analysis of the text mingles with the subjective suggestions and the external surface of the text gets momentum with the internal upsurge of emotions. It is a redefining and remaking of the established social roles in the context of the issues like man and woman relationship, the idealism of motherhood, woman’s quest for identity and the consistent lingering shadows of guilt and shame. It is a complex novel because in it Deshpande tries to dive deep into feminine mystique through the consciousness of woman herself. The skilful use of the technique of introspection and identification furnishes the text of the narrative with greater authenticity and rare emotional depth.

The narrative pattern of Remedies is markedly different from the earlier novels. It uses the omniscient narrator. It also uses the form of biography as a mirror reflection of autobiography. Madhu, who has lost her son in a bomb blast, has been assigned the
task of writing Savitribai’s biography. As Madhu explores Savitribai’s life, she understands that Savitribai lived in the past. It is a two-part novel prefaced by a prologue. Part I focuses more on the near past, Madhu’s life in Hamidbai’s office, her marriage and motherhood. Part II goes further back in time to take up her childhood, her friendship with Munni, her life with her aunt Leela and Joe. In fact, the narrative moves to and fro. Chandra Holm in “Potent Remedies : Themes and Techniques in Shashi Deshpande’s Small Remedies” observes that Madhu “is not merely a passive story-teller like the chronicler in Pushkin’s ‘Boris Gudenow’. She is very much of the mitgestalter, a creator with great potential. Though her intention is to write the biography of Savitribai, Indorekar, Madhu in coming to Bhavanipur, is attempting to unravel the puzzle that is past, present, and future, understand the vagaries of time’s hands and find remedies to the blows of life so nonchalantly hands over” (58). In it, the present and past are mingled / mixed. The novel cuts across the timeline. Madhu’s memories are so fresh that the border between past and present is easily obliterated. The novel opens with the statement: “This is Som’s story” (SR 1) but it very soon trans out to be Madhu’s story. Chandra Holm avers:

**Small Remedies** clearly bears the stamp of Shashi Deshpande’s writing. In the manner typical of her writing the story is revealed through the inner conscious of one central character. Life around is focused through the eyes of this character and understood through the mind of this one character. Not just in this aspect but also in her special way of looking at details, love for imagery, in her deliberately slow turns, in her ability to look into the depths of human heart and give expression to the feelings
buried in there, and in the very honesty with which her central character confronts her own life, in the importance given to dreams to unravel elements, this is a Deshpande book. (64)

**Moving on** is a woman-centric narrative spectrum. Beena Agarwal in *Mosaic of the Fictional world of Shashi Deshpande* admits:

No doubt, her preoccupation with the complexity of familial relationship, the awareness of the responses of three generations, the conflict arising out of the mal-adjustment between the parents and children, women’s obsession with their own battle between the contradictory commitments of body and mind, the ultimate denial of gender specific role and the efforts of the female protagonist to redefine her identity in the context of the totality of the experiences related with their own “self” and “society” have prepared the foundation of the basic structure of the novel *Moving On*. (140)

The endings of the novels work through restoration of relationships. In *Shadows*, Indu’s return to home is not out of a break in her relationship but due to a call from Akka. In the end, she is at home. She becomes Akka’s inheritance. *Silence* is marked by a return to the Churchgate house. In *Terrors*, Saru’s return to her home is also ridding herself of the past. It is a part of growing up. *Vine* ends with suicides and despair and a realization that there is no possibility of return to the past. Similarly, *Time* brings no hope of Gopal’s return home. Both *Vine* and *Time* reject the possibility of making amends, of starting all over again.
Reference


