Chapter Two

Gender Politics in the Indian Scenario

Woman is thus the direct product of the basic assumptions of male – generated – oriented and dominated social values and has remained so for centuries. She is moulded, reshaped and reoriented by man and for the man. Singh.

Before one begins to anatomize society and character, it becomes imperative to consider a few factors cardinaly responsible in the apprehension of the sociology of women. As M. Haralambos observes:

Two factors have been primarily responsible for the development of the sociology of women. First, the definition of women’s position in society as a social problem. Second, the reassessment of women as people who are just as important as men. In many areas of sociology, a subject and its treatment is influenced more by what happens in society than by developments within the discipline itself. (404)

Haralambos points out the limitations of the male sociologists and the extremities of radical feminists like Shulasmith Firestone and Juliet Mitchell and ideologist like Jessie Bernard. According to him, it is nothing but “. . . different answers to the different questions” (405)

Nevertheless, it is worth considering the American Feminist Sarah Grimke. Bhaskar A. Shukla in his book Feminism:From Mary Wollstonecraft to Betty Friedan quotes many a letter of Sarah Grimke addressed to either a “sister” or a “friend”
which situate woman’s cultural status. She writes:

The cupidity of man soon led him to regard woman as property and hence we find them sold to those, who wished to marry them, as far as it appears, without any regard to those sacred rights which belong to women . . . in the choice of a companion . . . If there be any truth in this tradition, I am at a loss to imagine in what the superiority of man consists. (qtd in Shukla 19)

In another letter addressed to “My Dear Friend”, Sarah Grimke laments upon the reality, “The idea that she is sought as an intelligent and heaven - born creature . . . rarely help up to her view ‘and that man’ by flattery, by an appeal to her passions, seeks access to her heart and when he has gained her affections, he uses her as the instrument of his pleasure” (25).

And now, it would be appropriate to place Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors in this light. Her first sentence “THE BEGINNING was abrupt” constitutes the pivot on which the entire story rotates. Sarita, affectionately called Saru is the prime mover of the story.

Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Hold No Terrors continues to address the novelist’s involvement in the cultural – sociology of women, particularly the contemporary culture. She applies a series of cultural pressures on woman’s identity and value that emanate from her being identified as Indian woman, a lady doctor, a wife, and a mother. There are some issues being examined by Shashi Deshpande in her work of realist frankness. The novel comes as a literary planetarium, which in a
particular time and space to the fore, and also a woman’s exercise, of course in futility, to assert a marginalized status while articulating the cultural symbols.

One cannot but help elucidating this simple truth, as the following passage illustrates the point.

The Beginning was abrupt . . . . At first it was a nightmare of hands.
Questing hands that left a trail of pain . . . . into the savage reality of a monstrous onslaught . . . I could taste blood on my lips . . . And then he spoke . . . I turned my head slightly, fearfully, and saw him beside me .
. . No more a stranger, but my husband. (no pagination)

The passage covering two pages, yet with no pagination indicates such boldness of Shashi Deshpande in grasping the private subject of Indian happy home and prepares the readers for the sort of facility with which the novelist explains femininity in terms of words. It is just easy to know what purpose a passage of this kind means to serve the novelist. In fact, Deshpande is just concerned with forging a practical situation with some narrowing of vision, perhaps, imperative. If one is to avoid the vague generalities presented in the long passage, as the researcher has done, one is given to a good deal of understanding certain fundamental women-issues.

A scrutiny on Sarita, called Saru, the female protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* will take one, further than this. It is the bulk of Indian social morality derived from Sarita’s feminine problems as perceived by the writer. Sarita leaves her husband and her two children, “That’s Renuka. And Abhi is Abhijit. She’s nine and he’s five” (21). “With only a suitcase of clothes” (15), Sarita reaches the house where she has grown and “had played hopscotch as a child” (1). She is greeted by her father with a “I didn’t expect you” reciprocity (16). Anyway, by the time “she came back
into the house, he had adjusted himself to her presence” (16). Yet, one catches glimpse of the crisis, internal and external as well, when Deshpande unfolds the situational anxiety in Saru. Deshpande writes, “Inside the house, the silence was palpable, throbbing and heavy, she felt herself enclosed, with an astonishing immediacy, in the old atmosphere of brooding stillness. As if something would happen sometime; not now no nothing now, but in some unknown future” (16).

Sarita witnesses thus “The familiar irritation [and] the familiar exasperation” (17). One, here is awakened to the fact that Sarita married much against the wishes of her parents and when her mother dies she is conspicuously not present. When she reaches in such a miserable condition, her father accepts her in his house and Sarita “was grateful for a chance to rest” (20). Lying down to relax awhile, she ponders over her family “A happy family, with the skeleton locked firmly in the cupboard” (21).

_The Dark Holds No Terrors_ is actually a remembrance or recollections of the past by the protagonist Saru, a doctor. Her brief stay at her parental home helps her to review her relationship with her husband, her dead mother, dead brother Dhruva and her children Renu and Abhi. Saru is fixed within the context of a chauvinist system. The major factor which restraints the feminine concern evolves out of the economic inequality that exists in a family. More so, a woman’s status, a physician as in the case of Saru, barricades the ongoing gender relations in the family since everyone knows a doctor is more sought after rather than a professor.

Manohar, Saru’s husband who teaches in a college, cannot digest the very importance given to his wife by the people. It so happens that on a day when there was an explosion in a factory with the mutilated bodies pouring in, Saru attends to these desperate needy. Every day there is a knock on the door and every time
Manohar, affectionately called Manu opens the door, he is faced with the question “Is the doctor at home” (41). It happens so often that Manu is pushed to the brink of irritability. He maintains a tone “certainly odd. An affected indifference” (41) the moment of indifference and difference is brought through Sarita:

And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband. a+b they told us in Mathematics is equal to b+a. But here a+b was not, definitely not equal to b+a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible. (42)

Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors exposes some of those areas in which a woman experiences a rigorous infringement on her individuality. Here one witnesses a family, and more than one, where gender inequality has been institutionalized. Most of the feminist positions perceive family as forging discontent and restraint in women. The crucial issue raised in the novel concerns the effects of an emotional as well as physical relationship of a woman with a man and also the relative effects of economic discrepancies.

The patriarchal society in India never allows a woman to have self-identity however educated and economically independent she may be. She has to lose her identity, hide her ability, shed her independence to safeguard her marriage. In one of her articles to The Times of India, Deshpande frowns upon the very idea of a woman losing her selfhood in the name of loyalty to her husband. As she states, “I believe that the family is not a divine sacred institution, but one created by humans for the
benefit of all society; and therefore, it should be built, not on the sacrifice of some, but on the co-operation and compromises of all its members” (qtd in Kapoor 133).

In order to heighten the sense of frustration in Saru, Deshpande uses the cross road imagery. She writes, “I walk out of the house, out of the gate, and on to the road. Turn to the right now, and there it is, the cross road” (DHNT 69). One could pick up the metaphor of a road that baffles one into an intricate web of complexities. Road as a metaphor could be taken as leading someone somewhere and if one develops the idea further, one could conclude that the character has lost control of the centre and the road becomes the dominant factor. “The cross road” could also be taken as a structure, essentially masculine, as revealed through its toughness. Deshpande concretizes the eternal reality through a paradoxical state of a dream. Paradoxically Saru’s dream, structures reality as revealed in the interior monologue: “I know all these ‘love marriages’. It’s love for a few days, then quarrels all the time. Don’t come crying to us then. To you? God, that’s the one thing I’ll never do. Never!” (69).

Though Saru has left her husband, “on the cross road”, she is consistently pulled back by motherhood. The mother in her wakes up calling for a compromise for she knows for certain that “Abhi refuses to go to bed until I cover him with his blanket” and also her daughter “Renu . . . who will not go to school unless I am at the door at the moment of her leaving” (71). Saru shows her father a piece of paper engrossed by Renu’s drawing. Deshpande forcefully expresses the crescendo of emotion.

For the first time she saw a look on his face that associated him with her children. It was an expression she had seen fond grandparents wear, a look of fatuous pride and affection. She had deprived her
children of that . . . Suddenly she felt helplessly confused, floundering, all her confident grasp of her own life lost to her. (71)

And here, it is worth quoting Sunita Sinha. She observes, “Her [Deshpande’s] work provides a pointer to the catatonic status of women in the tradition bound, male dominated middle class society of contemporary India, and concentrates on the struggle of women to overcome the constructing dilemmas of prefixed gendered definitions and behavioural norms” (175).

Saru hates the traditional concept of the Indians that the only purpose of a woman is to please her husband. As a doctor, she watches in disgust, women silently suffering, considering womanhood as a source of shame, finally concealing many diseases which may lead them to death. “a meaningless modesty born out of the myth of the self-sacrificing martyred woman.” (107) Saru’s contemplative mood sets the reconciliatory tone in the novel as one begins to empathize with her. As J. Padma Kumari observes, “Deshpande is a master writer in the way she articulates human emotions, the fears and feelings experienced by . . . women . . . . Recognizing oneself in her characters, one does not feel lonely in the world anymore” (86).

Drawing lines from the observation, one could surmise that Deshpande could be deemed a legend in her portrayal of emotions exclusively feminine. She epitomizes an Indian tradition bound cultural era through Saru, thereby symbolizing the latter through her delights, fear and defeats. In Indian tradition, the family restricts a woman’s space and time and hence she becomes a victim of oppression.

When Dhruva, Saru’s brother dies at the age of seven by drowning in the mud pool, Saru is held responsible for the death. And she becomes, “the wronged child again, the unloved daughter, the scapegoat” (182). Saru is pushed by her mother into
this treacherous labyrinth of guilt. “Now she had both, the suffering as well as the
guilt . . . she was alone, alone in the dark like Dhruva” (219).

When Saru becomes the “wronged child”, Dhruva is hailed as the “constant
North Star” (168) and “There was always a Puja on Dhruva’s birthday” (168). Saru
knows for certain that she did try to save her brother Dhruva from drowning.

I knelt down now, reaching out, trying to hold on to something . . . His
leg. His arm. His shirt. His hair. Again and again I clutched at
something that evaded me and finally turned out to be not Dhruva after
all . . . I was sobbing now in jerky gasps, gulping, struggling,
frantically trying to hold on to something. (189)

After the incident, Saru has become the constant wronged child and the
scapegoat- “you killed him. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?
(191). She is guilt ridden which is precipitated by her unloving mother and “the whole
of it came to her then with an absolute, unshakeable certainty” (192). Saru cannot
radically liberate herself from the situations, one being the guilt eventuated by the
drowning of Dhruva and the other being her husband treating her in all sadistic
proportions. She has the case of her friend Vidya, “an incipient women’s libber”
(155). While discussing Shakespeare, she emits a different side of the spectrum - “He
[Shakespeare] has a very limited vision” (155). She forcefully, yet brilliantly asserts
the point that “the man [is] at the centre, the woman always on the periphery” (156).
From the above mentioned observation, it becomes relevant to quote Simone de Beauvoir who writes:

Now, woman has always been man’s dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality. And even today woman is heavily handicapped, though her situation is beginning to change. Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as man’s and frequently it is much to her disadvantage. Even when her rights are legally recognized in the abstract, long-standing custom prevents their full expression in the mores. When man makes of woman the Other, he may, then expect her to manifest deep – seated tendencies toward complicity. Thus woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other. (48)

Simone de Beauvoir perceives woman as a being dependent of man and one of the reasons why gender inequality emerges. She also holds the proposition that woman is also partly responsible for their status as mythically fixed. Myth is her enemy and the acceptance of the myth relatively positions woman in a state of inertia. It is worth quoting Nabar who analyses the attitude of such traditional Indian women.

Mythicizing her role gives her (a woman) a degree of fulfilment in life. This self-deception also perpetuates the power equations where by the woman/mother eventually sees her imprisonment as empowering her by confessing on her the attributes of mother and wife. She sees her largely (perhaps naturally) in relation to the man in the domestic power
hierarchy (husband/sons). She thus becomes a symbol of men later on expect their women to be –unless enlightened and rational to an almost super human degree, the mother jealously guards against any evidence that her power vis-à-vis her son is weakening. (Nabar 185-186)

Vrinda Nabar positions the power hierarchy in the family as negating the contributinal attributes of a woman in the family. It is now possible to interpret The Dark Holds No Terrors as an outward manifestation of the inner turmoil of a feminine subject. The feminist theories position themselves against the family which is the fountain head of gender inequality. Eventually, the feminist theorizing doubts and contests the word woman as attached to the family. For instance, C. Gilligan holds the moral orientations like care, adaptability and acceptance as having been linked up with women. It is this position that enacts a psychic damnation of a woman. She says,

The different voice I describe is charactorial not by gender but by theme. Its association with women is an empirical observation, and it is primarily through women’s voices that I trace its development. But this association is not absolute, and the contrasts between male and female voices are presented here to highlight a distinction between two modes of thought and to focus a problem of interpretation rather than to represent a generalization about either sex. (Gilligan 2)

Claudine Hermann comes as another feminist theorist who proposes that a woman is fully aware of her secondary status in a familial constructive. She opines that,

Woman, who is always obliged to take others into account and also to consider a material reality from which she escapes less easily than man, can only conceptualize a cosmos of which she is not the centre.
Woman has since long learned to respect not only the physical and mental space of others but space for its own sake, empty space. (qtd in Upadhyay 82-84)

Claudine Hermann finds the gender inequality as a cultural consequence accorded to woman by a male super structure. The male superstructure devises ways in such a manner that a woman has been positioned as a slave in the family.

Deshpande concretizes the situation through an incident in which Saru, a lady doctor is asked to give a talk to the girl students, in an association the girls have formed. And here Saru vents her ire on the society riddled with chauvinistic vice and corruption. She persuades them to get happiness only through marriage and children, and adds the point that in order to stay happy and happier still in life “the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband” (137) and she holds this as the symbolic truth. Saru proceeds further stating,

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he’s an M.A., you should be a B.A. If he’s 5’4” tall, you shouldn’t be more than 5’ 3” tall. If he’s earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That’s the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage….Women’s magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That’s nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. (137)

Prema Nandakumar comments, “The refusal to recognize women’s economic independence and empowerment is one of the main reasons for violence against women, accentuating thereby, their vulnerability and abuse” (87).
Though the passage smacks of propaganda, it betrays its ironic implications with the very phrase “happy marriage” turning out be an oxymoron. Deshpande intensifies her ironic verve still stronger in the following lines – “Don’t struggle, don’t swim against the tide. Go along with it; and if you drown nevertheless, well, that’s an easier death after all” (137). Marriage is not simply a social institution. It is inextricably linked to religion, and religion, being a potent force in our country, determines more or less the code of conduct in marital relationships. Marriage is defined as a “cultural phenomenon which sanctions a more or less permanent union between partners conferring legitimacy on their off spring” (Nicholas 127).

Broadly speaking, the novelist, perhaps, wishes to drive home the point, that man represents the family, owns all means of production and everything – good or bad, should come only from him. This does not mean a woman can have no private possessions. She can own the clothes, furniture, her ornaments and her guilt ridden passions. Malati Mathur writes: “In portraying struggles of these women for identity, Shashi Deshpande waves no feminist banners, launches into no rabid diatribes. She drives her point home with great subtlety and delicacy” (3).

Regardless of the extent to which a woman has been subjected physically and emotionally, the feminist theorists attempt to reinforce a paradigm shift since these theorists conceive femininity as potentially performative and culturally constructive. Hence, they give a clarion call to women to shed the scales of this mythical debris and take on the role of the performative individual so that meaning is created and a redefinition of woman’s body and psyche has proclaimed anew. And here Judith Butler’s quote warrants mention. She conceived gender as performative, as the creation of meaning is a context-dependent act; she writes “As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative
point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations” (Butler 10).

Determination comes to Saru and all the previous perceptions she has rejected “so resolutely at first” (220) come back passionately embracing her. She has to accept “The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife . . . persons spiked with guilts” (220) and certainly not deny them, in order to clinch an identity for herself. As she speculates,

My life is my own . . . somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are not a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of proving my mother right. (220)

Having so long been subdued by the powerful forces that overpower her, she gains the mental strength through the same oppressive forces. Adesh Pal observes: “For Saru, the very word ‘mother’ stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a being…thus the strange childhood experiences false up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others”(74-75).

Her falsely inflated ego bursts as she opens up. And these are the last words spoken by Saru – “And, oh yes, Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I’ll be back as soon as I can” (221). Deshpande resurrects the doctor in Saru when she hurries out of
the house to the house where she is going to treat her patient, a child. Emboldened, she surges ahead with a new found freedom and courage.

In order to drive home the point, Deshpande has effectively structured the novel. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a tightly woven, carefully structured literary piece, in which episode is packed with meanings, variegated and multi layered. The richness of her language has given rise to many interpretations. One could perceive the themes of romanticism, woman – her dreams and reality, the tradition bound India, sexuality and gender politics neatly yet intricately woven into a literary structure. The start of every chapter naturally relates to one of the themes. The exploration of characters incorporates a proper apprehension of the text. On the one hand, one must say that the novel does not propose but creates possibilities and options a woman can strategically use to constitute a successful living.

The novel, *That Long Silence* considered to be the author’s masterpiece was published in 1988 and it won the Sahitya Academy Award for her in 1990. The women in India are forced to accept a second class status in the traditional male dominated society. Deshpande is aware of this injustice implied in the forced silence of the millions of Indian women. Jaya, the protagonist of the novel like so many other Indian women, has been trained to be silent. She is a writer but is forced to compare herself with the traditional images of a devoted wife and dutiful mother. Unless Jaya breaks her silence and begins to write as she wishes to, she cannot come to terms with herself and her position in the family and society. Thus, the novelist tries to establish that it is not only the patriarchal set up which is responsible for the women’s condition in the Indian society, but also the responsibility that lies within the victim to refuse to raise a voice to achieve the goal.
Jeya’s story has been inextricably linked to an all comprehensive pattern of a cultural component namely marriage. Marriage is presumed as a subject of man’s radical claims of superiority. Hence, in this context, That Long Silence cannot be evaluated apart from psychological and sociological conditions which produce a feminist orientation of thinking. Jaya seems to accept as Kalpana opines in her article “An Analysis of Violence and Resistance in Selected Women’s Fiction” that Indians regard the family as a strong bond and as an upholder of cultural values and tradition. This makes it difficult for any dissolution of marriage, once it is solemnized according to traditional rites and rituals. Therefore many women also reject feminism which they feel promotes individualistic attitude, egoism, selfishness, sexual liberty and above all a destroyer of the family. (3)

This is a cultural consequence impinging on the feminine segment. For, much of feminist theories confined themselves to decentering the mythical marriage, which, of course have produced profound effect upon the sociology of women. Nevertheless, Edmund Leach stands steadfast in his claim that “The family is the source of all our discontents” (qtd in Finch 13).

The theme of That Long Silence is simple. Jaya, the heroine of the novel recalls her married life with nostalgia. She is married to Mohan and has been living with him for seventeen years. One day he has gone away from her to clear himself of the charge of bribery and malpractice. They have two children Rahul and Rati and the third child has been aborted. Despite her marriage to Mohan and subsequently becoming a mother of two children, she feels lonely. She maintains silence throughout
her life. The novel ends her resolve to speak, to break her long silence. It is a sensitive and realistic dramatization of the married life of Jaya and her husband Mohan.

Recognizing the limitations of feminine polemics, many a feminist theory has oriented itself toward the identification of this sociological unit, family, as detrimental to woman. Janet Finch sees this situation reflective of the age-old mythical pattern. She writes,

Within feminist thought over the last 30 years, the argument that the family is fundamental to women’s oppression has really been a critique of one meaning of ‘family’, namely the nuclear family household. This refers to a group based on a heterosexual couple, sharing a home with their own children whilst they are young but not with anyone else. (14)

More so, a majority of contemporary feminist cultural theories explore the ramifications of myth while they attempt to identify new areas. Jean Baker Miller, who has sharpened her researches on the new psychology of women, submits the point that women’s oppression by men paradoxically generated “a source of potential strength and power for women weakness” (qtd in Stimpson 12). Jaya faces this dilemma of identity construction. It naturally makes one wonder if Deshpande maintains an exploratory or expository stance.

Sara Ruddick, echoing Jean Baker Miller, identifies one significant area called motherhood as inevitable for an identity. She also would like to imbibe the maternal virtues called “humility, resilient good humour, realism, respect for persons and responsiveness to growth” (16).
Yet, there is then the danger of decentering which stands antithetical to the maternal component, since the character of family varies from culture to culture. Carolyn Heilbrun advances this idea with a note of caution as quoted in Barbara Hill Rigney’s article.

I worry about the effects of a feminist criticism or history that necessarily focuses on the constrains that, however overcome or subverted or subtly recognized in novels and in life, remain nevertheless crippling and are, of course, neither necessary nor desirable …. Women must discover their difference and their own culture… (qtd in Rigney 95-104)

The monogamous nature of Indian culture is reflected in Deshpande’s novels. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya develops an intimacy with Kamat who lives in a flat above hers. She is perfectly at ease in his company and their friendship slowly progresses towards physical attraction. But Jaya controls herself and suppresses her desires in spite of the opportunity provided in the seclusion of his apartment. It seems that Jaya has done this just to safeguard her marriage. Jaya prefers to act by the dictates of the society, the culture, than be truthful to herself as an individual. This is also proved when Jaya behaves in a callous way on the death of Kamat. On one of her visits to his room, Jaya finds Kamat lying dead in his flat. She fails to pay homage to Kamat for the fear of being involved in any scandal which might endanger her married life. She feels guilty but remains helplessly passive.

Jaya was renamed as Suhasini by her husband and this confuses her in her search for identity. She rejects the name Suhasini and it is significant that she protests
against such customs. Kalpana Sharma, the social activist writes in *The Hindu* thus:

> After marriage…the girl loses not just her last name but also her first name. In other words, she becomes a new person, apparently with no connection with her past. This name-changing custom…is at the extreme end of the continuum that ordains that a woman’s identity and independence ends the day she takes her marital vows. The change of name might seem a minor issue. But …Will it make a difference to the quality of the marriage? And why only a girl? Perhaps both ought to change their names so that they start their lives on a completely clean slate!. (27 May 2012)

But Jaya changes her appearance to suit her husband’s idea of a modern woman. She cuts her hair, wears dark glasses and gets completely involved into the family fold. She compromises herself because she is taught the importance and necessity of a stable marriage and family. Though she is an educated woman, she is unable to free herself entirely from the clutches of male chauvinistic ideas. Thus, Jaya herself proves to be a part and parcel of Indian culture.

When Mohan leaves the Dadar house in a fury, Jaya is terribly upset. To add to her despair, Jaya gets the news that Rahul, her son who has been touring with their family friends has suddenly disappeared. She struggles alone with the trauma and it upsets her mental equilibrium. But she emerges victorious. For the two nights, before the return of her husband, she pours out her innermost thoughts, her fears, her feelings and everything she has suppressed in seventeen years of silence in writing. The novel written by Jaya contains not only her story but also the story of many characters who are victims of patriarchy like Mohan’s mother, Kusum, Vimala and others.
Deshpande, hailing from a unique, traditional Indian social construct recognizes the fixity that a woman as wife and mother, needs to establish her own identity in relation to the constructive woman of the cultural past. This might stand one with Matthew Arnold’s ‘Touch Stone method’. While Arnold applies this to criticism, contemporary views could apply this to the marital pattern of a concerned culture. Thus, one could infer that Deshpande writes, thinking back through many a constructive mother and wife she has witnessed. This amounts naturally to a great deal, one fixes the novelist as a pragmatic feminist.

Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* encapsulates the quintessence of Indian cultural motherhood. That is why the title *That Long Silence*, while taken as the eternal suffering of women, yet, paradoxically signifies silence as more effectively communicative and hence hits the path of success.

*That Long Silence* here is a main spring of Deshpande’s enormous productivity, is no doubt true. The analysis of Deshpande’s women generates a series of brilliant categories because it has been written by a clever observer who has had the experience of womanhood in a multicultural context. The novelist fulfils one of the wholly legitimate functions of a spokesperson more vigorously, yet abundantly in her novels. She is also knowledgeably aware of the secret motions of a woman’s identity in an all male chauvinistic ambience. By enlarging the bounds of the feminine proclivity, Deshpande dramatizes certain areas of the feminine patience and aspirations. Thus, *That Long Silence*, taken rightly as a considerable artistic feat, is more than nearly a dismal record of the genteel urban mothers, whose lives flourish “punctuated by dreary quarrels, the children’s successes and failures,...our resentment and bitterness” (*TLS* 4-5). It is amidst the dark dreariness, Deshpande unfolds the story in a long sequence of vivid pictures of Jaya. It is in this power to make the readers
see, in observation of and control over a wide diversity of facts, that Deshpande wins a glory.

Deshpande reiterates the metaphor of silence as a cyclic phenomenon, which over the years might point towards changes. Thus, Deshpande constitutes a new meaning to silence. The novel tends to read at an intensified level in that, Jaya, isolated as she is, prepares herself to capitalize the pre-existing ties to other characters like her son Rahul and the maid servant Nayana. Jaya articulates this feeling as to seize the moments of victim story that breathes behind her identity crisis. Rahul wishes to be fixed in his own framework and as Mohan makes tyrannical claims on his son like – “He has everything he wants, we deny him nothing, and look at his marks! I’m ashamed that my son should do so badly-” (TLS 49). As Jaya wonders at, “where does he get his cynicism from?” (50), she begins to encounter the real – “we are nothing” (50). But, yet, most importantly, Jaya feels that she must rest satisfied with those moments of reprieve and respite. As the novelist puts it, “Back home. As we were. The four of us. But there was this intervening period to be gone through before we could go back to being ‘as we were” (51).

With Nayana, Jaya distrusts “her silence at first” for she mistakenly considers it “for surliness, for hostility, for a reluctance to work” (51) and emanates this “I knew her better”, the silence into an acceptance of reality. Further Jaya realizes that “it was her reputation for reliability that enabled her to earn more than other servants did” and she envies “her single-mindedness” for what “she knew what her purpose in life was – it was to go on living” (51). Jaya escapes the dull drab commonality of existence witnessing these women’s resilience to harassment and she speculates, “it was these women who saved me from the hell of drudgery. Any little freedom I had depended on them” (52).
That Long Silence thus, contains an implicit anatomy of society, particularly the womanhood. Deshpande uses the victim story mode primarily for those who are topographically and economically marginalized. Jaya’s identity crisis is portrayed through the description of a topographic frame work:

But Bombay, I’d realised at once, was nothing but a grey uniform ugliness. The buildings had seemed terrible to me, endless rows of looking-exactly-alike, ramshackle, drab buildings, the washing that flapped on their balconies giving them a sluttishly gay look. It had taken me some time to notice the streets of Bombay; once I did, however, I had been immediately caught up by the magic of their teeming life. I had watched in utter fascination the mobs, the brawls, the drunkards, the school children, the coy newly-weds. (54)

Jaya’s psyche goes on into fluctuation as she sways into the mythical metaphor, “the blank page where ‘Seeta’ would have been” (69). Jaya makes a conscious, yet a consistent endeavour to set her “Seeta” aside only to realise her frontal position that she is everything but “Not myself” (69).

Hapless, Jaya glides into nostalgia “of how we never ate rice for months” (71) and out of it, “Yes we’ve done away with famine” (71), paradoxically, “escape is not always possible” (72). At the present moment, she is seated in the car with Rahul and Rati eating their ice cones, “encircled by those staring eyes – a deadly confining circle” (73) of beggars. Though, economically stable, Jaya is engulfed by the moment in which she sees the emaciated bodies move in frantic quicksilver movements for the crumbs that have fallen of the last bit of his cone. This experience has a devastating
effect which mars her relationship with Mohan, ultimately, pushing her into an identity crisis. As she speculates,

He [Mohan] had taken it for granted that I thought the same way. And so perhaps it was only I who had been surprised when intimacy had come, all of a sudden, with the physical link. We had slipped into it with a precipitancy that had taken me unawares. The truth had been that if I was ignorant so was he; but somehow, after those first few days of clumsy fumbling, it had been suddenly all right.(95)

Jaya is only ashamed at the quality of her feelings for her husband. She frowns at the very liability of her feelings since she “had never conferred ... frenetic emotions” (97) she holds this stance a disability as she attempts to clock it with all avarice. This generates a sense of fear, a result of loneliness in her as she contemplates,

The strength of my feelings for him had both shamed and terrified me....We’re all frightened of the dark, frightened of being alone. And so we cling to one another, saying... I love you, I want you, I need you. Often I had told myself: love is a myth, without which sex with the same person for a lifetime would be unendurable...I would never be able to shake off this monstrous burden. (97)

Jaya, soon after, experiences a sense of frustration and as she ponders over her nonexistent status, she realizes fully well that the ark of reality accorded to her has been enchained with the biological awareness as she ponders: “Man and woman – it was then that I realised the deep chasm between the two. They are separated for ever, never more than at the moment of total physical togetherness. Had he realised this?
Was this the reason for his cry? I felt sorry for him, the remote pity of one who had been through it all” (98).

Deshpande’s exploration of Jaya’s human condition, loss and the inevitability of suffering and of death become the dominant themes of the novel. Even the simple passage of time is shown, within its context, to be malign. Jaya, perhaps, seems to be under the control of an external force that emanates malignant maliciously.

In addition to that, That Long Silence does possess a private resonance, a resounding effect in that, one could witness a mute dramatizing of Jaya’s sense of depravity and loss of identity. She lives through attempting to throw off her, her immobilizing neurotic depression, which constitutes the rhythm of her personal life. Much of Deshpande’s effect of writing derives from her bringing to this elemental issue, a subtlety with which she cloaks her art. Jaya, as a victim of a chauvinist ambience, stretches herself to a breaking point. Under the double burden of a merciless husband, whose demand for sympathy unleashed against her and a remorseless self-distrust mining from within, Jaya sets out with a resolve to subvert the mythical order, though in fact, Kamat puts the resolve in her as he says, “I’ve seen them - angry women . . . Banging pots and pans. This would have been a better story if you’d banged your pots and pans in it. . .” (147). Nevertheless, Jaya is quite aware of the pull of the “Middle class. Bourgeoise . . . scared of failing” (148). And, her conflict is evidenced obviously in the following passage:

Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?... A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There’s no room for anger in my life, no room for despair, either. There’s only
order and routine - today, I have to change the sheets; tomorrow, scrub the bathrooms; the day after, clean the fridge… (147-148)

One wonders at Jaya’s perception of life and how far she should turn faithful to the ideal conception of life and of her own personality she has set up for herself secretly. Hence, what happens as a consequence of this strung-up resolve to acknowledge only her ideal self is something like a fragmentation of personality. One could infer, at the moment, that *That Long Silence* is a highly charged story, of great psychological as well as literary interest. Indeed, Deshpande enunciates a threat to a willed and achieved personality, Jaya’s personality is constituted by the possible eruption of a subliminal self for which Deshpande finds symbolical expression in some of her most memorable places. The following is an illustration of this:

A mother? Despairingly I relinquished my halo. No, I had been unfit to be trusted with the entire responsibility of another human being. How had I dared to take it on? Mohan’s wife, Rahul’s and Rati’s mother - I can crawl into that hole, I had thought, a warm and safe hole; but here I was now prodded out of it by cruel, sharp staves. (173)

Despande’s passage conveys a related sense of hidden identity. Jaya’s desperation is not the outcome of a need, the need of self-expression which artists find in their search for motives. The novelist, perhaps, likes to emphasize those definitive moments and as Jaya encounters those moments, a remarkable evolution of being takes place out of the significant evocation of her rising into conscious expression of another personality. In all her impressiveness, Jaya does stretch the fact of her life in all its brilliant resourcefulness and consequently contrives to evince appropriateness to her being. This is evident in the following mention of her speculation:
Two bullocks yoked together — that was how I saw the two of us the
day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It’s wrong. If
I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in
ourselves. I’ve always thought — there’s only one life, no chance of a
reprieve, no second chances. But in this life there are so many
crossroads, so many choices. (191-192)

Even though Jaya has many a choice, she is remote from the radical female as she
enters painfully into her dilemma, the very issue of a woman telling her story.
Mohan’s dismissiveness supplemented by her own passion for him prevents her from
acting a revolutionary and this very ideology forms Deshpande’s narrative. Jaya’s
experience with Kamat and her sudden withdrawal from surrender of body bears the
burden of her femininity. However, she enunciates an angry “Seeta” in her story
which marks the unforgiving gap between the phase of radicality and the phase of
womanhood. For there, contrary to the expectations of a radical finish, and after her
protracted struggle to resist her lust makes her undo the priggish image of her husband
who is caught in the vortex of urbanity.

Seeta as the fictitious character generates a silence not only in Jaya but also in
the narrative. The silence itself stubbornly bears witness to the repressed psyche that
cries out, with its historical truth buried deep in darkness. Eventually, the self same
silence drives Jaya forward into creativity and through her creative talent she re-
enacts her repression, since “Seeta” retells her story and invades the space of Jaya
over determined by character. That’s why even when Kamat makes out his friendly
propositions to help her become a great writer, she sets them aside as something dead
buried deep in her fragmented self.
Damn you, you’re dead, aren’t you? I saw you lying there on the floor, a look of surprise on your face, . . . I saw you lying there, . . . I knew you were dead and yet I instantly walked out on you, leaving you with only your voice for company. Now, why don’t you leave me alone? Why don’t you stay dead and leave me alone? (150)

Though at the outset, it becomes difficult for Jaya to put her fragmented psyche together, the love stories she has written generate a comforting psyche in her. She knows nothing else but only “my need of Mohan. And his need of me” (153). Deshpande adds a logical culmination to the episode:

There had been no anger in me when I had done that; there had been no outrage, either. There had been nothing but an overwhelming urge to respond to him with my body, the equally overwhelming certainty of my mind that I could not do so. . . . And I had been detached from that woman who had seen him, remote from that experience. (157)

Thus, Jaya as a character becomes complex and as a woman becomes determined, determined enough to script the morale of femininity. The complexity and determination of character briefly exemplify a few of Deshpande’s strategies in the novel. It helps the novelist emanate an ambiguous definition and multi-layered characterization and resistance to restructure the relationship between events and endings. In spite of the fact that there is then the novelist’s aphorism, “The relation of man to woman is the most natural of one person to another”, it is nothing but “treachery, only deceit, only betrayal” (158). The novelist sets out to decry the Freudian conjectures as she insinuates Jaya with a character and for her Jaya becomes
a terrible beauty born to detach herself from the enforced composure of psycho-
– analysis.

With Jaya, Deshpande provides an epistemological significance. The novelist
has a very good way of looking at things to ascertain all the endeavours she has made
in the creation of Jaya. This is one of Deshpande’s master themes, the contest of
sterotypes that dictates interpretations of human character. Several passages in the
novel echo *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, which might, perhaps, become the touchstone
to manipulate a schematic reading of Deshpande’s novels.

The terms in which *The Binding Vine* is narrated suggest something of the
scope of the action. It is clear that the events of the novel are invested with
significance far beyond their actuality. The novel is basically intended to be
wholesome in scope, the interaction, in ordinary terms, between conflicting male-
female values.

*The Binding Vine* is a first person narrative of an intelligent and outspoken
middle-aged woman Urmi, who has lost her one year-old baby daughter Anu. This
loss makes her highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. She discovers
two more suffering female souls, one dead and the other alive but in a coma stage.
Thus, in *The Binding Vine*, individual plots of three different stories are interwoven
bringing together three women separated by age, status and education.

Urmi discovers a collection of poems written by her dead mother-in-law Mira.
Through these poems, she understands the mind of young, teen age Mira who is
subjected to rape in her marriage. Mira suffers everything patiently through the entire
course of her life. The other sufferer Kalpana has been a victim of rape who is
struggling for life in a hospital.
With the sudden demise of her infant Anu, Urmi has been permanently fixed in the circle of her eternal misery. She is “tired of being alone” in the company of this misery and this is expressed through her speculation of life. “My exit is barred, I can’t go back. I am trapped in the present. There is no escape. I put my head on my knees and let the agony come through” (BV 13).

Deshpande gradually develops Urmi’s story, between this fragmentation of self and the external conflict. The story is fraught with a variety of episodes, some brief and some long, and is developed with specific references to sequence in either time or place and offer with clear motivation. Urmi realistically surmises that her means of identification and her meaning in life are inextricably tied to her marital life. She chooses to protect the life that means so much to her, and of her own volition, stands herself on the witness stand.

Deshpande feels no hesitation in delving into the female psyche concerning happiness and sexuality. Urmi cannot just comprehend the fact that Mira is a victim of this family architecture that demands the whole of her without her accepting to it. Deshpande makes a reference to the point, “Once you know the law can help you—if one woman can win the right to her own body…” (38). She unfolds the story of Mira before the reader as the story of “the woman who wrote those poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, [and] who died giving birth to her son at twenty two” (48).

Mira’s marriage is brought about by a “man’s obsession with her”, she becomes a victim of the other- “a man in single minded pursuit of an object: marrying Mira” (47). After her marriage, Mira’s sense of utter dejection and solitude pushes her into writing – a story, “clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married” (63). Urmi associates Mira’s
bridal grandeur and the ceremony with “a funeral solemnity hung over all of us during the ceremony” (63). The very idea of Mira as a victim of patriarchy culminates in the following observation: “... but I could see that her hands were trembling uncontrollably. And the back of her neck, I can remember that, looked like a lamb’s, waiting for the butcher’s knife to come down upon it” (63).

Urmi frowns upon the very intention of Mira’s husband, “The single mindedness with which he went about marrying Mira” (64) enunciates the amount of obsession he has for Mira. And yet, nobody is concerned about Mira’s feelings, as the following observation claims “There is no clue as to what she felt and did. Was she pleased at first, triumphant at being married at the age of 18 to the first man who ‘saw’ her? Was she angry that she had to give up her studies? Did she protest, say anything to her parents?” (64). These questions remain unanswered as nobody cared to know the mind of Mira.

Mira has been forced into a lived experience punctuated by the conjugal demands. One of her poems reveals her own predicament as evidenced by the following lines: “did Laxmi too . . . tremble, fearing the coming of the dark clouded, engulfing night?” (66). Urmi holds Mira’s poems as bringing back the “memories of her own life” (66) and she registers these as the plain truth “because it’s here, in her diary, the clay out of which she shaped her poem (61). Mira moves, then, from childlike simplicity and contentment to a sad, yet realistic, despair. Yet, Mira is forced to wear her womanly status of a wife proudly and Deshpande uses Mira’s truths not to disintegrate her as character, but to elevate her. She expresses this situation in a striking passage: “As a child, her beauty had embarrassed me; it set her apart from the others, made her look as much a luxury object as, the bottles on her dressing table.
But now, when I see her losing it, her waist thickening, her upper arms flabby, her skin dry, it saddens me” (67).

Deshpande is able to penetrate Mira’s mind, thus explaining moments of profound self realization that she has been reduced to a commodified beautiful object held dear by the male superstructure. Deshpande’s success in her portrait of Mira is the result of a genuine attempt on her part to make her women look real to the readers. Perhaps, she has assumed one challenge of a literary artist, to endow all femininity in Mira with the persuasive and fully developed attributes of human being. Deshpande’s creation of poems through Mira’s pen does have an intention. The poems come handy to conceptualize the thought content of Mira’s dilemma, as evidenced in the following poem Mira has written:

They called me mad
they, who cocooned themselves
in bristly blankets
and thought themselves warm
when I spoke of my soul
that boiled and seethed.
They called me mad
they, who were entranced
by a single white ray of light
when I spoke of the magic
of the seven colours in a prism. (BV 100)

Urmia is sure of the fact that “Mira was not joyful” (126), but “perhaps it was her writing her poems “late at night, after the man had gone to bed” (127) that gave her relief. When Mira meets Venu, a contemporary male poet, she speaks to him of her poetry and with a desperate kind of coverage, she gives him some of her poems to read. Deshpande brilliantly records Venu’s comments on Mira’s vacation as a poetess:
“Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men” (127).

Urmi is struck by meanings that generate despair and disillusion when she thinks “of Venu’s poems everywhere and Mira’s voice silenced” (128). Deshpande, through Urmi doubts and contests this male idea: “They brainwash us into this motherhood thing. They make it seem so mystical and emotional when the truth is that it’s all just a myth. They’ve told us so often and for so long that once you’re a mother you have these feelings, that we think we do.” (76)

Shashi Deshpande indulges in feminine politics where identity could be forged to some extent only in a mother status and this motherhood as many noted feminist theorists believe could also effectively construct the ongoing positivism of a society. Gerda Lerner has also rightly pointed out: “While men conquered territory and built institutions which managed and distributed power, women transmitted culture to the young and built the social network and infrastructure that provide continuity in the community” (179).

For instance Alison Young holds motherhood as a genuine base for a constructive physical action sometimes. She does not hesitate to connect motherhood with the peace politics Sara Ruddick speaks of. She writes, “If the world itself seems under siege, and if that siege holds any community and all children hostage, the effort of world protection can come to seem a ‘natural’ extension of maternal work”(22).

Similarly this nexus between motherhood and peace politics renunciates a sense of belonging in a private sphere. No wonder, one finds Urmila exercising her options of relief to Kalpana. Urmila’s motherhood stands with one, Alison Young who says, “Maternity was seen by women peace protesters at the Greenham Common
nuclear weapons base as the basis for their political action, such that ‘the issue of “peace” [was] not only a valid concern for women, but also … a concern best dealt with by women” (32).

Urmila’s efforts to help Kalpana is strictly opposed by her family members. When the hospital authorities try to shift Kalpana to another hospital, Urmi protests and takes the matter to the press. The government orders for reinvestigation and the women in the assembly and all local women activists now stand for Kalpana. But for Shakutai, Kalpana’s mother, exposure to the media is as bad as Kalpana being raped. Shakutai is afraid of humiliation in the society resulting from exposure of such incidents. Urmila strongly believes that women should have the courage to expose the evils of the society. She is furious at their uncomplaining attitude in the name of family honour.

On the other hand, Kalpana’s mother Shakutai is much worried about her daughter’s marriage after the girl’s been a rape victim. Kalpana is a victim of the male superstructure when her mother asks her to help her sister Sulu and her husband. She is the victim of Sulu’s husband. Saddeningly yet shockingly the reader encounters another situation in which the police officer magnanimously puts on Kalpana the male normative order. “Why make it a case of a rape? . . . She’s going to die anyway, so what difference does it make, whether, on paper, she dies the victim of an accident or a rape? . . . She’s unmarried, people are bound to talk, her name would be smeared” (BV 88).

Urmia is strangely disturbed by the “kind of deathly stillness about the body”, (109) Shakutai’s obsession with her daughter has made her neglectful of her household chores. When Sulu comes to know of her husband’s deed, she sets herself
ablaze and commits suicide and “suddenly, Kalpana and her family are celebrities” (181). Deshpande uses the word celebrities, rather ironically in the sense that they have been reduced to objects to be viewed, to be sympathized or sometimes even to be angry at. She uses a situation to capture the essential ironies of life.

The disgrace Shakutai had so agonised over wilts in the fierce glare of publicity. The final accolade on the family is bestowed when they appear, very briefly, on TV. Shakutai, sweating, nervous, stammers a few words, Sandhya and Prakash standing by her, until they are pushed out of the frame by others who shove, push, stretch their necks, even jump to get into the range of the camera. (180)

Deshpande’s polarization of Mira and Kalpana is not comparable to the simple stereotyping of many woman novelists. Most obviously, Mira and Kalpana are never meant either to be condemned or pedestalled. On the contrary, Deshpande’s main intention is to bring home the point that once a woman steps out of her feminine mystique, her only reward is despair. While the society holds Mira’s poems for her eventual doom, Shakutai holds her daughter “dressed up, lipstick and all” as responsible for her victim status. Eventually, Deshpande has made Mira and Kalpana believable by furnishing the readers with a good number of details about each. More importantly, Deshpande brings both of them to life by allowing them to repeat and watch them act and interact.

While Urmila is a proud mother fixed in her biological status in all glory and grace, her mother-in-law Mira and Kalpana come as victims of rape. Deshpande enacts a feminist position where she perceives rape as a forced motherhood by men. Here, she contests the historical role of woman as elaborated by Adrienne Rich.
Historically, cross-culturally, a woman’s status as child bearer has been the test of her womanhood. Through motherhood, every woman has been defined from outside herself: mother, matriarch, matron, spinster, barren, old maid – listen to the history of emotional timbre that hangs about each of these words. Even by default motherhood has been an enforced identity for woman, while the phrases ‘childless man’ and ‘non father’ sound absurd and irrelevant to us. (261)

Deshpande never allows her protagonist to overstep the boundaries of the sanctity of marriage. When Dr. Bhaskar declares his love for Urmi, she holds back and confesses her true love for her husband. Dr. Bhaskar sees her not just a wife of somebody but an individual with an identity of her own. But Urmila who is rebellious and independent is firmly bound by the shackles of tradition. When Preeti likes to make a film out of Mira’s story, she opposes. Thus, she values the sanctity of womanhood and marriage in India.

Exploitation of women lies in the controlling images of men. While women are sentimentalized as mothers, men attempt naturally to enact this historical sentiment through wrongful means. One of the reasons why Deshpande places two women here is one sees woman’s body out of the social arrangement as procreative and divine. Motherhood is something a woman ought to propose and is not something a man puts upon a woman. Motherhood is a woman’s genuine choice and certainly not a man’s option. Urmila comes in contrast to these two victims as an individual who has reclaimed control over her own body. She devices her concept of femininity that woman should be celebrated and individualized as against the matriarchal concept of woman as an object of desire. Thus, through the characterization of Urmila, Deshpande claims a unique maternal identity, mapping it as a source of
empowerment. Urmila is also a reformulation of a feminine identity which broadens itself to include a woman either a victim or a victor. Strategically, Mira and Kalpana are placed in that, they stand linked to Urmila, either as a legal or familiar link.

The emotional crisis in the life of Urmila is caused by the sudden death of Anu. Vanaa helps Urmila to come out of her emotional crisis. Urmi is torn as under by the remembrances of her dead Anu “who won’t let me go” (21). She is reminded again and again of the sad yet sudden departure of her child. She has hallucinations and she wakes “up to hear the soft snuffling sounds of her breathing by my side” (21). The mother in Urmi is rekindled when she feels: “Sometimes, as if I have gone back in time, her milky ammoniac, talcum odour comes back to me; my breasts feel heavy and painful, as if they are gorged with milk. Once again I can feel the softness of her body in my arms, the heaviness of her head flopping over my shoulder” (21).

Urmi, at the end of the novel realizes that love is the binding force which prevents one from being cruel, which prevents people from doom and destruction and also is the one which nurtures one’s life with compassion and tolerance. By helping others like Shakutai and Kalpana, Urmi is able to overcome her grief for the dead Anu. The dead child Anu is the binding vine of feeling and emotion between mother and daughter (Urmi and Anu and Urmi and her mother Inni).

*The Binding Vine’s* theme of love is again pertinent here. The assumption is that, the chief problem among the character in the novel is the incapacity to love. Generated by their psychic condition, one keeps oneself out of touch with their acquaintance and ultimately with their basic selves. On the one hand, the novel contains more social protest than any of Deshpande’s other novels. Kalpana and Mira
have encountered animalistic reaction to their beings and hence, their pain, eventuated by their sad encounters, develops into a social dimension.

In the light of the foregoing assumptions, Deshpande’s intention in the novel is more easily understood. While the main line of the story portrays the way a woman’s inherent definitions of woman fail her in her attempts to come to terms with her own womanhood, it should be noted that the same situation adds up to the sum of the predicament in the novel.

Deshpande forces one to understand Urmi’s predicament by posing her in numerous moods and emotions. One knows that Urmi is not what she wants to be but rather what she has to be. Anu’s premature death also forces repercussion in Urmi’s psyche. She has learned to protect herself by donning the guilt on her psyche and like Mira, she cannot come to grips with life so easily. She knows nothing of what life is like for her. Yet, Urmi, has been forced into an awareness of love that should be constant and hence sustaining. This she holds as the essential principle of life. And the following passage warrants mention here: “Perhaps the fact is that we all of us create our own truths, shaping them to our needs, in particular the need to be able to live comfortably with ourselves, with those we love and need” (54-5). Thus, in a moment of clarity and self-realization, she resorts to the right pattern of existence, “And to do this I will have to leave Mira’s life alone. I will go on to her poetry; that’s less complicated” (55). To Mira’s poetry she goes which further triggers her acumen to write.

Shashi Deshpande in her A Matter of Time, discerns the unique experiences of proclivity, which warp her as at once an Indian writer, still rooted in the whole culture of which she is part of. Published at a time when the Indian life encounters a post
colonial, yet multicultural mosaic, Deshpande crystallizes the experiences of one family or rather more than one. Hence, it might tempt one to think of *A Matter of Time* as her greatest work, even if it does not reach so deeply into the hearts of feminists. Nevertheless, so far as the chronology of her writings can be known, each of her successive novels shows the accrualment of a unique new power or skill and the sum of these always have remained with her. For as long as she writes, she retains a facility for invoking what is best available in her society and fashions her knowledge of facts into a narrativity.

*A Matter of Time* reflects perhaps “the most terrible moment of all, when Sumi and her father are to be taken away” (*MT* 235). The death of Sumi, the mainstay in the novel, haunts the readers with “its diaphanous veil of light and shadows, flickering as the aarti lamps” (89). Sumi comes as the wife of Gopal who lingers spiritually on the threshold of a marital construct. Gopal betrays Sumi in the hardest sense through a sudden departure from home. The whole verve of the novel proceeds from this realization of truth that has been so comfortably encapsulated in the patriarchal metaphor of a house. The house called “Vishvas”, declares the meaning of its structure by its very stolid presence. This is one male claim “Built to endure” (3), yet ironically goes off to erode in the hands of Deshpande. The novelist betrays the futility of the male charm through the rooms “dark, brooding and cavernous” (5). Hence “Looked at from the outside, it looks like an excrescence perched on top of the house, destructing from its main quality of [male] integrity” (5). That’s why Kalyani’s father who “built the house, is enormously proud of it” (5).

Deshpande strategically foregrounds the house, a symbol of warmth and shelter, to spell Sumi’s story of doom and disaster. Sumi is married to Gopal, a
university professor. Yet, between them there exists a sense of odd feeling which seems to be disjointed and uncoordinated. Deshpande portrays their delinked link.

The TV goes on through his talk, neither of them thinks of turning it off, or turning down the sound either, so that his words come to her against the background of the clown’s song: *Jeena yahan, mama yahan, iske siwa jana kahan* . . . [and] The realization that there is nothing more to be said -by either of them – comes to them almost simultaneously and he goes out as quietly as he had come in. (8-9)

And herein begins Sumi’s predicament. She has been helplessly woven into this chauvinistic pattern of exuberance and vanity, and out of which escape lies far away. Deshpande justifies *A Matter of Time* as a narrative projective of the incapacitated self caught in the whirlpool of the male normative order. Sumi is forcibly swayed by the familial construct between frustration and despair. She is fixed in a state of despondency holding life as an enigma, a puzzle and a riddle. As the novelist puts it, “Her mind slides from one interpretation to another, over and over again, until in sheer exhaustion she falls asleep. And gets up abruptly at three in the morning, a panicked waking as if someone has prodded her awake” (9). Sunita Reddy says:

Episodes from history and mythology bear witness to men who were venerated for their selflessness while no thought was given to the silent suffering and martyrdom of their wives. Lakshmana’s steadfastness and devotion finds no parallel in Indian mythology, while Siddhartha is hailed for spurning the luxury and comfort of princely life in pursuit of knowledge. Their respective spouses Urmila and Yashodhara,
however, remain shadowy figures in the background, doomed to live a
dlife of anonymity and insignificance. (115-116)

Sumi is one such worthy addition to the study of Shashi Deshpande’s illuminating
characters in existence already. As a woman, Sumi offers more feminine stuff for
critical apprehension. In fact, as a wife, she is conspicuous for complexity of critical
appeal, for the abundance of feminist perception, of challenging feminine orientation,
and of course of illuminating elegance of mind, that surface from under the homely
semblance of Deshpande’s art. Sumi appears before one holding “a relationship that
had been threatening to complicate my life” (44), startlingly attesting the observation
of many feminists. “Many feminists have argued that the family is one of the major
structures of patriarchal society and thus a prime site of women’s oppression” (Singh
197)

A subtle irony lies dormant deep beneath in Sumi’s kindly candidness – “How
long do we go on like this”, and a contestable psyche that reveals a conflict, internal –
– “My god, what’s happening to us and what am I doing, lying here on the floor like a
refugee?” (12). Of such an artist that Deshpande is, and of such a feminine
individualist, who has lived for years in intimate acquaintance with her kith and kin,
Sumi is the product of the absolute, unchartered sincerity of the artist’s perception of
the female ego. The deliberations involved in the creation of Sumi characteristically
make her a native of Indian mythical fluctuations culled out of post coloniality. Sumi
epitomizes a situation and comes as one as well, a lost love of masculinity. All Sumi’s
efforts to avoid being separated generate an enormously complicated turn, an
inevitability of life. There is little evidence, however, to say that the machinery of the
plot is not too intricate as one discovers a family holding a good relationship with
each other. Sumi’s family stands steadfastly huddled together much aware of the
authenticity of the situation that only the governing passions of womanhood, operating in full coincidence, will help sustain a living. The marital bliss emerges forth a marital vacuum as evidenced by the following observation.

The telling of what he [Gopal] has come to say takes him so little time when he has done, the song is still going on. He looks at her for a reaction, but she is gazing at him just as expectantly, waiting for him to go on. The realization that there is nothing more to be said – by either of them – comes to them almost simultaneously and he goes out as quietly as he had come in. (9)

Sumi, aware of this plain truth of life, finds it difficult to accept the situation of an estranged wife that she has become.

Sumi is not the only one, but Aru, her daughter too, “knows the panic, the disorientation of being lost”, when she “wakes up to the knowledge that her father has walked out on them” (10). With her mind quite “crystal clear”, she encounters the strange coincidence of life: “She [Sumi] answers all their questions with infinite patience, she listens to their repeated exclamations with what look like composure; there are no signs of irritation or annoyance . . . to give the impression that the room did not exist” (10).

To her daughter’s bafflement, Sumi gets on with her “routine that day is as usual. They are baffled, but as if she has set the tone for them, they go through the motions of their normal routine as well” (10). And, eventually, Sumi’s composure, marked by a strategic silence makes “it possible for them to think – – ‘it was only a quarrel’ it makes it possible for them to hope – he will come back” (10).
This is, after all, only an indirect continuation of the indictment of life. The statement has been designed by Deshpande only to show the consequence of mythical subjugation. In a tone of mild satire, Sumi reminds one of the existences of femininity and of its suffering, “... I could not avoid” (69). The mythical feminine rules over her as Sumi feels that her husband “... has nothing now, not even a proper job” (61). When Aru persuades her to be tough with him and “it is not right, he must be made to realize what he’s done” (61), Sumi retorts promptly, “How? By punishing him? Do you want to punish him, Aru? I don’t. I’m not interested. I just want to get on with my life... Let him go, Aru, just let him go. This is not good for you” (61).

Deshpande juxtaposes Aru’s conflict with that of Sumi’s in a different perspective in that, Aru, hopefully is willing to contest the mythical femininity while Sumi attempts to strike a continuum of it. Sumi, in fact, does not like those who support her husband. And Gopal stands here as one in case Sumi “intends never to lose sight of the fact that he is an adversary” (62). Sumi, has fully realized the futility of argument though she places her question before her husband – “Why did you get married at all, why did you have children?” (62). The question is the consequence of fact that Gopal hasn’t sent any greeting to Seema on her birthday. Deshpande brilliantly foregrounds the futility of the situation:

Emptiness, I realized then, is always waiting for us. The nightmare we most dread, of waking up among total strangers, is one we can never escape. And so it’s a lie, it means nothing, it’s just deceiving ourselves when we say we are not alone. ... All human ties are only a masquerade. Some day, some time, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth. Like Sudha did. And I. (52)
Sumi has been aware of the pretence of life and the plain truth that she has been alienated comes forth as a specimen of the fragmentation of psyche as she speculates, “And the truth is that it is not loneliness that is her enemy right now, it is a sense of alienation” (23). The very spectacle of Sumi flanked by her relatives makes her susceptible and vulnerable to the seismic rhythms of her alienation. Thus, Deshpande eventuates Sumi, a being, forcefully alienated, physically and emotionally. Physically, she is separated from her husband and emotionally, she is distanced from her relatives too. Deshpande intensifies Sumi’s conflict – internal and external through the snapshot of her mother Kalyani:

A classic post wedding picture, bride and groom formally posed against a dark background, the bride sitting in a chair, the groom by her, a tall table with paper flowers in a vase placed on the other side for symmetry . . . The man on the other hand is stern, his eyes hooded, arms folded across his chest in the usual ‘manly pose’ . . . And the way he is standing, he gives the impression of being by himself, wholly unaware of the girl sitting by him. His wife. (25-26)

Kalpana, the social activist in her article on “An Analysis of Violence and Resistance in Select Women’s Fiction” says, “The mother passes on the culture’s devaluation of the feminine to her daughter. Thus, weakness, powerlessness not only become associated with females, it also passes as essential traits from mother to daughters. Daughters thus cannot overcome this inheritance which disables and curbs them” (44).

In spite of the fact that Sumi wonders at the very proclamation of the word “fate” by Kalyani, she too falls in line with the “Chalked lines” since her perception
of life too is prejudiced beyond repair. Sumi feels for certain that “Destiny is just us and therefore inescapable, because we can never escape ourselves” (26). Sumi, thus can never escape herself – a fragmentation of self. Her fragmented psyche gets exposed: “For her, it [life] was a magician’s bag, full of odds and ends. Put your hand in and you never know what you might get hold of: a rabbit, a bird, a string of silk scarves, a chain of ten-rupee notes; Chance, yes, haphazard, yes, that too, but nothing predetermined” (MT 26).

One is given to perceive Sumi, as precariously perched on the cliff of her internal conflicts. Her yearning for love and identity, though it has a passionate intensity, is a direct product of mythical longing for companionship as Sumi is primarily a mythical debris, a residual steadfastly deep seated in her conservative position. Her simple nature is inclusive of strong emotions and a noticeable dash of acceptance and these elements are well under her sensory perception of the outside. There is no storm in her psyche and though this is the mark of a reasonable nature, on examination, this will not, one knows for sure, help her to sustain her existence.

Sumi is again Deshpande’s another woman from her armoury of intellect who yields little allegiance to emotion. And this is a good sample of a nobler spirit. Her love for Gopal is noble since it has been untainted by flesh. Her plan of life, in its realization of the existential nothingness, formulates a strategic endurance under duress, and it plays a considerable part in the novel. Her acceptance of her life as a destiny is the culmination of her meditation and confrontation with life, which offers her a striking personality as Diana Brydon states, “Female ‘passivity’ is not passivity at all, but the fruit of a strenuous and laborious mediation of women with the world and time” (181). Hence, though her personality is not very definable, it generates a metaphysical brightness that illuminates her character. For example, the following
observation by the novelist warrants mention here as Gopal recollects Sumi’s personality on a mythical equation called Hyperbole:

Sumi’s face was tranquil, all the effervescence settled down, leaving behind a clear sparkle, like that of crystal. And her skin, the skin for which I had so often tried to find a comparison and failed, was glowing after her bath, reflecting the pearly glow of the evening . . . And Sumi’s face, with its diaphanous veil of light and shadows, flickering as the aarti lamps moved, was as serene as the stone face of the goddess. (BV 88, 89)

Sumi, again is raised to the level of the Divine as Gopal perceives her as goddess: “I repeated the words of the song to Sumi, worshipping her from head to toe, and it was not sacrilege but an echo of the same supreme joy Purandaradasa had found in his Lord, Vithala . . . And I got it, a glimpse of the purest joy, the purest metal, untouched by any base alloy” (89).

To Sumi, Gopal is a less dignified canny escapist as he is much more interested in his dabbling of escapism rather than involvement with life. On the other hand, while justifying his state of helplessness, Sumi indicates that Gopal, at the bottom, is an alloy of reason and emotion though, neither of a very high order, as evidenced in the following situation, in which Kalyani levels a barrage of questions at Gopal: “How can you change so much Gopal, . . . what about your daughters? Have you thought of them? . . . Have you thought of what you have done to them?” (46-48).

Conspicuous among the woman of Deshpande’s creation, Kalyani emerges as an individual and independent woman by nature as seen in her contest of words with
Gopal. Deshpande records her moment of glory as she argues with Gopal for her daughter’s sake:

She calls him Gopala, dragging out the last vowel, loading the name with affection and tenderness. He [Gopal] is amazed that she speaks without hostility... ‘when Sumi married you, she was too young; but I was not anxious for her, you were older, you were sensible and you cared for her, yes, you did. I can still remember how you scolded me for being angry with her when she refused to nurse Seema.' (46)

Kalyani beseeches Gopal to forgive her “and don’t punish her [Sumi] for it”. She initiates a motivational reasoning in Gopal as “he tries to tell her that he has nothing against Sumi” and it is certain that “he never expected her to create for him the world he wanted” (47). When Kalyani cries uncontrollably, Gopal cries too as he hopefully asserts that Sumi “has done nothing wrong, she has done him no wrong, on the contrary, it is he . . .” (47).

Deshpande strategically manoeuvres Kalyani in such a way, that characterization essentially balances the ideals of life. Kalyani makes one realize, that Gopal’s renunciation of Sumi is in direct contradiction of the tendencies of his emotional desires and is sanctioned by his psyche that overrules even the demands of reasonableness. Gopal airs his voice of high passion, yet passionless in Sumi’s situation of separation, which has been obviously evident throughout the whole progress of his reaction to Sumi, Kalyani’s pleas and even Aru’s strong reaction towards him. Gopal emerges as one who is guided solely by passion. Reason might look like taking position when he argues his hapless condition, yet, his passion chalked by escapism goes hopelessly astray and is on the whole, mistaken.
A Matter of Time is more emphatically a novel of disappointment and disillusion. It is no longer a communion of a slice of life but a study of a single woman writhing beneath the evil tongs of fate. Deshpande, through her presentation of a web of Sumi’s relatives, weaves a larger puppet show with a greater complexity of psychic strings. By employing irony of event and situation, the novelist raises the novel to the post modernist situation, virtue looking on truth but failing to recognize. The story of Sumi and her aesthetic and pragmatic longing, mixed in judicious proportion, constitutes the quintessence of the novel. It is the story of Sumi, her seclusion from life and her tragedy by accident.

Marriage, as an institution, eventuates into a negating factor. When Kalyani and Goda discuss marriage, their voice carries the burden of myth. Yet, to them marriage is something “of love . . . of . . . wondrous things that happened in the past” (MT 118). As Sumi speculates, “Just so did the poet sing of the marriage of Shiva and Parvati, making of it a magical, awe-filled story, yet one that falls within the realm of belief because it sings of love, of the love of a man and a woman” (118). Sumi’s mother Kalyani sometimes calls it “destiny” (26). Sumi regards them as unfortunate products of destiny. For instance, Manorama’s parents do not come out of the same wavelength. It is her mother who decides her daughter’s education, “at a time when schooling for a girl was something that could come in the way of her marriage prospects” (119).

Soon after, Manorama “ruthlessly cut herself off from her family after her marriage” (120). The ethereal side of Manorama comes as she encounters the marital point. A responsive sort of lady, rather than an initiatory one, she realizes the importance of life as she begins to exhibit in severing her old relations for the new ones. Her idea of life is largely founded on her orthodoxy, which they feel has laid
down certain conventional laws of morality. And this is how Kalyani feels too. As Deshpande observes, “And so they were married” (119). Kalyani and Goda give a deep sigh when they reach this point and so much does it seem like the ending of a fairy tale that Charu adds: “And they lived happily ever after. So indeed it would seem from the response of the two women” (119).

The essential key of the book lies in its habitual recollection of emotion and events required by social tone. Marriage is a sublimation and this sublimation is a good thing and a foundation on which life is built. While marriage has the desired result restoring a cultural calm, it has another and surely intended effect in Sumi’s case. In her case, marriage as an infra structure rolls of into an ordinary common place thing ironically fixed on a bubble. Her life with Gopal culminates in the discovery that marriage has lost its potentiality to sustain growth. It subjugates and enslaves her and it leads her to “aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose” (Beauvoir 500). From this point of realization, the novel maintains, till the very end, the tragic overtones of Sumi’s life. In order to intensify Sumi’s grievous fix, Deshpande resorts to the use of memory.

Sumi, willingly engages herself with memories of the past and this exercise in nostalgia seems perfectly natural to Sumi. “Remembering, is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the present” (Bhabha 63). Eventually, realization of self takes place as the novelist records, “If she is, it is a purely impersonal search…, after Gopal left, Sumi thinks – retracing my steps, picking up things, thinking – is this it?” (MT 122).
Sumi is set apart from the other Deshpande’s protagonists in that she is not very vehement in her passion. She, though sensitive, has an impassioned apprehension of life. Her understanding of Gopal comes as an exquisite discrimination of the marital bliss, based on her perception of life. Sumi, thus, is what she is, a woman adorned with the conventional femininity, who has no command or persuasion either over herself or the situation in which she is in. Deliberately choosing to be herself, the weak and fragmentary self, Sumi sacrifices her talent, her vision, her womanhood in order to salvage her status. This could also be regarded an absolution of responsibility, a shirking of motherhood, since she is the mother of three children, and hence, she is responsible for the ultimate psychological disaster that rests on her.

Thus, *A Matter of Time* is a record of Sumi’s impassionate existence back dropped by her sense of loss and identity. Deshpande reveals to the readers, the profound reality of life that it is a matter of time that one should adhere consciously to the principles of life, so that the convulsive raptures of ego is set aside. Sumi is afraid of the fearful compulsion of life that she is responsible for the upkeep of her daughters, and is also helplessly aware of her dependence upon her husband. Tacitly, she has given herself to these fluctuating propositions. This becomes one of the reasons why, *A Matter of Time* could be perceived as a work of failure – a failure of ego. Gopal and Sumi, have succumbed to the pressures of their egos eventuating a symbolic sense of disharmony between man and woman. Deshpande maintains this spirit of misadventure as far away as ever at the end of the book. Coming down to the second generation, Gopal differs from the first, where man is really man, and hence has to nurture the family with psychological and physical sustenance. Gopal is not what is expected of a man as Sumi is not what is expected of a woman. Sumi and Gopal are made to carry out much of their disastrous marital experience and more
importantly, they begin gradually to lose a sense of vision. Both of them are the 
vehicles of this desperation of vision of life, with which they manipulate their 
conscious, deliberate, social life of marital nexus.

Therefore, Deshpande represents Sumi as realizing the reality of their marital 
union. Hence, Sumi experiences, a sort of life, to which, she is not a part. All that she 
knows of her Gopal is the impending failure.

For a brief while, Gopal and I were part of this eternal story too. We 
fell in love . . . But this passes . . . a time comes when the pleasures of 
the body pall. They taste flat, insipid, perhaps even bitter. We want 
love to last, we think when we begin that it will, but it never does; it 
transforms itself into a desire for possession, a struggle for 
power. (168)

Gopal’s desertion initiates this sense of loss of power of masculinity, with Sumi 
attempting to “contain her feelings . . . not to let them spill over”. Sumi considers that 
this way is the only way out “to cope with the reality” (172). Though life has run out 
of joint, Sumi attempts to hold on to the life line steadfastedly adamant. And so she 
considers Gopal’s desertion an accident as she makes a speculative attempt to clinch a 
meaning out of the situation. She contemplates, “You can never think of your own life 
as a series of happenings strung together. Even if it’s not a seamless whole, it is still a 
whole, with the stitches absorbed and invisible. Yet this incident, the accident, will be 
a watershed in their lives, marking a division between their lives before and 
after it” (173).

Sumi, deliberately attempts for the remedy. She does not want to be stricken 
by paralysis with the realization of the kind of life accorded to her. She feels, after all,
one has to learn to live with “the presence of despair,” dancing helplessly “in the wings” of life. One may, according to her, “as well sing and dance. Like the clowns in the circus keeping the darkness away with mirth and laughter” (183). She knows for certain, given the situation, to reject this is sure perdition and so one has to sway between the extreme conditions of fulfillment and frustration. Thus, she is part of the apprehension of reality for Sumi “had never imagined a time when it would no longer be in existence”. (184)

Sumi, known for her faculty of forgetting, sees to it that this desperation never surfaces, for she has embedded in her psyche, the epistemology of acceptance as she recollects, “that every revolution carries within it the seed of its own destruction. One oppression only replaces another” (214). This sense of reconciliation keeps her going. “Let that be” (107) constitutes her essential psyche.

Gopal is juxtaposed to this philosophical stature. He has answers ready for any question that Sumi asks and his comprehension of life runs similar to Sumi’s understanding of it. As he tells Premi,

In fact, it’s the secret of life itself. We know it’s all there, the pain and suffering, old age, loneliness and death, but we think, somehow we believe that it’s not for us. The day we stop believing in this untruth, the day we face the truth that we too are mortal, that this is our fate, as well, it will become difficult, almost impossible to go on. And if it happens to all of us, the human race will become extinct. (134)

Deshpande develops the subtle, yet complex relationships that exist between Gopal and Sumi, and then Gopal and others. The novelist traverses three generations, through obviously realized ethics and familial values and the eventuating dilemma.
This dilemma, as it recurs, develops the continuity of crisis, intensified by the continuity of the influence of the past. Kalyani and Sumi, then, converge as the mythical residues and their growing burden of consciousness, in fact, gets stuck up in the psyche. And, then of course, Deshpande’s principal focus is not simply a failure of the super ordinate male order, but the feminine incapability, that constitutes the ultimate crisis. The novelist generates a profound kind of realism rendering the processes of life as truly and sincerely as she can, but she does so largely in order to supplement certain judgements of life.

The chapters that follow Kalyani’s and Premi’s altercation with Gopal, strategically move toward gaining sympathy for Sumi. Hence, the focus of attention shifts from the inter-play and contest of life-value to the conflict that arises out of Sumi’s death. Sumi ultimately represents the feminine split punctuated by the cleavage of the individual and the society. This is one of the simple facts of the modern society. A good deal of femininity depends on how one defines it and how far one traces it back to the historic pattern. Deshpande’s portrayal of Sumi, develops a number of expectations, naturally, in the reader’s mind and one begins to have assumptions about the progress of the story.

Sumi comes as one historic debris as she enacts a continuum of the previous generation. In terms of Sumi’s conflict, a strategic rethinking becomes imperative. Nevertheless, Sumi is Deshpande woman and hence one has to take her as a symbolic authority of pragmatic feminism. Acceptance of harsh realities is one virtue that constitutes the embodiment of life. Sumi’s basic vitality lies in her clarifications of her series of experimental mistakes and the underlying responses to such experiences.
One is rather led to believe that Sumi’s experiences and the underlying attitudes she possesses project her as the sole representative of femininity. In short, Sumi’s basic attitudes of life centre on the moral authority as mother, rather than woman and so she ends up in naught. An authorial intrusion like the following strengthens the case in point. Deshpande writes, “I don’t understand how feminists can argue that a man is responsible for his family. If you reject patriarchy, you must reject all these things based on patriarchy too” (DO 214).

There is then the resolution in Deshpande that feminism in itself might only be a symptom of unnaturalness. For, the novelist believes that such feminist orientation could only share sterility in woman. Sumi, for instance, has within her this strange yet passionate knowledge of postmodern reality and that is why she attempts to transcend the limits of femininity in order to clinch a totality of existence. This is one new kind of vitality one sees in Sumi. This vitality is her virtue, which ultimately rejects merely legal or radical experience. In her gradual conscious realization of what she is seeking tends to give her specific vitality to maintain a liberalist attitude as she tells Gopal that she wants him to know that she has no role in this scheme, this plan, to take Gopal to court. She disapproves of it entirely.

Sumi passionately evolves a new epistemology of life as she tells her husband. She says:

The truth is, Gopal, I want Aru to go on with her life. I’m selfish and lazy, I want life to be easy and comfortable. And I want my child’s life to be that way too. I want her to enjoy the good things in life, I want her to relish it and not spit it out because she
finds it bitter. Baba thinks… Aru may take to the law, that she may become a lawyer,…(MT 220)

Deshpande, eventually fixes Sumi in the right perspective of things. Sumi is apprehensive of the fact that “we’ve lost a whole section of our lives” (221). Sumi’s death by accident paralyses the ongoing negotiations of life manoeuvred by her. This is “the most terrible moment of all” (235) as everyone unable to bear it, stands stupefied by silence that is ironically pounding in everyone’s skull. In order to intensify the pathetic perception of the novel, Deshpande brings in Gopal, “doing his mourning for his dead here, now, in private” (236). He stares at the river, the symbol of life and fertility, and then he hits the ultimate truth of life, as he speculates, “Letting the ashes of the dead float away with the river, he has seen it all, he knows how ephemeral it is, not just human lives, but the grief and mourning of the living. Everything passes, nothing remains” (237).

Gopal’s resolve to take “some of Sumi’s ashes for immersion in the Alaknanda, a river, Sumi and he had seen together long ago” (245), ritualizes and dramatizes a solemn ceremonial gesture, which is an evident manifestation of man as ritual residual. The ultimate relation of Gopal with Sumi, is a religious ritualistic residue in which the relation of the human soul to God is celebrated.

Gopal does not want to reveal the intentions of his plan since he feels “that there is more to this journey than this immersion” (245). This is a place in which one finds the old stable ego of Gopal shatter and the ritualistic residual Gopal become recognizable in every aspect. Gopal is described by Deshpande as coming under the direct influence of the irresistible mythical encounter. And so, one could presume, that Gopal’s behaviour under this situation might be assumed to be projective of
chauvinism of the male ego. This scene is nothing but an aesthetic proof and rhetoric
evidence in the hands of Deshpande to assert that the male individuality has lost the
hopes of refurbishing itself anew. And thus, Gopal has been thrust into the cultural
segment which pronounces his perdition.

Yet, Deshpande, in her usual self, takes the close of the novel with a hint of
reconciliation and resolution, as one finds the bereaved Aru is comforted by Gopal
after having been “invaded by a piercing pain” (246). There is then a note of peace
generated as “They look at each other” and when Aru says “Papa, you go. We’ll be all
right, we’ll be quite all right. don’t worry about us” (246), as Deshpande completes
the destiny of time with her philosophy of life: “If it is indeed true that we are bound
to our destinies, that there is no point struggling against them, even then this remains
– that we do not submit passively or cravenly, but with dignity and strength. Surely,
this, to some extent, frees us from our bonds?” (246).

_A Matter of Time_ is a brilliant record of the falsity of the male ego and the
intricacy of its self deception. It could be regarded an everlasting outward
manifestation of the inner turmoil that is caused of a strange moment in which, a
husband for no reason, walks out on his family. Deshpande, a supremely conscious
artist of man woman relationship is quite unaware of the self deception of the male
ego. No wonder Deshpande emerges as a wondrous artist, who with the vehemence of
her rhetorical passion, brings out her sensitive and impassioned apprehension of
femininity that has been historically yoked to the male super structure.

Feminism is a wide spread phenomenon and empowerment of women is
realized to be the need of the day. While Indian women are still under the clutches of
culture, the prairie women of Canada are tough enough to break the shackles that bind
them and forge an identity for themselves. The next chapter analyses the women of Canada, from the novels of Margaret Laurence.