CHAPTER V

The Journey Forward: Moving On

By forgiving and choosing to move on, one takes the power back to morph it into positive (Tripputi, finestquotes.com).

Human beings are the only animals whose existence is like a continual process. Man is born like a process, he is ever evolving and his being consists in his becoming. That is the crisis, the crisis of his very being, hence the cause of his anxiety, tension and anguish. It is a strange paradox that despite all anxieties, tensions and anguish, the movement in human life continues literally as well as metaphorically. Man continues to grow physically and move from one place to another along with moving from one relationship to another in his life.

Shashi Deshpande's novel Moving On captures the essence of life as not to stagnate by taking anything or any relationship for granted; as the living phenomenon goes on moving from the known towards the unknown, from the familiar to the unfamiliar. The suggestive idea of flowing with life instead of refuting its currents by making changes in one's own mind-set; makes this novel quite distinctive from Deshpande's earlier fiction. It is quite obvious that the author had made a smooth and gradual transition from her earlier novels to the recent ones. As the author journeys through her life, her approach and perspectives to look at life and relationships change, as it can happen with any mature and sensitive writer. Her perceptive and mature mind experiences and portrays the dire need to maintain relationships not by one-sided adjustment and introspection on the part of the female protagonist; rather she envisages the quintessential woman in the process of her evolution, moving on in her life despite the oddities and imperfections in her relationships.

The earlier as well as the latest novels written by Shashi Deshpande, mark a significant departure from the net-work of themes like nationalism and east-west encounter as chosen by many other writers, in favour of personal and individualistic themes of secretive and subjective problems and predicaments besetting the lives of her protagonists. The thematic and the ideological preoccupations of her novel
Moving On reflect Deshpande’s efforts to redefine women in the context of the incredible socio-economic changes which according to the author subsequently lead to intellectual changes and expectations of the protagonists to some extent. Consequently, Moving On can be described as a well-estimated account of contemporary Indian woman’s physical, emotional, psychological and intellectual needs and aspirations, detecting and unearthing the conflicts and catastrophes of this archetypical woman who in the process of her progression, is shedding the conventional image.

The title of the novel has many connotations like moving on from life to death (the death of Manjari’s Baba – Badri Narayan), moving on from death to life (as Manjari, a widow at the age of twenty-one struggling to live after the death of her husband Shyam), moving on with the natural growth-pattern of all human beings and in the process shedding childhood innocence, becoming a rebel to assert and fight for her wishes and entering the domains of complex adulthood (which exposes her the multidimensionality of relationships by foregrounding the physical aspect). In a metaphorical sense, the novel urges the readers to move on in life and not to cling to transient relationships, moving on without bothering to know what the destiny has in store for them. The message is hidden in the title of the novel. It is the imminent fact that life never ends, not even after death; it moves on and beyond death.

Moving On, covers an account of four generations and presents a kaleidoscope of relationships - budding, growing, maturing and disbanding because of the intrinsic contradictions and challenges. It is a story of the secret lives of men and women, who love, hate, fight and negotiate with passion and intensity which is simply enthralling. It is a spellbinding tale encompassing many interrelated tales mapping a larger network of relations and offering a genealogy of characters resulting in a cuddling up of narratives in narratives, repeating lives-within-lives. There are different frameworks involving a story of a father who exhibits an unusual interest in human body and its mysteries, a story of a mother who tries to put the family together by her ruthless exercise of the power of love, a story of a sister who is separated in childhood, a story of an uncle who plays the game of life and death as a member of the Bombay Underworld. The novel also includes the tale of an ardent young woman who tears the family apart by indulging in a passionate love-affair, the story of a
woman who is unsure of what to do in her life, thereby undulating here and there to
make sense of the world and of her own sexuality. It is also a story of the dissolution
of families through steady estrangement, tapering off of bonds, and hostility and
rivalry between siblings.

The novel sets into motion with the protagonist’s discovery of her father’s
diary (dating from the 1st of January 1997 to 30th March 1998); facilitating the
discovery of her own self through unlocking of the past, rescuing the old memories
and recasting events and responses. Using the structure of a domestic novel and pages
from the diary of Manjari’s Baba; the author explores the private lives of the
protagonist, her father Badri Narayan, Manjari’s sister and her mother, situating these
lives in the public context. On one hand there is an effort to separate each strand by
dividing the novel into twenty-one chapters, and on the other hand, there are attempts
to intermingle these strands and retrieve vital information about each character and
event in the past, from the pages of Baba’s diary interspersed in other chapters. The
discovery of Baba’s diary and its reading by Manjari, is a process of re-visiting, re-
telling and recovering her past by the protagonist. It leads to Manjari’s discovery that
she cannot live in the present without coming to terms with a past that she wants to
erase from her memory and it comes with the knowledge that there is no memory that
is completely erased.

Memory is a recurring theme in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Baba’s
diary re-telling the past, mediates the present and the past, signifying forgetting and
remembering as important vectors constituting a duality that the characters move
through. The ensuing struggle to reconcile nostalgia with reality and the fire of the
body with the desire for companionship races to an unexpected resolution, churning to
produce complicated emotional landscapes. Using memory as a narrative style seems
a very simple and straightforward way of writing to Deshpande’s critics, but she
thinks it the other way. In an interview entitled “In Conversation with Shashi
deshpande” with Gita Viswanath, Deshpande tells how she feels about her narration:

It’s not simple and it’s not straightforward. I have a non-chronological
narrative. I have to work extremely hard; it doesn’t come to me in a
linear fashion. I work through a person’s memory. There is a person’s
narrative and the story comes through her memory. I have to put together a chaotic mass of material. It’s neither simple nor straightforward as far as I concerned. But in a way, it’s realism. I don’t see any reason why I should write excepting the way it comes to me. I have never felt the least desire to write any other way except the way I want to write (Naik, Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande 231).

The above statement of Shashi Deshpande makes it quite clear that the author never works through a linear unfolding of lives. She believes that human life is not a straight progression from its beginning to its end. Through the character of Manjari, the author recasts many events and characters of the yesteryears. The present makes its own demands: a defiant daughter, devious property sharks and a lover who threatens to throw her life out of gear again Manjari tells her own story as well as the story of the writings of her father as well as her mother. She is a narrator as well as a participator and delineates her own self from the perspective of a daughter, a mother, a woman and a narrator. She also performs the function of a reader who reads the accounts from Baba’s diary, thereby unlocking the past of her family. Moving On is therefore a representation of the author’s belief in moving on in life in a circular way which makes past, present and future blend and influence one another. Therefore, the past is presented in Baba’s voice and the present is revealed in the first person in Manjari’s voice. Through the use of this alternating voice, Shashi Deshpande not only forthrightly articulates a thematic and technical maturity by giving double perspectives but also effectively reveals her skill in telling the amalgam of past and present happenings in a circular fashion in realism, with truth of detail under typical circumstances. She has been vocal enough to say in many interviews that she believes in presenting life as it is, and not as it should be. Therefore, the use of double narrative in first person, one in the pages of Baba’s diary and the other through the thought process of the protagonist Manjari; is an interesting technique devised by Deshpande to reduce the monotony of the elaboration on the relationships in one extended family.

Baba’s diary validates the intricacies of relationships and the tensions between existential polarities of the head and the heart, the body and the mind, as explained by
his daughter Manjari. The beauty and boldness of body over mind is established so convincingly; making it intervene between the heart and the mind time and again, breaking down the foundation of all the relationships. The beauty, boldness and the supremacy of the body over the mind surfaces throughout the novel in the same manner as the spirit of rebellion subverting the easy flow of events. Theme of women’s sexuality binds Deshpande’s all novels and Deshpande has described this aspect within and outside marriage. But it is only in Moving On, that Deshpande has taken the theme of body; the body over powering the mind. Talking about the theme of body in Moving On, Deshpande says to the interviewer Deblina Chakraborty:

This is the first time I have made the human body the subject of my focus. I have attempted to explore physicality in all its facets—from sexuality to physiology, through the form of novel. In fact one of the key characters is an anatomist (Deshpande, The Times of India 6).

The women characters in the other novels of Deshpande seem to be rather restricted by the natural functions of their body. For them, growing up into a woman is something shameful and a torture. But it is creditable that in Moving On, the novelist has not ignored the demands of a female body and in fact, made the most part of the novel revolve around this theme. Anything like this was yet to happen before Moving On. Raman Seldon’s comments on the changing times and changing perceptions can be justified in the context of Manjari. He feels that the time has come when “woman must uncensor herself; recover her goods, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal. She must throw off her guilt...” (Seldon, A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory 150-51).

The preoccupation with body runs in Manjari’s family. Her father Badri Narayan is an anatomist and the obsession with the body starts with him, which pervades in all the subsequent generations through the characters of Malu, Manjari and even in his granddaughter Sachi. He takes delight in human body and its miraculous functions. Manjari’ s understanding of Baba’s obsession with the human body is:

His was a more detached view. And yet, the admiration was intense and fervent. He had absolute faith in the perfection of the human body.
If fault lines showed up in the execution of the plan, that did not take away the perfection of the plan itself. He sang praises, I remember, of the symmetry of the body. A symmetry that was not just aesthetic, but functional. He spoke of the efficiency of the organs, of the superefficient back-up system. Look at the kidney, and the liver, it’s like having a huge chemical factory, a scrupulously selective waste disposal system within us, he said (23).

To Baba, human body was a marvellous creation of God, with it exquisite network of nerves and architectural design and co-ordinated movements. But he never looked at the beauty of the body with “the luscious curves of the female form” (23). He was more interested in the swift movements of the body, its full potential and its grace in action. Manjari tells more of Baba’s delight in the human body, “‘Haddi doctor’- that was my father’s nickname in the hospital. When I first heard it, I thought it was insulting; I was furious. But Baba laughed. ‘I am a bone man,’ he said. ‘It’s the right name for me’ ” (23).

Baba also co-related the physical body with its emotional aspect. He knew that “emotions can be faked, lips can speak untruths, but the body never lies” (108-109). The more he studied the human body, the more he realized that “everything in it was ordered to a purpose; he saw in it a perfection, an exquisite balance, a harmony” (107). He “believed like the Buddha did, that the human body itself is a privilege” (112). On his wife Vasu’s death, he was left with nothingness. As a scientist, he rejected the idea. To him, matter never ceased to exist; it changed form. Therefore, there was always something which remained. Reading the Upanishads with Ramchandra Sir, he ‘absorbed this idea of the body being “only the outer covering, within it the essence, the unseen formless essence, from which the long infinite thread of life unwinds. But for humans who experience life, who get life through the senses, the not-seen, the not-felt is not much comfort” (111-112). Baba also gives another philosophical idea about body when he says, “We can never deny the ties of the body, we can never leave them behind us. The ties we forge through our bodies are the strongest, the hardest to sever” (114). In the last phase of his life, he realizes that his body is giving up on him, but his mind is clear that the world is receding from him. He is angry at times that he is to leave the familiar world and go to the unfamiliar
world. He remembers the words of Dr. Kapadia which he said in one of his lectures: “A man possesses nothing certainly save a brief loan of his body. Yet the body of man is capable of much curious pleasure” (304). In nostalgia, he relates failure in his married life to his preoccupation with body. He feels that he failed in communicating to Vasu, the “enormous tenderness” he felt for her. He remembered how after every physical union with his wife, he thought he was a beast who wanted to possess her physically. Baba realizes after the death of Vasu:

Why did I fail to make her understand that what I wanted was not to possess her body, or rather, not only to possess her body, but myself complete by merging into her? I now know the entire truth what I had heard my teacher say: if we humans are the greatest marvels in creation, we are also the greatest mysteries to ourselves. I continue to be amazed by the genius, the questioning nature, the ceaseless probing of humans to resolve the mysteries of the universe, the way in which, gradually, but surely, so many mysteries have been resolved (111).

It is after Vasu’s death that Baba realizes the biggest flaw of the human body—its transience. Malu, Baba’s daughter, dies after giving birth to a girl child, exposing unpredictable ways through which human body can react. Manjari remembers painfully, “Malu’s body went on convulsing, writhing into such frightening contortions that I couldn’t hold her down” (322). Life changes for the whole family, plunging into grief, after Malu’s death.

Vasu is not preoccupied with body, like her husband Badri Narayan. Baba always considered her a frigid woman who was incapable of responding to his sexual passions. Even for Manjari who was full of passion for her husband Shyam; her mother’s frigidity was a mystery. In her last story ‘Blackout’, Vasu treats the body as a canvas for painting male brutality, by portraying a muslim woman continuously battered by her husband. It was completely unlike of Vasu’s other stories in which she ‘always ignored the body’. In this story, the protagonist, after her husband is caught by the police, undresses herself in a dark room and touches the multicoloured bruises with a sigh, saying “I can sleep tonight” (174). There was something sensuous in the way she wrote about the protagonist making “the body came in with vengeance-the
man’s body dragged out and beaten to pulp, the woman’s body covered with bruises” (176).

Shashi Deshpande has always highlighted the importance of bodily touch as a means of ushering positive energy in relationships. Manjari reminisces her childhood, when she had ‘an innocent relationship with her body, with her unexpressed sexual desires and her body’s needs’ (71). She delightfully recollects Gayatri’s hand on her neck, gently caressing her and her “inhaling the sandalwood fragrance of her body, Feeling, too, the reverberations entering my body from hers when she spoke” (34). Manjari, who is always in awe of her mother’s body, like her Baba, remembers the touch of her sister and her mother. She remembers how happy she used to be in the embrace of her mother to “inhale with rapture the sandalwood fragrance of her body, feel the smoothness of the bare skin of her arm against my cheek. I am loved. I am wanted” (44). Manjari also feels secure by reflecting upon the rapture of inhaling a, “Baba-Mai smell, the smell of cosiness, of been loved and petted. The smell indeed of happiness itself. At times there was a faint whiff of another odour, which she realized much later, when she entered that world herself, was that of their mingled bodies of sex” (115). Manjari inherits this passionate love for the beauty of body from Baba. Both Manjari and Malu grow up by hearing the miracles of human body from their father. Manjari says: “If Baba was the priest, I was the acolyte” (24).

Moving On also focuses on the transience, deterioration and decay of human body over the years. Manjari was hesitant to visit her mother who was fast approaching her death as she could not think of her mother’s sandalwood fragrant body, stinking and with one amputated leg. But she visits her at her deathbed for her own ‘atonement’ and ‘punishment’. Manjari gives vent to her guilt-feelings:

I often thought of us as murderers; I thought we had murdered both Malu and Shyam. Sometimes I thought of myself as the First Murderer and Mai as the Second Murderer, sometimes it was the other way round. No, I didn’t want to bring all that back. Yet, I knew I had to see her; it would be my atonement as well as my punishment. And so I went, not because Raja had shamed me into going, but because I knew I had to (323).
Family is an institution of utmost importance in Indian society with its focus upon the importance of striking a balance in various relationships. It is the main axis of *Moving On* as is the case with the other novels of Deshpande. Beginning with *That Long Silence* and going right up to *Moving On*, Deshpande reveals her unflinching faith in family values and ties. She agrees with a few other writers that family relationship is a theme on which epics after epics can be written. The celebrated author upholds the sanctity of family and familial relationships and believes that any rift or failure in a relationship causes irreparable damage to an individual’s psyche. The protagonist Manjari’s own story is therefore incomplete without her relationships with the other characters in the novel. It is through this intricate web of characters that she finds meaning in her existence within the known cultural ethos, social pressures and personal complexes. Weaving the stories of various characters like Baba, Manjari, her mother, Raja, Gayatri in the centre, Raman and a few other characters on the periphery; makes *Moving On* a book about families. The epigraph of this book reads, “All the stories that have ever been told are the stories of families - from Adam and Eve onward” (1). Despite facing the disintegration of her family, Manjari’s faith in family as an enduring institution remains intact. Baba also thinks of faith as “The adhesive that holds things together” (342). When asked by different interviewers, regarding the frame-work of her novels; Shahi Deshpande replied that relationships and particularly the family relationships are and will be the cornerstone of all her books. In *Moving On* too, the frame-work is the same but the book reveals the ironies, vagaries and compulsions involving an extended family.

With *Moving On*, Deshpande comes back again to the subject of restoring faith in the belief that family relationships is a perennial theme in English literature. The author has dwelt on the Indian cultural scene and presented a faithful picture of familial and marital bonds in Indian society. The protagonist Manjari, through her Baba’s diary, tells the readers about her father’s relationship with the other members of his family. She feels that such knowledge is very crucial to move on in one’s life as, “We need to know our parents, without this knowledge we can’t go on, we will always remain incomplete” (12).
The story of Manjari’s Baba and his family is not a multigenerational mock-epic family saga. There is no idiosyncratic or metaphorical character. Instead the family structure reveals the verisimilitudes of everyday life with the characters representing reassuring texture of everyday life. All these banal details like putting the key in the latch and opening the door, description of all the rooms of the house, the door at the staircase etc. along with an emphasis on the satiation of human needs like love, affection, care, concern, rivalry, rebellion, sensuality and hate lend a powerful and paradoxical structure to the novel, making it a document of social realism. The novel is also replete in negative values like rivalry, rebellion and hate which make it a faithful picture of Indian family life with its emphasis on adjustment despite many odds in the familial, marital and filial bonds.

All the relationships in Moving On revolve round the anti-thesis between body and mind, unquestioned fidelity and open rebellion, rationality and sentimentalism. The hidden mysteries of life are incessantly unravelled through relationships- short-term and long-lasting, consequential and futile, social and familial. The incomprehensibility of life is overpowered by death, with its potentiality to weaken the existing relationships and demolish established identities. Moving On, like every other novel of Deshpande, exhibits the author’s unnatural obsession with death. There are deaths in series like the death of Manjari’s father Badri Narayan, her first mother and second mother, Manjari’s sister Malu, RK, Manjari’s aunt Gayatri and Manjari’s husband Shyam. A succession of deaths in Manjari’s house gives no time to her family to grieve and heal, “to pick up the pieces, to align them and put things in a cast” (47). Under the shadow of death, all the relationships disintegrate and the essential goodness of life is lost. The lives of the survivors Badri Narayan and Manjari, are “dictated to by the dead. It was they who, even after their death, shaped our lives” (41) and to Manjari, “the words of the dead matter more than the living” (21). Reading the pages from Baba’s diary, Manjari feels Baba’s fear of death despite his ‘fist-raising gesture of defiance’ (21). Death is the greatest fear of man and Manjari could understand Baba’s fear of death revealed by him by pouring his thoughts on the pages, only after reading his diary after his death. Death does not dissolve the partnership between the father and the daughter, as she feels her Baba making her a partner by sharing with her his fear of ‘ceasing to exist’. Shashi
Deshpande shares a painful truth with her readers, a bitter reality of life, as how children turn their back on parents when they grow up. Manjari too, realizes this late, in her nostalgic moments after Baba’s death:

And then I think of Baba sitting alone in the house, writing, and his loneliness swells about me. I think of him, his wife dead, one child gone estranged, and I put my head on the table and wept loudly and noisily the way I had cried as a child, the sobs startling even me, the tears falling on Baba’s writing, leaving inky trails down the page (22).

After being face to face with a series of deaths, Manjari also realizes another irony of life that “death, just as birth, knits us into the being of a house because ‘the finality of death’ keeps our memory chained to a place. With birth, there is a moving on, a going ahead, memories piling up, diluting the original ones’ (75). The use of ‘birth’ and ‘death’ as contrasting and complementary factors of life, demonstrate the philosophical and reflective mind of the author. In the same philosophical vein, Deshpande further brings into fore another reality that death also awakens the conscience of the characters and leads them to self-realization. It is a patient’s death in the hospital that takes Badri Narayan through the corridors of memory, to his mother who met a similar kind of end. Again, it is only after the death of her husband Shyam that Manjari’s hidden-self starts surfacing, making her surprised at her own self. To her utter bewilderment, she feels dazed and lost, saying:

I had entered a dark airless tunnel..., in which nothing could grow, nothing could survive. Worst of all was the feeling that I was separated from humankind, that I no longer belonged to the world of ordinary people, ordinary living; each thing I did was a painful reminder of what had happened to us. I had lost the innocence which makes it possible to face each day with hope. Time is the greatest healer, they say. But for me time was the enemy as well, taking him into memory, eventually, making even the memories fade, so that finally I was left with nothing (326).

The death of near and dear ones bring chaos and disintegration in the protagonist’s life but the intensity of pain it leaves is a measure of the relationship she
shared with the dead person. In the last few pages of the novel, the protagonist makes a comparison between the agony she had undergone at the death of Shyam and Malu:

And there’s Malu, Malu whose death left an aching emptiness inside me. Shyam’s death devastated me, for Shyam was my lover, he was my companion. In losing him, I became a woman without a partner. But Malu was a part of me; she was connected to my very being, my soul. When she died, it was like losing something of my own self (327).

It was Sachi, who thrusts Manjari out of that dark tunnel into everyday life, as Sachi’s demands, her talkative nature, her love to lead life to the fullest, shook Manjari out of deadness into arguments, anger, irritation and subsequently laughter. The succession of deaths in her family leave their imprints on Manjari’s life, disrupting the routine of life, but life goes on like a flowing river, sometime turbulent and other times placid. The journey of life goes on, urging all the survivors to face the current bravely, confronting its storms and challenges. Deshpande speaks about the polar-opposites in the same breath: renouncing and indulging, taking and leaving, loving and hating. Life is mind-boggling, making the mind move through the extremes so thoroughly that the polar opposites slowly merge into each other making a reader arrive at a third point which shows that both aspects belong to the same phenomenon. The integrated understanding creates a centre which realizes that the opposites are complimentary, not contradictory. It becomes a magnet that draws all the scattered iron files to the person concerned.

The spirit of rebelliousness is a dominant feature in the characters of Deshpande. In Moving On, rebelliousness and defiance is visible quite overtly in all the relationships. Badri Narayan’s father “was something of a rebel. He was also, what is more rare, a man whose actions scrupulously followed his convictions” (4). He was the first in his village to go for school and college education but along with returning with a BA degree, he came back becoming a Gandhian, subsequently marrying a Harijan Girl and leaving home after being disowned by his father. The married life was a fleeting one as the girl died soon after the marriage. The rebelliousness resurfacing, makes him marry the second time, this time with an
orphan girl with a Mangal in her horoscope only to live up to his ideals. Badri Narayan, in many respects was like his father. He reveals his true nature in his diary, “I have always been a questioning man; asking questions was the main tenet of my professional life. I tried to instil it in my students as well, telling them that to accept anything unquestioningly was to insult our capacity to think. The habit of asking questions, so deeply ingrained in me, still remains (49).

Manjari’s mother Vasu, who was widely known for her reticence and reserve, inhibited ways, shyness from strangers and intimidation from crowds; secretly loved her freedom and space. Manjari realized this facet of her mother’s personality quite late. She realized that what Vasu “valued most was freedom, freedom to be by herself, to be on her own, freedom from our constant demands on her, from our claims, from the need to be aamchi Mai” (125). Through the character of Vasu, Deshpande lays bare the soul of a quite, shy and reticent woman who secretly longs for some time to fulfil her creative desires. Vasu represents many Indian women who dutifully take upon themselves their duties as wives and mothers, forgetting their duties towards their own selves, suppressing their inner needs and feeling frustrated subsequently. When a woman critic spoke with contempt of Vasu’s stories, calling these as ‘reactionary and anti-women’, Vasu was angry but maintained her usual silence, but her face betrayed her inner clamour. Manjari could feel the turbulence going on in her mother’s mind:

Vasu’s face, I think, more than most people’s, showed the close connection between the emotions and physiognomy. I was torn by pity, I wanted to hold her close and comfort her, I wanted to take away that pinched look and bring back the composed, in-control-of-herself Vasu. But I could not help, for she would not admit her hurt to me. Perhaps the fact that our daughters then following their own paths and were no longer part of our life, added to her unhappiness. (199)

But Vasu threw off her self-imposed restraint all of a sudden, when she wrote her story ‘Blackout’, which was not usual as her other stories of women, love, marriage and home.
Manjari, the main protagonist of the novel, who was an obedient and self-effacing girl, turns into a rebel in the later part of her life. Unlike most of Indian girls, she does not hesitate to ask her father to let her have a drink with Raja. Her love with Shyam was a love at the first sight which shocks her parents. She gives another shock to her parents by posing for a photograph before Shyam’s camera. The relentlessness of their opposition to her relationship with Shyam angers her, leading her to give shock after shock to her parents particularly to her mother. She opposes her mother and gives vent to her anger by kissing Shyam on his lips, “a brazen declaration, not only of my love for Shyam, but of my defiance of Mai” (186). Manjari’s father also opposed her relationship with Shyam, dissuading her from this affair, explaining her that she is naive and doesn’t know what she wants. All the protagonists of Deshpande are bold and defiant but conform to the ideals of Indian women as prescribed in scriptures or sanctioned by cultural norms. Moving On, a relatively new novel of Deshpande establishes a relation between traditions of committed social realism and the epistemological adventurousness of modern Indian woman who does not overthrow her former role but reveal the modernistic strain on her mind which perturbs her cultural rootedness. Manjari who initially needed everyone’s approval for every small task, who always wanted to please every one, declares shamelessly before her parents, “It’s not Shyam, it’s I who don’t want to wait. I want him, right now” (187). Her mother tries to explain that it was only infatuation and sexual attraction, but Manjari, the new woman, knows her mind very well, “But it was not. On the contrary, all the confusion had vanished. My body was clear now about what it wanted; it wanted Shyam. It wanted Shyam’s love, it wanted his body. I had no doubts about it at all” (187). Unruly Manjari transgresses the defined domains of her parents and marries Shyam; giving the greatest blow to her father who got so much bewildered by this decision, “that a girl so intent on her career, so devoted to her parents, could turn overnight into a passionate, rebellious woman. Hormones, I told myself; it is the hormones raging in her body” (203).

Mother-daughter relationship is considered a very close relationship in Indian families. But in Deshpande’s novels, the protagonists never shared a strong chemistry with their mothers. They rather faced the hostility of their mothers. Saru, Jaya, Manjari and even the protagonists of the other novels of Deshpande had mental-
blocks in their relationship with their mothers. Manjari, the protagonist always felt insecure in the company of her mother and had a vague feeling that Mai loves Malu more than her. She had to really work hard, winning her smile and encouraging words. But for Malu, it was natural and effortless. She remembers that “Malu didn’t have to work at all, she just had to be” (44). In her whole childhood, Manjari spared no occasion to please her but when Vasu disapproves Shyam as life-partner for Manjari, she becomes fierce and uncompromising. The rift in the mother-daughter relationship becomes wider and wider after Manjari’s marriage.

For Manjari, living with Shyam in a dark, tiny room and keeping aloof from her in-laws whose loud-voices penetrated the walls of her room, was a period of acute unhappiness. She missed her parents and longed to go to them, but was afraid of Mai’s censoriousness and also expecting no consolation or words of encouragement from her. She expressed her rebellion by rejecting any sort of help even from her father. Like in the other novels of Deshpande, it was the protagonist’s father who understood her daughter and shared better chemistry with her, than her mother. He knew her daughter’s defiant nature but empathised with her, as he writes in his diary, “Looking back now, it seems to me, Jiji did the right thing by rejecting our help. It enabled her to move on, to get beyond what happened” (245).

Raja is another rebel like Manjari who also marries against the wishes of his parents. Sachi is also a rebel, who is ready to get into film production in spite of Manjari’s resistance and doesn’t need her mother’s permission to drink with BK. Not only that, she also starts interfering in her personal life. Manjari herself relates, “I have seen how she is suspicious of anyone she thinks I am friendly with. I have suffered from her rudeness, her atrocious behaviour with any male who showed the slightest interest in me” (215). Manjari has mixed feelings for Sachi, sometime repulsive and other time loving. She calls her a bad fairy in her story because she brought chaos, fear, death and disintegration into their lives. But she loves her and calls her a good fairy as she feels, it was:

Sachi who rolled back the darkness from Baba’s and Mai’s life and brought some kind of peace into their tortured lives. She changed our lives too, Anand’s and mine, bursting into the small room we had
closeted our-selves in, breaking into the intense closeness between us. With her loud cries for attention, with her clamour and her demands, she pulled Anand out of his silence, she made him talk, she made him laugh, she took away his frightening dependence on my moods. They became allies (326).

In Moving On, every rebel accepts the rebellion of his or her offspring as a part of life, not as a natural off shoot of his or her own doing. Even Baba, Manjari’s father doesn’t equate disobedience with rebellion and relates it to the process of growing and moving on in life. To him, “Disobedience is not the original sin; in fact I don’t see it as a sin at all. It is a part of growing up, of moving on. Without the serpent we would have remained forever our child-selves, living in a state of innocence, nothing happening, our story stalled. We need the serpent to keep the story moving” (205). The past amalgamates with the present, but the present pays for the past, with the juxtaposing of the actor and the acted upon. The rebel of past is made to tolerate the collapse of relationships grounded in defiance. But at the end of the novel, this spirit of rebellion sublimates into surrender, an unwanted re conciliation with the incomprehensible patterns of life. Every rebel accepts the rebellion of his/her offspring as a part of life, not as a natural off shoot of his or her doing. It seems that this spirit of rebellion is more inherited than acquired. Rebellion as a projection of modernity and growth of individuals, as projected by Shashi Deshpande doesn’t seem very persuasive and realistic.

The traditional concept of sex outside marriage as taboo is fast losing its importance in the current times. The society today is not that very rigid in giving a woman liberty to give expression to her pleasure in sex. Woman today are not very inhibited in giving expression to their sexual needs. Promila Kapur, a renowned sociologist concludes in her study Love, Marriage and Sex, “All these findings suggest that the negative attitude towards sex or that of condemnation has lost ground considerably and the positive attitude towards sex as one of the needs of every human being is emerging” (220).

Shashi Deshpande’s attitude towards sex is more ambivalent and paradoxical than any other Indian writer in English. It is not due to any peculiar and indefinable
characteristic of Indian mind, as is sometime held by her critics, but due to the
unnatural, and subtle forms of patriarchy which survives even today as the driving
force of social life. Virtually every novel of Deshpande has restrained working of
patriarchal forces, and Moving On despite looking like the story of an uninhibited
modern woman; has understated tones of disapproval towards sex for the sake of sex
only or only a source of physical pleasure. The paradox is that the protagonist unlike
all other protagonists of Deshpande reveals a renaissance of the female principle with
an upsurge in the power of women in contemporary times even in India. Sex is the
means by which a woman can assert herself but the simultaneous denial and
triumphant affirmation of sex is an indication of the deep and ancient roots of
patriarchal ambivalence. In her sexual relationships with Raman, Manjari’s feverish
imagination overflows, but there is a tumultuous co-existence of logical opposites in
her emotional mind, making her fear and avoid sex at the same time. She gives vent to
her uncontrolled passion and sex often appears to be the only goal worth striving for,
worth living for, in her life.

Sex has the lure of a mirage to Manjari which gives her clear access to power,
to regain once more the primacy which she had lost with the death of her husband
Shyam. Relationship with Raman began unconsciously as a temporary means of
feeling wanted, overcoming aloneness and to re-establish her sunken self-respect,
apt from its biological function. But it also makes Manjari suffer from remorse. The
more she tends to be detached – that is afraid of being emotionally involved-the more
she despairs of being loved. Sex appears to Manjari as the only solution to solve her
all problems, but her sufferings are not lessened and the relationship from which she
expected a substitute for love, only plunges her into deeper misery. It leads to an
enormous increase in emotional barrenness and results in a relationship with a
throttling of feelings. Her attempts at eradicating her loneliness and her aloofness
become unbearable, and she is consumed by a compulsive drive for human intimacy,
for sexual relationships. The sexual relationships produce a state similar to the one
produced by a trance, or to the effects of certain drugs. But after the sexual experience
is over, slowly the tensions of anxiety mount which led to a repeated indulgence in the
sexual act leading to anxiety and guilt. She feels all the more separated after the
sexual act and is driven to take recourse to it with increasing frequency and intensity.
Erich Fromm, a well-known psychoanalyst, sees sex as the ultimate need and desire of every human being. His views on sex justify Manjari’s indulgence in sex for the sake of sex, subsequently leading to loneliness:

Sexual orgiastic solution, to some extent is a natural and normal form of overcoming separateness, and a partial answer to the problem of isolation. But in many individuals in whom separateness is not relieved in other ways, the search for the sexual orgasm assumes a function which makes it not very different from alcoholism and drug addiction. It becomes a desperate attempt to escape the anxiety engendered by separateness, and it results in an ever-increasing sense of separateness, since the sexual act without love never bridges the gap between two human beings except momentarily (10).

Moving On lays bare a visible boldness in the treatment of sexuality. All Manjari wants is to get rid of her loneliness through sex but after a considerable number of sexual unions with Raman, and consequently suffering from remorse and guilt pangs; she feels surprisingly, somehow stronger and discovers with immense relief that she would much rather live alone. The impression is that she merely reverts to her former isolation but actually it is a matter of being now for the first time on solid enough ground to admit even to her own mind that what she wants is isolation. Manjari, as a new woman, convinces her own self that there is no reason to feel guilty or ashamed and tells Raman firmly that she wants to sell the house and he should find himself some other place to live. Despite Raman’s reluctance to leave her home, she conveys to Raman that their relationship is over, “‘It’s over, you have to understand. It’s over.’ ‘I promise, ma’am, I won’t ask for anything.’ ‘I’m sorry, Raman, it’s over. It’s over. It’s my fault; I know it’s my fault, but you have to go now’” (278).

Despite giving rationalization to her inner mind, about her relationships with Raman; Manjari again feels guilty on seeing Raman walking out and dragging his feet, looking anxious and heavy-hearted. Through Manjari’s character as a modern and contemporary woman, the author exhibits a war between tradition and modernity going on in every contemporary educated urban woman’s mind. Modern Indian woman, regardless of her education and seemingly liberated outlook is not able to
shed her traditional heritage of values. Manjari, in any case, feels pity on Raman and
is remorseful of not what she has done to herself, but of what she has done to this
young man. To quote Manjari’s thoughts:

I keep seeing his face and eyes the whole night and think over and
over again- what have I done, my god, what have I done? He will
never forget this, he will never forget me. This experience will
accompany him like a phantom all his life. I will be with him each
time he sleeps with a woman. He will compare every woman with
me, each experience with this one and he will find them always
wanting (278).

Manjari can empathise with Raman very well as she can visualize him in
future in relation to present in the same manner as she visualizes her in present in
relation to Shyam in her past. She feels pity as well as hatred towards Raman, as she
feels the same towards herself, “He will go on searching for me all his life, he will
never forget, he will never let go. Like me. I had thought that with this man I would
be able to let Shyam go, but it has not happened. Each time I have been with him, I
have thought- this is not Shyam. Each time, I have hated him-and myself-because he
is not Shyam (278).

Shashi Deshpande states a very plain but bitter truth that if the desire for
physical union is not stimulated by love, it never leads to union in more than
transitory sense. It creates for a moment the illusion of a union, yet without love, this
union makes two persons as far apart as they were before. Sometimes it makes them
ashamed of each other, or even makes them hate each other as it happens with
Manjari in her relationships with Raman. When the illusion goes, she feels her
estrangement even more markedly than before. The novel therefore is an antithesis of
Freudian postulate that love and hate are the outcomes of various forms of the sexual
instinct. Erich Fromm expounds Freud’s views on love and sex:

For Freud, love was basically a sexual phenomenon. ‘Man having found by
experience that sexual (genital) love afforded him his greatest gratification, so
that it became a prototype of all happiness to him, must have been thereby
impelled to seek his happiness further along the path of sexual relations, to make genital eroticism the central part of life (70).

Freud, of course, emphasized the consciousness, biological drives, repression and so on. For him, there was no difference between irrational love and love as an expression of the mature personality. The contradiction is that through the marriage of Manjari and Shyam, Shashi Deshpande seems to be corroborating Freud's another postulate that love is a ridiculous phenomenon and love and sex is one and the same thing. Manjari's relationship with Shyam beginning with falling in love by both at the first sight is accompanied by blindness to reality and impulsiveness. Manjari is not ashamed of her sexuality and considers it as the main purpose of getting married. Promila Kapur's findings on the basis of her study, that women now aspire for the fulfilment of the needs like companionship, respect, satisfaction of emotional and physical needs when they look for a marriage partner, do not hold true in the case of Manjari. Whether it was love or just infatuation leading to a hurried marriage is not clear but what is definite is that it was not a rational decision on the part of Manjari. Rather it was "A brazen declaration, not only of my love for Shyam, but of my defiance of Mai" (186). Despite the opposition of her parents to her relationship with Shyam, considering their marriage a deterrent to her education in medicine, she pays no heed to their advice. Her mother, like all parents, advises her daughter and tries to make her aware of the ground realities, "'You don't know what you want, you don't know what you're doing. It's only physical, don't you understand? Your body is confusing you,' Mai said to me" (187).

Abraham Maslow, in his book Motivation and Personality, throws light on the concept of human desires. Maslow feels that human beings are animals, always wanting one thing or the other, and feeling completely satisfied only for a short time. Satisfaction of one need leads to popping up of another need and when this is satisfied, another need comes in the foreground. According to Maslow, "Proper respect has never been paid by the constructors of motivation theories to either of these facts: first, that the human being is never satisfied except in a relative or one-step-along-the-path fashion, and second, that wants seem to arrange themselves in some sort of hierarchy of preponderance" (69-70).
For Manjari, who married Shyam mainly to satisfy her sexual needs, the satisfaction of these needs leads to another set of needs or desires. Fulfilment of her sexual hunger through marriage actually becomes a channel through which several other needs express themselves. Managing with the meagre income of Shyam shatters their bliss soon. Living in a dirty room, with a dirty sink, a stinking toilet and a bathroom with clammy fungus all over it, evaporates all love soon after the birth of their son Anand. Coping with a never well Anand in her shabby surroundings, makes them drift away from each other. Manjari remembers the days of their waning love:

Closeted in one small room though we were, we seemed to be living on two different continents. In bed, we lay close, but without touching. It was like the game of pebbles I'd played as a girl, a game in which, if two pebbles touched, you were out. And so, you were given the grace of a tiny gap between pebbles, 'an ant's path' as we called it. Yes, Shyam and I too were given the grace of an 'ant's path'; nevertheless, our game was coming to an end (290).

The love between Manjari and Shyam gradually dwindled, when they became unable to meet their everyday needs with Shyam's piecemeal work. Manjari could sense the rift in their relationship, but being young and naive, she could not do anything to salvage her marriage. After the discharge of their son Anand from the hospital, she goes back to her parents' house. Shyam also accepted it seeing that Anand felt better living in clean surroundings and responded to proper care. Both Manjari and Shyam could see their dreams toppling down but never questioned each other regarding any plans to live together; as if they were maintaining the remains of their relationship very precariously. Shyam committed suicide but Manjari had lost him long before his death:

And I lost Shyam. He came more and more infrequently, he spoke less and less of the future, of our future, he said nothing about a search for a home. I didn't see, I didn't understand that he was trying to tell me that time was running out for us. I still remember the day he pulled me close in a desperate grip, his face devoid of love, affection, tenderness, even desire; nothing there, only desperation. 'Shyam,' I said and he let
go of me, he stepped back and said, ‘I’ll ring you.’ And he went away. And I saw nothing (292).

Looking at Manjari and her husband Shyam’s life, with their immature minds; love between both of them can be interpreted as mere physical attraction or obsession, which they failed to realize at their tender age but their parents with wisdom and experience gained through maturity and age could perceive very accurately. Here, Shashi Deshpande differs from Freudian logistics of full and uninhibited satisfaction of all instinctual desires creating mental health and happiness. Notwithstanding a somewhat liberated attitude towards sex in the contemporary times, even the clinical facts demonstrate that men and women who indulge in unrestricted sexual satisfaction do not attain happiness and often suffer from neurotic symptoms. Mere satisfaction of sexual needs neither lead to happiness nor even guarantee sanity. Manjari too, after her first act of sexual indulgence with Raman, is perplexed and shameful of what she had done. She says to her, “Never again, never again, I tell myself when I’m back in my own bed, bathed and changed...” (257).

One union leads to subsequent unions, giving Manjari’s starved body, a strange kind of peace but bringing her mind on the verge of neurosis. She lays down the rules for their relationship, the rules to indulge in sexual act, only when she needs it. Surprisingly, she even formulates the rule to make it a word-less union every time and makes Raman follow her every injunction. In doing so, Manjari tries to show that their closeness was only physical with detached emotionality. A small error on the part of this young man is not pardonable by her obsessed but guilt-ridden mind. Therefore she keeps on adding new rules for this new territory:

There is to be no speaking, no words between us. He obeys this too, as he does my other injunctions. Yet, each time it bursts out of him in an explosion of ecstasy, ‘Ma’am, ma’am, ma’am...’ Only one word, the same word, but it says everything I’ve banned him from saying. No touching, I tell him. No, I say, each time his hands try to move over my body. No, I say when his lips come fearfully, eagerly, close to mine. The first time I stop him so harshly, so abruptly that he suddenly
pauses, he withdraws. But in a moment his young body gets back into its rhythm. And then it’s over (258).

Relationship between culture and personality is too profound and too complex. In general, the paths through which the main goals in life are achieved are often determined by the nature of a particular culture. The way in which a man expresses or achieves his needs, is in a large part, although not completely, culturally determined. The same is true for sexual needs. These needs are expressed through culturally approved channels which in India is only matrimony. Satisfaction of these needs or expression of this instinct more overtly and in ways which the society does not approve, lead to feelings of culpability. Manjari, who never found sexual gratification after her husband’s death; feels physically fulfilled through her relations with Raman. However, her conservative mind considered extra-marital relationships a taboo, making her feel guilty and not allowing her to glow in the warmth of physical fulfilment and instead she gets caught in the web of a guilt-ridden and apologetic existence. She sometimes sobs after the sexual escapade but again struggles hard to overcome the guilt feelings. She becomes conscious and uncomfortable as if caught stealing, when Raja comments on her weight-gain. However, she is caught in a maze with no hard outlet; thereby mitigating her agony by alternatively giving explanations to her mind and attempting to conceal everything from Raja. The following thoughts of Manjari divulge her ensuing struggle to extinguish the fire of the body with secret sexual experiences, her fear of exposure and twisting and turning of her complex mental landscape:

Like drinking water when you’re thirsty. Like a diabetic’s craving for food. Nothing wrong with it. And yet, why do I bathe three times a day, why do I scrub myself when bathing as if I want to flay myself, why do I punish my body so angrily? The body and mind so much at variance with each other-Baba is right. Nature has done this badly. How can you want the act and hate the idea so much? Why am I ashamed of what I’m doing? Hiding all traces of it as if I’ve committed a crime, as if I’ve murdered someone. Like a criminal washing away the bloodstains. But traces always remain; the pink spots show (260).
The remarkable thing about Manjari is her voyage: from a rebel, posing resistance to everyone including her parents, then suddenly becoming a part of and living through her husband Shyam, becoming a fearful and helpless woman living all alone, facing threats and assault from strangers in the lonely nights and finally emerging as a woman with enormous courage and steadfastness to live her life on her own terms. The most traumatic time for her was, when her sister Malu was made pregnant by her husband Shyam. When Malu dies after giving birth to Sachi, followed by Shyam’s suicide; Manjari undergoes trying times of pain and struggle to reconcile with the inevitable. Still, she refuses to accept any financial assistance from her parents and manages to grapple with innumerable difficulties to survive with her son. Estranged from her family she devotes her life taking care of her son and Malu’s daughter Sachi as her own daughter. She reminisces the difficult times, “I had no time to brood or grieve. It was down to the basics: work, eat, sleep, wake up, go back to work... (213).

Manjari epitomizes the modern contemporary woman who knows her mind clearly. She turns down Raja’s repeated proposals to marry him, as she knows it well that they are good friends and not lovers. She disapproves Raja’s role of the protecting male in her life by saying, “I want the brakes under my feet, not someone else’s. I don’t want a dual control, the control should be mine, mine alone” (88). Even her children approve of her marriage with Raja, but she feels quite capable of looking after herself despite getting calls from the mafia underworlds threatening her to sell out her ancestral house. Raja, the upholder of patriarchal norms and values is bewildered to know about her decision to learn driving her car and later thinking of using it as a taxi. Raja is again shocked to find Manjari working on a computer at home and earning money by typing manuscripts for others. Manjari’s decision to stay and face all the challenges of her life but not compromise her freedom display her autonomy to face the challenges of patriarchy, by discovering her own strengths, her own needs and her own ways to fulfill these needs.

Loneliness, due to lack of communication, is another perpetual theme in most of Deshpande’s fiction and Moving On too, begins and ends too on the same note. Baba, unable to communicate and share his feelings with anyone, starts writing the diary in his old age as he gains an understanding and acceptance of his life coming to
a close. Baba’s lonely life is a life of his own choice but at the fag end of his life, he feels a need to scribble his thoughts. Sharing one’s thoughts and feelings to feel light and relieved is a natural human need which is stressed upon in every novel of Deshpande. Manjari realizes that for Baba, it was more than a need:

It is an urge to do something about the chaotic jumble of thoughts and memories that have been troubling me so greatly. Such a vague purpose - if it is a purpose at all. But a sense of limited time urges me on. The awareness that my life is coming to a close makes me want to speak, to share my thought with someone. I imagine that this is a normal human emotion, for even my father, an otherwise inarticulate man, made me a confidant in his last days. Unlike my father, I have no one I can talk to. Therefore this book. A poor substitute for a human ear... (3).

Baba finds satisfaction in remembering his father and also his other relatives. He is regretful of the loss of communication with his wife near to her death when she actually needed his consolation and caring words. He realized that Vasu was punishing herself by staying aloof and bearing pain by containing everything within her. He regrets with pain that he did nothing to soothe and comfort her, “There was no place for anger in our lives. There was just this—this nothing. We stopped communicating; in fact, there was nothing left for us to say to each other. Vasu never spoke much in any case; she was a strangely inarticulate person for a writer. And I – did not know what to say. Silence was better than any words I could think of (201-202).

Manjari also validates Vasu’s nature to remain ‘terrified of self-revelation’ and calls her ‘a loner’ (201). Badri Narayan is remorseful that Vasu and he “didn’t manage well. They could have done better; the regret remains” (304). But he further explains that they had to forget the past in order to live. Both Jiji and Baba turned their backs on their past and felt that was the only way to move ahead with their lives. Manjari also feels the same when she says, “It’s no use going back, agonizing over the choices we made, imagining what would have happened if we had taken the other road” (311).
Communication gap also occurred in the relationship between Manjari and her Baba after Manjari's marriage. They refrained from the ‘involuntary comforting gestures of hugging and holding’ (313) after Shyam’s death. But Baba knows it well that it is the compassion that has brought Jiji closer to him and it will keep her with him till his death. Feeling grateful for Manjari’s concern; he wants to break the barriers between them when she comes to stay with him until his last moment. He wants to break all sorts of communication barriers between the two and even wishes to live a little longer to spend more time with his daughter. Baba gives vent to his feelings when he says regretfully:

All humans fear death. And to me, death has become even more unwelcome since Jiji arrived. I want more time with her; I want to break the barrier between us. It makes me sorry that we approach each other carefully, as if we are carrying water in our cupped palms and are afraid of spilling it. I think of all the time we have wasted; yes, so much time wasted. I am now full of regrets. I want to live some more time, I want to make up for the lost time, I want to recover, for the last time, that old relationship between us (206).

At the end of the novel, not being able to designate her relationship with Raja, we find Manjari almost in a similar confessional mode. She says repentantly’ “The search is doomed to failure. Yes Baba, you are right, we will never find what we are looking for, we will never get what we are seeking for in other humans. We will continue to be incomplete, all of us, each one of us. Yet the search is what it’s all about, don’t see, Baba, the search is the thing” (343). The novel ends with a pathetic note. Rejecting Raja’s proposal to marry her, Manjari starts the car, the road looks hazy, her eyes brimming over with tears, like rain pouring out of a cloudless sky, making her surprised. But life goes on and on...

The precise nature of connection amongst the various characters, within their extended family and within their conditioned constrictions is difficult to understand. The ease and intimacy of Gayatri and RK make us feel that “they had known each other for many lifetimes” (11). Their relationship was complete even without having any child and “it was through Gayatri that RK connected to the everyday world and to
people” (77). Again it was Gayatri who gave Vasu (Mai) both her love and friendship all along her life. Gayatri, a strong and resilient woman, was resplendent with inner goodness. She was a woman whose life was not meant for her own self, but for her family and also for many other people even outside the family. She helped vegetable vending couple to buy a handcart, started a library in her own garage for the neighbourhood children. She “never let her connections to other people out, she kept them intact and alive” (160). Through the character of Gayatri, Deshpande vouches for relational autonomy for women, instead of economical autonomy. Talking about relationships and characters like Gayatri, Deshpande seems to be increasingly interested in the idea of goodness in human beings. Keeping in tune with the contemporary times with prevalence of violence and evil everywhere, she is talking about the mafia and underworld characters and feels gloomy about goodness being equated with weakness and people talking about values instead. But for honesty of purpose she does not hesitate writing about goodness in common people like Gayatri, “Nevertheless, goodness is real, it exists-not only in people like Bapu or Mother Teresa, but in ordinary people. It is these people who make life worth living. So, whether it is Joe in Small Remedies, Kalayani in A Matter of Time, Akka in The Binding Vine, or Gayatri in Moving On; they make life possible for others (Deshpande, “Magical Terrains” The Hindu).

The search for selfhood is a persistent theme in most of Deshpande’s fiction. But the seamlessness with which the author merges such intense private emotions into the complex web of relationships in everyday life, where the narrative keeps shifting from the minds of the characters to their social ordinariness of reality and again to its rupture by emotional upheavals, is an interesting feature of Moving On. No character in the novel is self-contained, not so enormous, that it seeks attention to itself without negotiating its identity within its family. The whole novel relates one person with the other. Manjari knits the story of her life, knitting the lives of other characters into one family, to make the pattern complete. She says, “My story –how can there be such a thing as my story when other people’s lives are so knitted in to? I cannot pick out one stitch and say; this story is mine, take another and say, this is Baba’s story, then one more and say, this is Mai’s ... all our lives so entwined, so knitted together that I will never be able to separate them” (270).
Relationships are must to move through life. One needs to preserve his identity but one cannot nurture one's self, if he never enters the gamut of relationships. Yes, there is the fear of rejection but the characters in the novel accept the fear of rejection, the fear of inevitability of death and fulfill themselves through others, fulfilling the others through bonding with them. Manjari struggles and is vulnerable many a times but lives life intensely. The great saint Osho gives very beautiful and valuable advice in the context of relating with others:

You need to be needed; you need somebody to accept you; you need somebody to love you because only when somebody else loves you, will you be able to love yourself, not before. When somebody accepts you, you will be able to accept yourself, not before. When somebody else feels happy with you, you will start feeling happy with yourself, not before (Osho, “The Courage to Love” Osho Times 34).

Paradoxically, it is Manjari’s ability to be emotionally independent that makes her capable of closeness. This is not to be confused with her being cold or indifferent. Manjari realizes the need to be intimate with her own self through awareness and acceptance of life, letting go of hurt and bouncing back to face life in totality with its positive and negative traits.

The novel ends with Manjari’s decision of going ahead with life, not knowing whether she is on the right track or not, not knowing whether she will find the path or be lost forever. But she is tremendously bold to move into this world of contradictions without thinking or asking anyone ‘how’. The fears of the unknown future are there but she does not try to escape from any situation, because she knows that living life in its multidimensionality, in its totality, will ripen her consciousness more and more. Only then will she come to know the ultimate consciousness, which is freedom, which is joy, eternal joy, which is benediction.