Chapter IV

Time The Healer:
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Life has to be made possible

-Shashi Deshpande

Shashi Deshpande has created a niche for herself in voicing the sufferings and bitterness of women through her characters. For the first time, she deals with the theme of alienation in her novel *A Matter of Time*. Deshpande allows her women to experience the perturbing and confusing silence within, and empower themselves to confront power politics, understand the crisis and then resolve them.

The novels *A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies* are considered as resistant texts that transcend the daily happenings and finally reconcile with the ultimate reality. *A Matter of Time* opens with a graphic and saddening description of the ‘Big House’ called ‘Vishwas’. It is a clear and honest account of the absolute and sudden disintegration of Gopal’s family and the reaction of all his people. Deshpande has dexterously intertwined the lives of three generations and the promising fourth generation in the context of families which are moulded by the traditional values that are attached to family bonds. Bande criticizes: “There are three generations of women with impregnable silence and suffocating life but it is the impatient new generation ready to fight it out tooth and nail that provides a whiff of cool breeze” (42)
Thus the above quote explains that women surmount the impediments on their way and cope with life in different ways as they face the necessity of nurturing the people, including the men. But at the same time, the new generation would fight it out with courage to transcend the deleterious elements.

The novel deals with Gopal’s mid-life crisis leading to his desire for renouncing his family life. Without any warning, he tells his wife, Sumi, that he is leaving the house for ever. Sumi is shocked and stood awe-struck with her three teenaged daughters Aru, Charu and Seema. All the four of them are caught unawares. Sumi is silent whereas Aru, her eighteen year old eldest of all, tries for reasons for this calamity. Aru is upset over the breakup of her family. There is a problem here, it is imperative for women belonging to this house to question it, to fight it. At the core, resistant phenomenon is important primarily because it questions and seeks solution. It is symbolic and never takes place in a vaccum.

In the novel, one finds an honest picture of the sudden disintegration of Gopal’s happy family. The anguish and frustrations of women give a true-to-life saga of the difficulties faced by Sumi. The strong support of her immediate family-her parents, sister and cousins comforts her against the sufferings of life:

Premi’s visit, if nothing else, has opened a door through which the family enters, converging on Sumi and her daughters to perform its role. They congregate like mourners after a death in the family- but a death in a distant land, a death without a body. (AMT 20)
Shashi Deshpande emphasizes that her novels centre around family relationship, and everyone has to live within those relationships.

“Human relationships is what a writer is involved with person to person and person to society. These are the two primary concerns of a creative writer and me the former is of immense importance, my preoccupation is with interpersonal.” (252)

She seems to agree with Pro. C.D. Narasimhaiah who says that “it is a theme on which epics after epics can be written relationships-and human emotions.” Deshpande says:

“We know a lot about the physical and the organic world and the universe in general but we still know very little about human relationship. It is the most mystifying thing as far as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it, puzzle over it, and write about it. And still find it tremendously intriguing and fascinating. (251)

Jasbir Jain considers the novel as a story of divided families of pretence and honesty, of love and unhappiness of freedom and bondage, of involvement and detachment.

Families must always support the members, and provide security as individuals but they keep up appearances and destroy the integration. They in fact disturb the family environment of love and understanding. The parents, instead of allowing their children to grow, fail in their filial duties towards their children.
Deshpande evolves this in her novel. Women, mostly the wife is at cross-roads. Crisis afflicts the families of the near and dear. They are in troubled waters stands juxtaposed to the families of their relatives, which are leading a normal course of life. The persons who bear the brunt of it are the wives, children, mothers and women in general.

Sumi and Gopal’s is not the usual arranged marriage. Gopal frequently recapitulates to share in their discovery of each other: “And I knew then that it was for this. This losing yourself in another human being, that men give up their dreams of freedom.” (223) Their happy moments in life leaves no one in doubt of their compatibility—both physical and mental. Their separation is all the more poignant.

Aru is terribly upset over the dissolution of the family she becomes aware of her neighbour’s eyes following her family. Aru resents the situation that their family appears to be “so pathetic and vulnerable”.

Unlike the other deserted wives, Sumi does not disintegrate at the humiliation and suffering inflicted on her. As she recovers from the shock, she musters up courage, picks up the threads of life and tries to readjust her lifestyle to suit the situation. She moves to her parental house with her children and helps them to go their lives without mentioning about her husband’s desertion. She puts up a brave self but it is obvious that behind her courage and false bravery:
Say it, Ramesh, say he’s missing, say he’s walked out on his wife and children. It’s got to come out some time, how long are we going to hide it from the world? And do you think people don’t know? I’m sure they do and frankly I don’t care. (AMT 21)

Thus the grotesque tragedy, which is so undeserving leaves Sumi undisturbed outside.

It is obvious that there are no reasons for Gopal to walk out of his family. This is clear when Kalyani, Sumi’s mother who pathetically pleads to her son-in-law Gopal to return home. Gopal never blames Sumi but does not offer any convincing reasons for his action.

The female bonding and resistance are central issues in this novel. Apart from dealing with the theme of self-realization it also includes a host of complex issues. Woman’s recognition that often love leads to marriage, marriage invariably takes one to the world of woman, with a common heritage of oppression a community of women who are trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, and self negation. The novel A Matter of Time deals with the dilemma of wife desertion. Wife desertion is considered as another dimension of cruelty to and betrayal of women. Gopal’s desertion of his wife and three daughters suddenly results in despair and a kind of displacement of the family. It is even considered a “a death without a body” Gopal’s desertion is not only a tragedy but also a matter of shame and disgrace. Moreover, the disgrace is not for the man
who deserted the family but for his wife who is deserted. Aru is upset over the break up of the family she even wants her mother to file a case against Gopal. There is no obvious reasons for Gopal walking out of his family. His desertion makes Sumi experience the trauma of a deserted wife and also the anguish of an isolated partner. Her bitter isolation linked with the patriarchal pressure and family responsibilities makes her stand alone and helpless along with her teenaged daughters. Even though at the age of forty her life is cornered by the agonies of desolation she is not shattered, particularly emotionally Sumi straight away decides to face the situation. Like the other protagonists of other novels Jaya, Indu Sumi also seeks refuge in her parental home, also like any responsible mother she helps her daughters to go on with their lives as before.

Sumi learns to pick up the threads of life though deserted by her husband for no fault of hers. However Sumi does not think of divorce. According to her, divorce frees a woman legally but the memories attached to the marriage cannot be erased easily. Gopal’s frequent recapitulations reveal that their marriage had not been the ordinary arranged marriage; They had enjoyed harmonious relationship, their joyous intimate physical as well as mental compatibility during the early years of their married life. After Sumi’s return to the Big House with her daughters, the family with a host of aunts, sisters and others flock together to find out the possible cause for Gopal’s desertion and make efforts to bring him back, while the affected members brave the adversity, each in their own manner. The relatives attempt to find out why Gopal deserted his family so irresponsibly.
There doesn't seem to be any obvious reason for Gopal walking out on Sumi. Although Gopal had maintained silence when Kalyani, Ramesh and others had questioned him the reason for deserting the family ultimately breaks the silence to Premi's probing, Gopal discloses his awareness of meaninglessness of life and the realization of the futility of life and his consequent loss of faith in it. He replies: “Why did I do it? I can give you so many answers, but I've begun thinking that the plain truth is that I just got tired”. (AMT 133)

He explains to Premi by quoting his Yaksha’s question to Yudhistra what is the greatest wonder in this world and his reply:

We see people die and yet we go on as if we are going to live forever. Yes, it’s true, that is the greatest marvel this world holds, it’s the miracle. Infact, it’s the secret of life itself. We know it’s all there, the pain, suffering oldage, 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, this is our fate us well, it will become difficult, almost impossible to go on...It happened to me, I stopped believing. The miracle failed for me and there was nothing left. You've got to be the Buddha for that emptiness to be filled with compassion for the world. For me there was just emptiness. (133-34)
Aru has lot of questions like why has their father left them; why is her grandmother Kalyani so oppressed and silent; why has her grandfather Shripathi shut himself. Goda and Kalyani recount their early lives through a serious of incidents remembering events, and some anecdotes, their quarrels, unravells the mystery to Aru. Kalyani’s husband Shripathi had abandoned her and has shut himself up since his only son Madhav who was slightly retarded was lost in the over crowded Railway Station at the age of four. Despite frantic efforts the boy could not be found. Shripathi could not forgive his wife for her negligence hence he sent Kalyani back to her parents house with her two remaining children, two daughters Sumi and Premi. Manorama prevails upon her brother to return to live in the “big house with his wife and daughters. Although he obliges her but continued to maintain a stoney silence. The husband and wife are living together under the same roof even if there is only silence between them could be a perfect arrangement for others but neither Sumi nor Aru could comprehend the meaning of such existence. It is apparently an example of enormous cruelty meted out to her. Aru is shocked when she finds her grandmother’s acceptance of such a life:

And when Kalyani signs her name, carefully spelling out ‘Kalyanibai Pandit’, Aru is amazed. How can she still have his name, for God’s sake? Or, and this is the most bizarre thought of all, has she forgetton all that happened, has she put it away where it belongs-in the past? (AMT 146)
Kalyani is an outcast in the eyes of her husband and all communication ceases between them. But Kalyani doesn’t react with the show of emotions. It is Shripathi who suffers accursed loneliness. She resists him by building her own cocoon, by establishing a bond with Goda her sister and her two daughters and having their families around the house. The hurt of deserting, the anguish of rejection, suffering experienced by Kalyani is brought out explicitly when she pleads: “what have you done to my daughter, Gopala, don’t do this, don’t let it happen to my daughter, what happened to me” (AMT p 46) But by and large her resistance had been through the stoic silence she maintains. Usha Bande observes:

“Silence can be a powerful tool of resistance when it practices a lack of participation in the social power relations. Kalyani’s resistance is so hard that even the author remarks in one of her interviews that Kalyani appears to Anu not “as a victim but as a woman come out of all that victimization intact”. (256-59)

History repeats itself. There is the striking illustration of the axiom. Life must be lived forwards, but it can only be understood backwards.”(AMT 98) in the continuous interplay of the past and the present in the events and rememberances that take place in the lives of the four generations of women in the novel. Vithal Rao and Manorama, Kalyani’s parents were not blessed with a son. Manorama recounts the anxieties that she underwent and was tormented by the fear that her husband Vithal Rao might remarry to have a son. Hence she exploits the
indebtedness of her youngest brother Shripathi, who was educated and helped by Vithal Rao since he had no son of his own, gets Kalyani married to Shripathi. “Perhaps, after this, Manorama felt secure. The property would remain in the family now” (129) Kalyani’s martial life comes to an end with the loss their son. After days of futile search Shripathi withdraws himself from his wife and “has not spoken to her since the day it happened”. (140)

Kalyani who has not been told of what has happened to Sumi when Sumi arrives at the Big House with her daughters, and when Kalyani is informed about Gopal’s absence from the family scene, she is stupefied at seeing them. When she is told that they would be staying there as a matter of fact it creates tension. Kalyani who was abandoned by her husband Shripathi, bemoans and cries out in anguish and disbelief at what has happened to her daughter Sumi, years later. Sumi is more or less abandoned by Gopal. His desertion is quite different from that of Shripathi. But like her mother Kalyani who returned to the “Big House” with her two daughters, Sumi also returns to her parent’s home with her three daughters.

It is clear whatever be the reason, a woman abandoned is a woman abandoned. For Kalyani and Sumi the abandonment is a social stigma. Kalyani’s reaction when Sumi returns to tell her that Gopal has deserted them astounds everyone. ‘No’ she cries out, no, my God not again. She begins to cry….Suddenly they are submerged in the awareness of loss…..(12”) After the loss of her son and
the ruthless withdrawal of her husband and thereafter Kalyani’s state of mind has been disturbing. Sumi could recognise the contribution of Kalyani a “self-punishing woman”. Shripathi punishes her not only by abandoning but also severing all relations with her. But Kalyani establishes relationship with the people and family around her which is “The complex net of relationship that Kalyani has with many people, she (Sumi) is reminded of the spider she had seen one morning, scuttling from point to point, drawing silken, threads out of itself, weaving in the process a web with a beautiful design (185). Even this oppressive silence could not kill Kalyani’s affection to the other members of the family.

Kalyani is visibly upset when she comes to know about Gopal’s desertion his family. She would never allow the tragedy of her life to resurface in her daughter’s. When she goes to meet Gopal she takes the entire responsibility herself for Sumi’s “Carelessness” and pleads with Gopal not to let it happen to her daughter what had happened to her. She says without allowing him to speak:

I know she doesn’t let him speak. I know she was careless, she says,

I know she didn’t bother too much about her home, ‘But, Gopal and now she hesitates, ‘how could she have known what being a good wife means when she never saw her mother being one? I taught her nothing, it’s all my fault, Gopala, forgive me and don’t punish her for it.” (AMT 47)
For Kalyani and women like her marriage is the most important aspect of woman’s life. R.S. Pathak comments: Kalyani’s character is a faithful representation of self-sacrificing Indian woman of the older generation. Pathak opines to them marriage is:

the most important happening in a woman’s life. It is both a problem and a solution to life’s problems. Kalyani is keen on getting a good match for her grand daughter Aru, though they are “amazed” by her usual interest in marriage, which was responsible for her own misfortunes. “How can she, of all people, think of marriage with enthusiasm?” (124) Kalyani’s character is created with “superb authenticity” and Typifies an “unusual relationship found only in India. (158)

Sumi does not question his withdrawal. She appears to be an epitome of silently suffering and passively resistant like her mother. Sumi is made of a different stuff since she is more concerned with life she prepares herself. She distances herself from Gopal, she doest not want self-pity and she blocks out of her thought all unpleasantness. She remarkably maintains her cool and matter of fact attitude. After the desertion by Gopal Sumi shows boundless patience. Her nature is such she cannot hate person for long. She is self controlled that she cannot even talk about Gopal’s act of desertion. In fact her mannerisms “having the air being lost” and her stylized manner of walking are indicative of her
sensitive nature and her keen sense of agony at her misfortune. She fully realizes that expressing one’s suffering to the world is totally meaningless. She tells Deavaki:

‘you silly girl, why are you crying? Sumi removes Devaki’s glasses and gently wipes her eyes with her own sari. ‘Don’t! you’ll spoil your sari. And may be I’am crying because you don’t. you don’t even talk about it, Sumi’. I’ve never been able to cry easily, you know that. And what do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don’t know why and may be he doesn’t really know, either? And that I’am angry and humiliated and confused…? Let that be, we won’t go into it now’. (107)

The entire novel revolves round this one particular question as to why did Gopal walk out on his family so irresponsible allowing people to make wild guesses. Sumi however does not ask an answer from Gopal at any point of the narrative. Even the one question which she wanted to ask remains unsaid and unvoiced:

…if I meet Gopal I will ask him one question, just one. the question, no one has thought of What is it, Gopal, I will ask him. that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns? Because… it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are part of. How
then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn your back on every thing in your life? Will you be able to give an answer to this? (AMT 27).

Probably even Gopal does not know the precise reason for his walking out. He seems to be groping in the dark, but moving towards his determination this indecisiveness of Gopal is so pronounced it makes Latha Anantharaman, a reviewer to come to the conclusion that:

the novel has “an unfinished feel” and that the tragedies that occur towards the end are abrupt, which is true to life indeed, but not always desirable in literature,” (159)

Though her husband’s desertion brings disgrace and humiliation on herself, she sees to endure all with quiet patience because she realizes that there is no definite external reason for Gopal to desert his family. She understands that “reason lies inside him, the reason is him” (AMT 24). The disintegration of their marriage had been so unexpected and in Gopal’s absence she experiences a deep state of emptiness and void. She feels totally lost and helpless yet she does not question him nor plead him to return. As N.B. Masal in the article Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time*, “as an exploration of a Woman’s Inner Life”, observes.

“The breakdown of Sumi’s marriage had circumscribed Sumi’s marriage in an unexpected condition. Gopal’s absence leaves her
in a state of vast emptiness. She feels, “I can’t find my bearings, there are no markers any more to show me which way I should go.” Yet it is from the depth of her despair that she tries to transform her emptiness into meaning in order to redefine her identity. She does not remain a passive mother, but an active agent. We cannot forget that Sumi, like her mother, is a suffering oppressed and wronged woman. Yet she does not question the man, her oppressor. (AMT 147)

Sumi’s whole life and future seems beyond her control and comprehension she recalls what Gopal used to say regarding “Destiny”. She has often heard her mother Kalyani talk about ‘fate’ or ‘destiny’ for everything, from boiling over of the milk to a sudden death. But she had not given much importance. Gopal had said:

“Destiny is just us and therefore inescapable, because we can never escape ourselves. Certain actions are inevitable because we are what we are. In a sense, we walk on chalked lines drawn by our own selves”. (AMT 26)

Sumi reveals an independent nature, in a manner resembling the other protagonist-Indu, Saru, Urmī and Jaya. She surrounds herself with deathlike silence and she conveys her pain more effectively without words and she does not rant or rave but copes with her grief, disgrace and humiliation of being a deserted wife. Sumi’s silent suffering assumes at times a heroic proportion.
Aru or Arundhati eighteen year old daughter of Sumi is upset over the issue of her father Gopal walking out on the family. She is a rebel and rebels against her father she is a keen “observer” of the events affecting the entire family. She could be said to be the most sensitive character and reaches out to help others who are in similar predicament. Unlike Sumi and Kalyani she could not remain silent towards her father. She approaches him not expecting sympathy for her mother or for the family but wants to bring to light the reason for her father’s irresponsible behaviour. She wants to go ahead with “a purely impersonal search”. Both of them are restrained and unimpassioned. Deshpande writes:

She does not ask him any questions, she tells him-how it has been for them, the feeling of displacement, the questions and innuendoes they have to face, the sense of shame and disgrace. She speaks to him of Sumi, of the change in her, of Charu and her desperation, her feeling of having been let down. ...She calls him a callous father-it was Seema’s birthday, you know that, you would have sent her a letter, she was waiting, we would all see that—a cruel husband, an unfeeling man. She questions Gopal. “why did you get married at all, why did you have children?” (AMT 62). Her searching questions makes Gopal reexamine his motive and reason for fleeing from the family.

Aru is critical not only of Gopal but of patriarchy. She expresses her views on patriarchy and points out how women, in general get victimized as a result of the actions of men. Aru’s rebelliousness distinguishes her from her mother Sumi
and her grandmother Kalyani. According to her Gopal’s walking out on their family is not just a tragedy but shame and disgrace. Her mother’s silent acceptance of it makes her react violently. She is pained by her father’s ruthless action but at the same time her self-respect would not allow her to stoop to self pity. When Sumi appears to be seemingly unperturbed and says: And do you think people don’t know? I am sure they do and frankly I don’t care”. Aru sharply comments on her mothers reaction:

‘You don’t care?’ Aru’s reaction to her mother’s words is violent and sharp. That’s wonderful. You don’t care about his having gone, you don’t care where he is, you don’t care what people think—but I care, Yes, I do, I care about Papa having left us, I care about not having our own house. I don’t want to live like this, as if we’re sitting on a railway platform, I want my home back, I want my father back....’ (AMT 21)

Her hostility is like a weapon of an adversary. Aru out of frustration of seeing her mother and her grandmother suffer at the hands of the men of their family and their tragedy declares “I’m never going to get married”. Human relationship is the main concern of A Matter of Time. It is about the human bonds and bondages. Marriage which is considered to be the most coveted relationship of all human relationships does not find place in the adolescent Aru’s scheme of life. She is quick enough to perceive the betrayal and cruelty in the man-woman relationship, she expresses her earnest point of view clearly to Premi, her aunt.
She looks directly at Premi, and Premi realizes she is in dead earnest. ‘I’ve been thinking about marriage a great deal, Premi-mavshi. What’s there in it? I mean, look at Amma and Now Sumi... What do you get out of it?.... ‘And look at Goda-ajji and Bhaiiji-Kaka-they’re always scrapping. At their age and after so many years of marriage. And she’s Constantly complaining about him to Amma’. [AMT p. 138]

Aru is probably frightened that in the maze of family history, what happened to Kalyani, and Sumi and other women in the family might happen to her-one more generation of women going down in the history writhing under the relentless impact of patriarchal fate. Thus in the novel *A Matter of Time* reactions of the mother and daughter who belong to two different generations are different. Sumi is mature and reasons out Gopal’s desertion, while the other, Aru who stands at the beginning of the journey of her life, has filled with anger and resentment against her father. Aru is full of the sense of injustice and protest against her father. She fights for the rights of women while Sumi is trying to retain self-identity and works out a strategy to create a life for herself and her daughters. She tries to overcome the shock and emptiness left behind by Gopal. Both Sumi and Aru focus on strategies of readjustments and forge an indentity of their own and struggle to learn to become “one’s own refuge” and value the fellowship of
other women. There are fears in Aru that she could not articulate. Although Sumi retreats into a shocked silence initially, and appears seemingly unperturbed her silence expresses a true life saga of the trauma faced by her.

Gopal is the male protagonist of this novel. Gopal deserts his family for reasons that he himself is not aware of which result in the disintegration of his happy family. Gopal is forty seven years old man physically thin and weak but a clear hearted person. In fact Sumi admits that she fell in love with his “physical being first” (168). He reciprocated her love, cared for his wife, tended his daughters and he could easily cross the barriers between sexes with ease. It is rather strange and surprising people around him to know about his walking out on his family. While others were making wild guesses Gopal admits that he was frightened by his own sense of inner emptiness.

Emptiness, I realized then, is always waiting for us. The nightmare we most dread, of walking 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. It is the desperation of a drowning person that makes us cling to other humans. All human ties are only a masquerade. Some day, some time, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth. (AMT. p. 52)

Humiliations by his students at the college, led him to resign his job as a History lecturer could not be the sole reason for Gopal’s decision to desert his family. He is an idealist and he realizes the futility of existence.
Shripathi and Gopal create a tense atmosphere in the family. Gopal deserts the family and Shripathy isolates himself from the family. The two families are troubled and the normal course of life is disturbed by the acts of these two men. The children, wives, women, mothers are the persons who bear the brunt when their life partners go back on their promises and violate the principles of the sacred institution of marriage paradoxically the society holds the women guilty and expects the wives to surrender and submit to men even when they have cast them out. Men are left free and no scathing remark is made about them or no one accuses them daringly. According to Keerti Ramachandra:

“A Matter of Time is about women and men. But it is also about renunciation, bonds and ties and about alienation. Introspective and concerned with understanding the varied responses of the characters to a given situation, the narrative is equally compelling, with the author drawing you into the lives of her characters completely. (21)

Gopal’s departure from his family is viewed by Sumi as a blessing. All these while she had remained content to be a wife and mother, occasionally drawing insight into interpreting human conditions but mostly subordinating herself to the household chores, looking after to her husbands needs and bringing up her daughters. But now that she is on her own she decides in to enjoy her freedom, discover her potential for creativity, finds herself a job and above all to realize the purpose of her existence. Sumi accepts Gopal’s decision to leave them
placidly. Gopal leaves the domestic sphere because he cannot cope with life’s commitments. He has an unexplained existential urge that he leaves his happy family and renounces every thing else behind in his quest for the self, like Gautama Buddha who abandons his family and home to find a solution to the emptiness and loneliness. His desertion is of quite different from Shripathis. Gopal speaks of past and present and the novelist has invested him with the qualities usually reserved for the female protagonists—the qualities of reflection and entrospection. In fact the story begins and ends with Gopal.

Gopal’s decision, to withdraw from responsibilities of the household, relinquish his role as a father and a husband because he is burdened with the fear of being unable to fulfill his obligations as a husband and a father and an intense sense of loneliness and isolation from his family could only be termed as the coward’s way out. Between Sumi and Gopal there is a basic incompatibility, a dissimilarity of temperaments. According to him it his past, the insecure childhood his knowledge of the ephemeral quality of happiness led him to renounce his family. The opening epigraph drawn from Brhad-aranyaka Upanishad: ‘Maitreyi’, said Yajnavalkya, ‘Verily I am about to go forth from this state (of householder)’....

The Hindu tradition identifies four stages in a man’s life—1) Bramhacharya (bachelorhood) 2) Grihastha (householder) 3) Vanaprastha (relinquishing the duties of a house hold) and 4) Sanyasa (total renunciation). There is a reference to the third stage of a man’s life, that of a house holder, Like the house holder who in
the course of the third quarter of his life leaves his house hold and enters the fourth stage of his life: that of a renouncer. His walking out on his family has been thought in terms of Sanyasa-the final stage, asrama, Vimala Rama Rao-a reviewer of this novel shares Sumi’s view of Vedic renunciation which frees one of all bondages, He cuts off himself from all worldly pleasures and reduces his needs to bare minimum.

It is clear from Gopal’s vague references to his past that his childhood had not been normal. It reveals that his father had married his brother’s widow and the fact that he was born of that union proves disturbing for him particularly as an adolescent he draws several possible reasons for this marriage. The inner conflict within his mind makes him draw a parallel between himself and Hamlet’s predicament:

Knowing nothing about him then, expect that he had married his brother’s widow who became my mother; the possibilities had been innumerable and my adolescent mind had drawn various selves out of the protean being of the father I had imagined. So many of them:

A man who sinned against his brother by loving his wife. The brother dying of grief and the wife and the man marrying immediately after.

A kind man moved by pity to marry his brother’s widow, to make that brother’s daughter his own. A Lakshman-like younger brother, keeping a promise made to his dying elder brother to look after his young widow and child. (AMT 42)
It is evident from Gopal’s ruminations about his parents' marriage as marriage of convenience, thinking of his father as his mother’s guilty partner, that he and Sudha did not share the same father leave avoid in his life. Thus he had been for long nurturing a sense of loneliness. Gopal was struck by the truth that one is always alone he takes a philosophical stance and makes the observation that “Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes—a life time of commitment—it is not possible for all of us” (69) He acknowledges that when he married Sumi he needed her womanness her warmth and her humanness (68). But soon after marriage he realized that it is only in losing one self in another human being, that men give up their dreams of freedom. The sacredness and values of marriage are totally lost on Gopal. For people like Premi and Devaki Gopal and Sumi were perfect model of lovers. But when the children grew up he dreads his failure as a husband and father. He considers responsibility as his enemy. He enjoys his married life but wants to be free of the bond of intimacy. He, by deserting the family ultimately severs the binding tie with his wife and children besides the responsibility of supporting the family especially the children and their education. But his fleeing from his family and his responsibilities does not bring him wisdom instead he is torn between opposing desires—relishing every moment of his life as a husband and father and the dreadful feeling that he is a failure. Gopal’s abandoning the family is not the result of worldly life, freeing himself from all bondage or renunciation due to contentment but a withdrawal in pain and fear of being a failure.
In spite of all the hurdles and problems that Sumi faces she wanted to make life sweet, sublime and purposeful. She wanted to be independent in all respects earning a living for herself and her daughters, learning to ride a two wheeler, giving proper education to her children even moving out of her parents house, reviving her creative writing and planning to rewrite the story of Surpanakha in The Ramayana expressing the progressive outlook of a new woman who wants to assert her individuality. Through the story of Surpanakha Sumi wants to give vent to her emotions She says:

Female Sexuality, we’re ashamed of owning it, we can’t speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such woman, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous but a woman charged with Sexuality, not frightened of displaying it— it is this Surpanakha I am going to write about. [AMT 191]

The novel A Matter of Time highlights another important fact—the deep rooted desire for a son in the Indian context. Manorama undergoes great anxieties for not having a son. “She became the visible symbol of their failure to have a son” (151) She was tormented with the fear that her husband Vithalrao might remarry to have a son. This made her force Shripathi marry Kalyani against their wish and also against the warnings about the risk of abnormalities in children born
through such consanguineous marriage. Kalyani gave birth to her son and won the favour of her mother. But the happiness is only short lived, for her martial life comes to an end with the loss of that abnormal retarded son at the age of four and Kalyani returns to her parent's home with her daughters in disgrace after the disappearance of the child. The deprivation of a son for the family continues through Kalyani and Shripathi, through the Second generation pair Sumi and Gopal with three daughters. The desire for a son is realized in the desperate reassurance of Aru to Kalyani after the death of Sumi and Shripathi. "Aru, breaking out of her paralysis rushes to Kalyani and kneeling by the huddled body says 'Amma, I'am here, I'm your daughter, Amma, I'm your son, I'm here with you, Amma, I'm here ....(233)

The concept of the new woman is clearly expressed through the transformation of Sumi. It is clear that to day women are no longer subservient to male ego and no longer dependent on them. The new woman feels that economic independence and domestic space are pre-requisites for women and they are never prepared to compromise after her struggle and loosing her individuality in a male dominated society. Thus the modern women want to lead a life of freedom, liberty where there is no place for patriarchal domination. Thus grandmother Kalyani and grand daughter Aru embody the past and future. They are the fixed points at the core of the family's fortunes around whom Sumi and Gopal's relationships finally revolves. Gopal and Shripathi are the root cause of all suffering they do not play
an active role, and the they are flitting like shadows. Gopal’s exit and Shripathi’s withdrawal from the family tilts the balance and the original stability is never regained.

Sumi in the beginning appears to be a will-less woman, too dull to understand the situation she finds herself in, indifferent and gloomy. But once she comes out of her shell and begins to assert her power and independence she appears to be strong willed and assertive. Aru it is hoped would practice what her mother Sumi has achieved and follow the pride and dignity of life, courage and confidence to live one’s life which she has inherited from Sumi. Although Sumi remains a unhappy prey, who never breaks her silence but refutes the notions that women are not objects to be used and abused. She conforms to the belief that women are embodiment of tolerance and sufferings taking her mother to be a role model. She emerges finally as a self assertive rebellious woman. Aru establishes close relationship with Kalyani and takes up the responsibility not only of the family but also as a representative of a new generation of women, who would break the suffocating life and penetrate the impregnable silence of the previous generation and make them speak for themselves. It would only be a matter of time, when the impatient new generation would be ready to fight successfully in getting justice for woman and enjoy their rights within the framework of family relationship and society.

All Shashi Deshpande’s novels deeply deal with family relationships. The thematic concern of the novel is about the saga of three women-a writer, a
singer and a social worker and how each one in their own way attain solicitude and a sense of individuality and self through their occupations and skills and continue to defy the servility of men through their shared experiences. In a review Meenakshi Mukherjee observes:

In Small Remedies, Deshpande is attempting much more than she did in her earlier novels—all five of them different from each other—but smaller than this in scope. ... But none of them gathered up, as this new novel does, in one large sweep, the plurality, diversity and contradictions of our composite culture where an Anthony Gonsalves (the reference to “Amar Akbar Anthony” is deliberate), a Hamidabai, and Joe can all be part of Madhu’s extended family, and the daughter of Ghulam Saab can opt, though not very easily to get accepted as Shailaja Joshi”. (123-24)

She ventures to write differently. She deviates from her portrayal of traditional Kanadiga-Maharashtrian Brahmin family and writes about a Goan Christian family, the life of a Muslim tablaplayer, the people surrounding him and notably about his grand-daughter, Hasina, Madhu, Savitribai Indorekar. Leela and Hasina learn to know themselves and in their association with each other they achieve not only social but also spiritual identities. For Savitribai, the great singer of the Gwalior Gharana, music is the aesthetic dimension of her spiritual salvation.
Madhu the narrator has been commissioned to write the biography of Savitribai born and married into an orthodox Hindu family, who then eloped with her Muslim table accompanist Ghulam Saab because of her extreme devotion to music. After careful introspection with better understanding of the situation, others and themselves, the other protagonists decide to compromise and start living their individual life. But Savitiri Bai confronts the dilemmas, and experience rearranges her domestic life without the help of her family. Madhu writes about Savitribai.

I can make Bai the rebel who rejected the conventions of her times. The feminist who lived her life on her terms. The great artist who struggled and sacrificed everything in the cause of her art. The women who gave up everything—a comfortable home, a husband and a family—for love. (S.R. 166).

Madhu explores the life of the great vocalist Savitribai Indorekar. She is very imperious in her attitude to her students, servants, and even her biographer, often instructing her on how to conduct the interview. She wants Savitribai to reveal some vital information about her and waits for her particularly to talk about her daughter Munni. Savitribai had revolted against the accepted norm of the society. She had left her home, discarding her marital identity to join a Guru to learn music. She uses her maiden name Indorekar, instead of her surname Joshi. The scar of having been rejected by her own child and the agony of rejecting that
child is hidden behind her rigid refusal to speak of her daughter Munni. Madhu’s efforts to probe the depths to understand the sufferings of Savitribai as a woman, mother is avoided by her. One of the reviewers observes that the persistent efforts of Madhu is also the efforts of the author “to rouse the sympathy of the bereaved mother,” and also “to record and interpret the life and art of the great musician is who is marginalised”. This has estranged her from her daughter. She is an unhappy mother who enthralls the world by her singing. Her reputation has been clouded by controversies and rumours. Bijay Danta comments about Savitribai:

“A rebel Brahmin bride, she elopes with her tabla accompanist and has a daughter from him. Now she wants to recreate her past in such a way that the revisited and reconstructed links give greater clarity to her fading image. Each step of her life as a public figure, retrospectively repeated must look logical, bold and significant. The link with the Muslim lover must appear inconsequential, an aberration at best. (205)

Thus for a woman with such background to elope with a Muslim tablaplayer and live in a strange town among total strangers must have required immense courage. It is evident that there are different yardsticks for men and women in one society. And this is obvious to Madhu who was a witness to Savitribai’s rejection by traditional society. She remembers how in Neemgaon “each family had its place marked out for it according to religion, caste, money, family background etc.” (138).
Munni becomes the best friend of Madhu after moving into the neighbourhood and most of the girls in the neighbourhood become regular visitors to Madhu's home. They are really not interested in establishing friendship with her but they are curious about Munni. They begin to interrogate her pretending all the time that they do not even know her name.

‘I’m Meenakshi, she proclaims....

‘Then why does everyone call you Munni?

‘I don’t know. My name is Meenakshi....

The question makes her angry and stubborn and upset. The girls go on to the next questions “If your name is Meenakshi, why does your father have a Muslim name?” ‘My father doesn’t have a Muslim name.

My father’s name is Sadashivrao. (35)

More than Savitribai it is Munni who insists on calling herself Meenakshi. There is a total denial of her daughter. Munni’s story brings about the intersection of Madhu’s past life at Neemgaon as a doctor’s daughter who lived in a small town-

Bhavanipur and her immediate present as doctor’s wife and the mother of Adit in Bombay. The past is often at variance with itself. Madhu’s search for authenticity often involves Savitribai’s recollections of the buried, forgotten past, the past which is reinscribed into the narrator Madhu’s memory. The narrator and the character become specular images of each other.
Madhu while presenting the story of Savitribai and her family presents a glaring picture of the inequalities in the orthodox society. She remembers his Neemgaon how each family had its place marked out for it according to caste, religion, family background and wealth and money. It is obvious from her report how Savitribai was rejected by the conventional society. She is fully aware of her father’s unorthodox ways. Being a widower with a daughter to take care of he maintains a male servant at home giving no importance to any kind of morals, deserving no rituals and openly resorting to drinks. Now Madhu realizes that while people were willing to ignore her father’s eccentricities, he was not willing to accept Savitribai. “Being a man he got away with much, he would live the way he wanted without open censure or disapproval” (139).

Madhu quotes the example of Savitribai’s father-in-law, who had a mistress, a singer who was famous for classical Thumri singing. The old man visited her regularly but there was no outrageous outcry:

It was an openly known fact that he visited her regularly. The women of the family spoke of it among themselves they gossiped about it, giggled over it.... This was the point of discussion, of exclamation. That he had a mistress was accepted; a wife from one’s own class, a mistress from another-this was normal. [Text p. 219-220]

But women are judged on a different scale. Though Baiji was encouraged and supported by her father–in-law, she had to face the anger, derision, contempt, ridicule of all the women.
For Bai to develop a relationship with another man, a tablaplayer, a Muslim is unimaginable and it is a crime. Did anyone blame the father-in-law for this? As the head of the family, a position that was indisputable then, he was not accountable to any one. Nevertheless, there must have been comments and criticism. Did he blame himself? For a man, a wealthy man and the head of the family, to indulge in his love of music even to have a singer as a mistress, was all right. But for a daughter inlaw to be learning music, and that seriously as if she was going to be a professional! Surely there was outrage, surely there was anger in the family. Rules could be modified for the daughters, sometimes they were, purely out of affections, but daughters-in-law carry the weight of the honour of the family its reputation its izzat (220). Thus it is obvious for any woman to swim against the usual tide is scandalous and unthinkable. Deshpande writes:

To be set apart from your own kind, not to be able to conform, to flout the rules laid down, is to lay yourself open to cruelty. Animals know this, they do it more openly, their cruelty towards the deviant is never concealed. But the subtle cruelty of persistent hostility leaves deeper wounds. There is always the temptation to succumb, to go back to the normal path and be accepted. To resist the temptation speaks of great courage. (221)

Thus Madhu is left confused and perturbed about Bai’s courage or lack of it. She had the courage tom lead the most unconventional life anyone in her society
would ever imagine to do so. But behind such a courageous personality there was a woman who wanted to conform, to be accepted by society and tradition.

Bai’s success does not make her a self-realized person. Even towards the end of her life, Bai struggles to find her identity by ignoring a great but important part of her life. She wants to successfully obliterate her relationship with Ghulam Saab, and her daughter Munni, born of Ghulam Saab, despite his contribution towards Bai’s success. This maligned the character of Savitribai:

“...A woman who’d left her husband’s home- what morals would she have anyway! Bai was obviously damned by every one. To the town she was one of ‘those women’ she speaks of now, women who were only doing what was expected of them. Professional singers were expected to accept a man’s protection. So why not Bai? Women can never be free. Is that it? (SR. 223-224)

There was also a strong rumour that she had other lovers who too helped her in the success of her career. But she had to draw a line and erase the names of Ghulam Saab, Munni and someothers connected with her journey to success and fame. She could attain her identity only through denial of these things. Though her efforts point out to her achieved dreams, yet she spends her life in struggle to gain the identity and the respectability she had lost. However to a biographer the real Bai remains elusive. Munni, is alienated right from her childhood because of her parents unusual relationship. She strongly tries to detach herself from her
original parentage by consorting a different story. She claims that her father is living in Pune, a famous lawyer caring 'a lot of money; and Ghulam Saab was only a tabla player for her mother. In fact her mother was Brahmin, a married woman who was living with a Muslim man made her misfit in the society. Munni starts living her life of illusion to convince the society that her life is separate from Bai and her lover Munni strives to attain the life and identity of a respectable family which her mother had rejected. Denial made it possible for Savitribai to live with herself to gain her respectable identity. Savitri’s ambition made her neglect her daughter, Munni was unloved and uncared for. She developed contempt for her mother. She detests every thing about her, mother’s looks she had rejected everything associated with her-music, talent, genius ambition and freedom. She hated her mother’s visitors, her performances. To her, her mothers life style meant disgrace. In her search for identity as a common middle-class woman named Shailaja Joshi, she successfully denied the old one, Munni daughter of Savitribai and Ghulam Saab. But her death neutralizes her life long struggle to attain an identity separated from her mother. Munni inspite of her determination fails to attain self-realization and in her death, she is identified as Savitribai’s only daughter which she resisted all her life.

And then Shailaja Joshi, the woman I met on the bus-another name, another person altogether. The result of Munni beating herself into shape with a savage determination, like dough being pounded into
soft pliability, capable finally of taking any shape. 'Shailaja Joshi—only daughter of Savitribai Indorekar.' The notice of her death—giving her back the identity she had resisted all her life. (SR 225)

Apart from Savitribai, and Munni Small Remedies also includes the saga of another equally remarkable, women, Madhu’s aunt, Leela who dared to be different from others. Leela a non conformist was committed to the communist ideological. She is a fiercely independent woman who was even critical of Gandhiji’s principles of Ahimsa, and Satyagraha and thought it was ridiculous to allow oneself to be beaten up.

Leela was a strong personality she was confident and was well aware of her needs and the goals and aspirations. She was married to a man of low income as a punishment because she did not show any interest in domestic chores and had a great inclination for higher education. But her grandmother’s punishment turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Her husband Vasanath encouraged her to pass her matriculation. Her husband died at an early age of TB. His death strengthened her resolve to be independent and purposeful in life. She was determined to support her husband’s family. Her awareness of her responsibility and her desire to fulfill it did not shirk away. This leads her to revolt against tradition. She refuses to return to her parents house after the death of her husband, and marries Dr. Joe a social worker. She supports all women affected by the contagious disease, she is considered a rebel both in her social life and in her personal life too. She being a Brahmin widow revolted against tradition re married a Christian widower with
two children. It is clear that Leela always had striven to attain self-hood and her persistent pursuit eventually earns her happiness and contentment. Leela wanted to lead a simple life and did not approve of life which did not look beyond one's own self. She did not believe in caste, creed or colour.

Savitribai and Leela were the rebels of their time; both dared to dream and to achieve freedom. Leela was a victim of gender politics, she could never reach the hierarchical top in a male chauvinism. It is the inner strength that these two women possessed that helped them to breakthrough the barriers and surmount the obstacles to achieve what they wanted—freedom and individual identity. Neither Bai nor Leela ever complained of gender discrimination. They worked for the freedom they wanted, in some way they asserted. These are women who struggled to find their own way and voice.

Both Savitribai and Leela had dreams and both learnt how to realize those dreams inspite of social barriers. They were women who dared to dream and however harsh and cruel it may be they changed those dreams in to reality. In fact it is not merely the stories of heroism of Savitribai and Leela and others, it is the story of women who struggle and triumph through their life's journey. As the opening lines of the novel Small Remedies indicate “This is Som’s story or rather, Joe’s story as related to us by Som.” (SM 1) In fact it is observed that it is the story of all those who defy, suffer, endure and yet stand up to face life; all those who realize the “imperfectability” and yet “move forward to self-knowledge and acceptance of a ‘flawed’ self, past mistakes and future failures.” (SM 199)
In this novel Shashi Deshpande enters into the world of classical music. Madhu the narrator is writing the biography of the great doynne of the Gwalior Gharana, Savitribai Indorekar. Deshpande seems to be on familiar ground in using the jargon and idiom of music effortlessly As Meenakshi Mukherjee opines:

> Of the four remarkable novels I have read in recent times that deal with music-Vikram Seth’s An Equal Music, Salman Rushdie’s The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Bani Babu’s Bangla Novel Gandharvi and now Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande, I think, faces the toughest challenge. This has to do with incompatibility between the discourse of Hindustani music and the English language.” (146)

However, *Small Remedies* is less about music and more about the fascinating Vocalist, Savitribai Indrekar. Although, Savitribai appears to be physically a frail woman seemed petite yet she is imperious in her attitude. ‘She had the tremendous grit and determination to revolt against the traditional norms and make a name for oneself in the field of classical music. Changed the derogatory words “that singer woman” of Neemgaon Savitribai had led an unconventional life that no one in her society would imagine. Behind these acts of courage was Savitribai who wanted to be accepted by the society and granted an identity.

Music and creative writing are at the centre of the story as a small remedy for their problems they face Savitribai forgets herself in her music and Madhu
makes an attempt to drown her grief in creative writing. (In writing the biography) Madhu is trying to discover herself, constantly remembering her personal grief and sharing it with Savitribai's and asserts her solidarity with other suffering women.

Silence of generations of women cowed down by societal patriarchal norms is gradually being destroyed. Creative writing is a kind of breaking of silence. In *Small Remedies* the novelist once again explores the role silence plays in preserving the self from total loss. Similarly in *A Matter of Time*, though the three women Kalyani Saru and Aru are victims of patriarchal dominance they reclaim their identity, and individuality ultimately when they break their silence. Sumi's controlled approach and her restrained resistance, Kalyani's strategy of defiance by her formidable impenetrable silence. Show that by and large women use silence as a powerful tool of resistance and protest but when it is broken it leads them to find their identity. Thus Sumi wants to make her life sweet and sublime even amidst various hurdles and problems. The portrayal of Sumi's character by the novelist show that Sumi wants to assert her individuality, in the male dominated society, no longer to be dependent but lead an independent and free life. This shows the modern concept of new woman who never compromise after losing her individuality.

Disasters cannot be warded off. To make the big and small disasters, the grief and pain bearable and to remember those small happy moments of life all have their different talisman.
And so the Ganeshas in niches, the decorated thresholds, the Mango leaf thorans, the oms, the Swastikas, the charms and the amulets—all to keep disaster at bay, to stave off the nemesis of a jealous God. It doesn’t help; nothing does. It’s always a battle. Such small remedies, these, to counter the terrible disease of being human, of being mortal and vulnerable. (S.R. 81)

In *A Matter of Time* Sumi never likes to unlock and lay bare her emotions to Gopal. Her pride prevents her, nor she requesting him to come back to her. She appears to be composed to the outside world. She feels, that, it is important for women like her, to retain her feelings as she says “...The picture she presents to the world is one of grace and courage, to be admired rather than pitied” (AMT 172). Sumi’s thoughts reflect her modern progressive outlook. She reveals essentially an optimistic vision of life. Perhaps, Aru, as a representative of the younger generations would penetrate the silence and make women realize their situations and speak for themselves. It is Aru who inheriting her mother’s pride and dignity courage and confidence, articulates the feminist voice in the novel. When at the end the news of Sumi’s and her grandfather Shripathi’s death comes she rushes to Kalyani and says “Amma, I’m here, I’m your daughter, Amma, I’m your son, and I’m here with you” (235 AMT) Thus in this coming together of Kalyani and Aru is the healing touch of time. They have each found their identity and have forged a partnership.
It is clear that the protagonists of these two novels *A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies* are women caught between tradition and modernity, who are conscious of their predicament. They are not exceptionally strong women who revolt against conventional morality. They are intensely aware of the need to articulate and find their identity. They no longer remain passive and silent. Silence acts as a barrier, and works as a powerful, potent tool of resistance. These are the desperate remedies they adopt. Jaya in *That Long Silence* admits at the end of the novel that it is not easy for a person to change, especially overnight. But it is possible to change over long periods of time. Thus Kalyani, Aru reposition their lives by regaining their identity. Kalyani feels empowered when in Shripathi’s will is read out where in she is referred to as Vithalrao’s and Manorama’s daughter and not as his wife. As Usha Bande writes: “... it is as if the words have given her something more than the house, restored something she had lost; they seem, in fact, to have strengthened her (AMT 245). It is her identity, her individuality she finds ultimately.

The heroines of *Small Remedies* Savitribai, Madhu Leela and others may not assert yet they might appear to be rebels but they are strong women struggling to find their own way and own voice. Human beings have to find their own strength to stand firm and that strength lies within. These are the desperate remedies. It takes time to heal. It is this strength that sustains Savitribai Madhu, Leela, through grief and pain, anguish and agony and help them to establish their identity.