CHAPTER - IV

Representation of Family and Relationships

The family is of prime importance to an individual, as it centers one’s individuality within a safe cultural haven. Family symbolizes a collectivity that provides continuity to individual identity. Strangely woman’s individual identity gets merged in the family. Woman’s life revolves around her family whether before or after her marriage. After marriage she becomes the caretaker, nurturer, upholder and the unifying bond and strength of her family. Her family then does not free her from complexes and challenges concerned with individuality, specially assigning her a complex status after marriage. One could try to understand woman’s status in relation to Simone de Beauvoir’s idea of marriage and relationship:

Marriage is obscene in principles insofar as it transforms into rights and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge; it gives an instrumental and therefore degrading character to the two bodies in dooming them to know each other in their general aspects as bodies, not as persons. Marriage therefore makes or breaks a woman. (The Second Sex 463).

However, despite the negative viewing of marriage as seen above one could understand woman’s status in marriage through positive overtones as seen in Kamini Dinesh who says:

(The Woman’s) emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing upon untapped inner reserves of strength. The wife, in the end, is therefore not a rebel but a redeemed
wife-one who has broken the long silence, one who is no longer afraid of the dark. She is a wife reconceptualized as a woman and an individual—a marked contrast to the older generation of women around her with their uncomplaining, unresisting, fatalistic attitude. Hers is the dilemma of the new woman that could be resolved when the claims of selfhood are reconciled with the claims made upon her by the family and society (204-5).

In India woman is at the centre of the family; domestic life starts with her. She is the custodian of the family’s wellbeing, prestige, tradition and culture. Yet she is still to find her identity with equal status in the family, she is born into and given in marriage. Women’s place in society and family in India as defined by political feminists is to support her in gender equality, to demonstrate how politics which is a power relation present in her daily life is a kind of political philosophy facilitating the examination of the state, it’s role in addressing inequality in gender, her social subjugation and giving importance to her rights. Similarly, social feminists also believe that liberation for women can be achieved by trying to end her suppression from cultural and economic sources. They assert that women cannot be liberated due to dependence on males financially; so, woman will get justice only when she is freed from economic, class and race suppression.

Like social theorists, Indian literature indicates to us that woman’s place in her family and her relationships change when she is married. In the joint family, she achieves power by her transition from the position as daughter-in-law to that of the mother-in-law and therefore has been able to secure her position, particularly in having borne a son enabling the continuation of the masculine lineage.
Similarly, family is central to Shashi Deshpande’s works that represent family and relationships and even dwell more on relationships within and without the family viz between mother-daughter, father-daughter, husband-wife, and brother-sister. In short, the woman’s relationship with others becomes central to all familial relationships, with woman acting as the catalyst to them. Very often, the woman looks within to find her strength for her problems, and she finds a solution of hope and peace for her family. Just as woman is central to the family, family too along with its relationships play an important role in shaping the life and totality of a woman. The family is shown in positive light in Deshpande’s stories and they are basically Hindu families with its joint family system. So, these families and familial relationships have an Indianness to it with its positives and negatives which are typically Indian. There is also a looking backward through representation of family in the Indian epics. The family is very often seen through the eyes of a woman who is the narrator or central figure, since she is at the centre of the family. Relationships mould and shape her individuality and identity; or in other words, her relationships within and outside her family defines her roles. At the same time, her centrality to family life does not denote her superiority, since very often, woman becomes an appendage, belonging to a father, husband, brother, son etc. Hence, her relationship is not free from male dominance. As a wife, it is expected of her to be

….obedient to her husband, renowned, light-footed, eloquent in speech, sympathetic to the patients, attains to happiness when she lives peacefully with her husband, and nicely cooks the food highly efficacious, and grown through rain, conducive to our physical growth, brought daily in use, and relished by our ancestors (Chris Weedon, Post-Structural Theory 54).
Shashi Deshpande reiterates the centrality of women in her representation of family. The family portrayed by Deshpande is a large powerful paradoxical structure that belongs to the middle and upper-class Hindu background. Relationships within and outside the family are also examined by the author through the female narrator. The family is a space replete with human beings moved by love, care, pettiness, rivalry, patriarchal dominance, materialism, ambition, idealism. This is expressed in her own words thus:

For me, when I began writing in the seventies, it was women. My stories, and later my novels, were the outpourings of my feelings, my thoughts and questions about the place of women in the society I lived in. Women, who had lived in some place in my mind for years, emerged and I wrote about their fears, their desires and their emotions. It was many years, almost a decade later that I came upon some lines that struck an instant chord within me: ‘The direct, natural and necessary relation of person to person is the relation of man to woman. From this relation one can judge man’s whole level of development. It reveals the extent to which man’s natural behaviour has become human’ (Writing from the Margin and other Essays 204).

According to her the real concern is woman’s relations whether to another woman or man and that explains the development of a person. Further in the same book Deshpande comments about her writing, which is relevant to women’s writing in general:

My writing, however, came out of no abstract theory or borrowed ideology, but out of what I saw. And what I saw was this: that women
do not matter, not in themselves anyway, but only as providers of heirs, male heirs, for the family. That women are to be regarded as subordinate and inferior human beings......demand for dowry and bride-burning, economic and social inequality, legal judgements that were based on chauvinist and patriarchal values, a disregard for female life... This is reflected in women’s writing. There is a great difference in the writing of women in the sixties and in the eighties. The writing shows that old roles are no longer relevant for women and that they are trying to find new roles both within the family and without (Writing from the Margin 204-5).

Marital relationship in a short story called “An Antidote to Boredom” depicts the gradual boredom and life of a house wife; she realizes a certain gap and monotony between her husband and herself because of the husband’s very busy schedule. The stagnant marital relations lead her to an affair with a widower, a stranger at her son’s school, an affair that brings sudden charm and beauty to her monotonous life now. Simultaneously, a sense of guilt also troubles her. However, the moment she realizes that her husband knows of this affair, which, coupled with her realization that it was a passing affair only as an antidote to boredom, she forgoes it.

Like Simone de Beauvoir says:

A husband regards none of his wife’s good qualities as particularly meritorious; they are implied by the institution of marriage itself. He fails to realize that his wife is no character from some pious and conventional treatise, but a real individual of flesh and blood, he
takes her for granted her fidelity to strict regimen she assumes not taking into account that he has temptations to vanquish that she may yield to them, that in any case her patience, her charity, her propriety, are difficult conquests, he is still more profoundly ignorant of her dreams, her fancies, her nostalgic yearnings of the emotional climate in which she spends her days.” (The Second Sex 473)

Like what Simone de Beauvoir says, Deshpande too expresses the gender role expectations that suffocate women. She draws attention in her writings to the fact that the society expects women to live within relationships. Such rules rigidly laid down for a wife, sister, daughter or mother, make them unhappy - this is what Deshpande tries to convey in her writing. What she does not agree with is the idealization of motherhood – the false and sentimental notes that accompany it. The most difficult relations that remain complicated within the Indian family system or society at large is the man-woman relationship.

D.H. Lawrence writes: “The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman.” (Barry Jeffrey Scherr, 11) A man-woman relationship is the most beautiful one. But the relationship that a man and a woman have is not empty of difficulties. Compared to the various types of relationships, man-woman relationship is the most committed and the most difficult one. It is the man-woman relationship, specially the husband-wife relation which is rich and psychologically and culturally very satisfying. Discord in this relationship causes many problems and sufferings for the woman.

Deshpande attempts to closely examine man-woman relationships within the orbit of society and family; she basically focuses on the female experiences in life,
reminding us of yet another example of Jane Austen with her limited ambit and restricted knowledge of the world. Like Jane Austen, Deshpande is more preoccupied with the challenging problems and the choking surroundings of her female protagonists. It is only when these protagonists fight firmly in this vicious and hard male-dominated society, that they discover their real identity as wife, mother, daughter, and most importantly as human beings.

Some short stories from her third volume *It Was the Nightingale* (1986) depict man-woman relationship from newer perspectives. In one story, though Jaya chooses to be away from her husband for two years, their separation takes place in mutual love and understanding. “A Man and a Woman”, shows us how a young widow gets involved in a physical relationship with a much younger boy of seventeen, long after her husband has been dead. This young boy, the dead husband’s younger brother and his widowed sister-in-law, only thirty years old but full of life, energy and beauty, are at the centre of the story. It seems that nature had made her for “the joy of life, a body made for a man’s hands” (207). Her dependency on male companionship is obvious here. She says: Where shall I go, Manu? My parents are dead. My brothers…no, I can’t live with them. And I have become incapable of living by myself (“A Man and a Woman” *Col V.II* 205)

Many man-woman relationship themes in Deshpande focus around marriage or its failure and feminine patterns of self-depiction; and her depiction of relationships in familial and non-familial circumstances throws light on woman’s view of family and relationships. Like Deshpande, Charlotte Bronte’s heroines attain happy marriages because of the writer’s skilful handling of circumstance: if given a poor man or a maimed one, then maybe she might have a chance. The other name
for marriage is dependency for a woman: the level of responsibility or of irresponsibility is defined by others, and of irresponsible power; the giving up of autonomy; vulnerable in experience. Women novelists recognize the charm, but also the terror. In their probing of internal and external female experience, they often question, openly and never concealing marriage as a happy ending.

Such a depiction reminds one of what Spacks critiques on the same issue. While analyzing different texts in *The Female Imagination* Spacks brings forth the importance of family, marriage and relationships. In the Chapter “Power and Passivity” she comments on George Eliot’s Gwendolen Harleth from the novel *Daniel Deronda*:

She understands only power relationships, tyrannizing over her mother and sisters by virtue of her beauty, which they recognize as giving her the right to her own way. Her pragmatic uncle immediately acquiesces in her demand for more advantages than his own daughter, never allowing himself quite to realize how fully he participates in the commodity view of marriage. She has no interest in relationships with other women, because “women did not give her homage”; and her understanding of possible relationships with men is limited to the receiving of homage (47)

In its examination of marriage, *Daniel Deronda* is perhaps unique among nineteenth-century novels. Sometimes Gwendolen thinks of marriage as an arena of power. Other women may yield their freedom when they marry; she proposes to enlarge her own…To imagine marriage as a state of freedom, she must imagine herself as unique. Such a view is opposed to what Deshpande’s heroine views
marriage as, since marriage seems to set a trap for them, unlike Eliot’s heroine, who
wields power from marriage and marital relations.

Marriage has always been a very different thing for man and for woman. The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them; women, as we have seen, have never constituted a caste making exchanges and contracts with the male caste upon a footing of equality. A man is socially an independent and complete individual; he is regarded first of all as a producer whose existence is justified by the work he does for the group; we have seen why it is that the reproductive and domestic role to which woman is confined has not guaranteed her an equal dignity (Beauvoir 426).

Like western women writers, Deshpande’s heroines observe the power relations in the family. Charlotte Bronte observes the relations between women and men as importantly involved with problems of power or power relationships. Bronte also comes through unmistakably much better than George Eliot, in describing accommodative relationships between women. Charlotte Bronte’s novels display a speculative optimism not unlike George Eliot’s. Regardless of their clear point on how women suffer, both these authors appear to consider it possible for women to receive emotional and moral contentment—not without difficulty, since the only alternative to relationship is solitude which is equally unbearable. Shashi Deshpande’s writings have a great affinity with these above writers, since she also
brings out the male-female power relationships and the female-female harmonious relations.

It is these power-ridden relationships which make Deshpande consider male-female relations as causing sorrow to a woman, making her escape the relationship. In “An Antidote to Boredom,” the husband locks his wife in a prison of daily routine and an unfelt, ritual conversation, until the prospect of her committing adultery awakens, if not love, at least possessiveness. When the affair with the other man is over she then realizes that life could be much more meaningful, when negotiated and approached with positivity:

And then I knew, he cared, and as if a dam had burst, a flood of shame, of guilt swept over me, drowned me. I let go the mirage that I had tried to grasp all these days, and now I realised, when it was too late, the most piercing thought of all-that it had been no mere antidote to boredom, but the best part of my life, and I let it go (Col V.I 20)

She is filled with contentment and satisfaction because over all, she had fun and slightly rebelled though of course later she lost; however, that was better than to have never rebelled. She would not ever have the courage to allow this affair to grow, since she is tied by marriage, yet she had tried and acquired what she wanted at a point in time, because of which she achieves a great sense of achievement.

What negativity in relationship could do to damage a marital relationship is seen in the aging couple in “The First Lady”. They have lost all feeling for each other except mutual self-hatred and a sense of emotional loss. Men in these stories, as an occasional prospective lover, appear to the women protagonists almost as a different species: potentially hostile, largely uncaring, and certainly unseeing. The
lines of communication are down: the marital sex is awful (mostly, he wants sex and she submits); the wives suffer in varying degrees and combinations of shame, resentment, ennui, guilt and intrusion by in-laws.

However, an unusual man-woman relationship that penetrates the transience, uncertainty and emotional instabilities that affect clandestine affairs or relationship is witnessed in “Rain”, which deals with guilt and failure of two individuals, even though in love. The story, narrated by a man, unlike most of her stories narrated by woman, narrates his feeling for his cousin, who is the wife of somebody else, and his separation from her for thirteen years. When he meets her again, all feelings and emotions of love revisit him, with her husband in deathbed and the woman’s initiation into love-making that follows. The story explores in the narration of the man, a woman’s psyche and will that urges to count her as a human being who has a mind and body and not merely view her as a wife. She knows and realizes that she is not someone who will follow the traditional life of a widow. The love she has for life and wide thinking aids her to comprehend the futility of a decision to agree to live in negation and limitations; hence, denying social obligations, she intends to settle into a fresh and new life, leaving her guilt behind. However, the man could not forget the fact that the first night they made love was the very same night her husband died. This fear and guilt leaves a very intense mark on him and so he is not free to lead a happy normal married life with this woman:

It has never been any good again. Always, the same. I spend hours wondering what is wrong with me. Has the guilt of that rainy night scarred me so deeply? Meanwhile I wait for something to release me from this cage of guilt and fear, for something to set my manhood free. But nothing happens. And
all the time I remember her words… ‘To live like this forever… (Col. V. II 19)

In a sense, the above portrayal of man-woman relationship brings to one’s mind the female writer witnessing the male gaze on such a relationship. The word ‘gaze’ is getting momentum in gender studies in studying the male-female relationships. The male is treated as subject while female is treated as the object. Feminist theories view the male gaze as revealing unequal power relations between the viewed and the viewer, gazed and the gazer which suggests that a man may be imposing his unwanted (depersonalizing) gaze on woman. This view of the male gaze further finds man as voyeur viewing the woman as an object of desire. While in the case of the woman, all that she can do is to only return the gaze, when she objectifies others by the gaze. Hence in relationships of power the one who gazes directs his or her gaze even to the same gender for non-sexual reason.

Voyeurism is the root of male gaze. Mulvey says:

Women are the image, and man the bearer of the look, the Voyeur. In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split…(and) the male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female. The split between the active male and the passive female, the male gaze projects its fantasy on the female figure, which is styled accordingly. Women are displayed and coded to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.” (Waugh. 510)

Regarding what has been discussed above, one finds that it is true in the case of Shashi Deshpande’s short story “The Stone Women” (2003), which portrays the
male dominance through its gaze. The gaze socially and figuratively looks prominent, controlling the object of its gaze. The title “Stone Women” itself indicates female as the object of the male gaze in the images of the women etched out in stone around the walls of the temple. The structured but simple plot revolves around a couple married five months ago and around their visit to Sri Channakeshava Temple at Belur.

This story narrated in the first person, brings out the women carved in stone as objects of gaze, first by the creator or the stone mason, and then by the art connoisseur and tells the story of a woman’s vision of the male gaze to control her. For, the male gaze, dominantly patriarchal, decides on how to shape its pleasure principle. Such a point of view is brought forth in the story by the female narrator, who remembers her husband thinking about her bracelet as ugly, and her act of stopping to wear it ever since he disliked it, though she feels its lack and remembers it with a feeling of loss. She quietly hates her husband’s double standards, since this selfsame man who never even liked his wife wearing bracelet is now full of praise of these stone women carved as laden with jewels.

The female point of view that Deshpande weaves about the male gaze of objectifying women is the most interesting dimension of the story. The male gaze on the female body as an indication of voyeurism is proved to the woman when she observes her husband totally lost in his gaze of the stone carvings of female figures, with the male guide accentuating the gaze. Consequently, the narrator feels ashamed to even hear about the explanations given by the guide about these women on stone, concluding that women’s bodies are objectified by different ways for male pleasure and sexual delight. Various naked leaning women in stone depict civilization, society, harmony, morality and order according to male ideas, with women being
shown in a negative light as the artifacts of the male artistic traditions and as mere objects of the male gaze in visual tradition, hailing these creations as edifices of great art and popular culture. That is why one observes the narrator getting uncomfortable with headache and nausea, with her imagination that these stone carved women are closing in on her, which makes her leave the temple.

The stone carved women in the story become a feminist edifice to ostracize the power of male dominance not only in society but also in architecture, art, language, and power politics particularly through the gaze. For, they might symbolize for the male the epitome of feminine beauty, while the stone women are lifeless and stagnant. The interesting turn that the story takes is when such a realization of the male gaze that belittles her female self-respect, makes the woman assert her individuality by dressing according to her preference. When the woman retires to bed later, her husband’s hands that feel her body make him utter angrily, “You are wearing something new, I don’t like it… It hides you.” (Col V.I 75) Here we find the male gaze manifests its dominion on the clothes of the women too and her choice of dressing. However, she impresses on him that she is happy with what she wears, thereby denying and resisting the male attempt to stereotype her as woman through male gaze, as done to the stone women.

The story thereby proves how women’s awareness of and her understanding of the male gaze helps them to resist gender stereotyping; it is a lesson in words on how the woman saves the male-female relationship from becoming stagnant through her act of resisting how the male gaze would influence her thoughts, actions and feelings, by growing beyond these stereotypes and refusing to identify herself with the stone carvings of female mythological figures. It is obvious how myths glorify women, stereotyping them into characters and frozen into stereotyped relationships.
For example, a fairy tale character like Griselda or a mythical character like Gandhari is frozen artistically into docile, loyal wifehood.

Similarly, several mythologies, folklores and epics of India present woman and her various relationships, especially her relationship with the man, importantly as wife. Women writers in India are aware of the internalization of cultural ambition that women endeavor and they seek reconciliation in relationships rather than freedom from it. The writers envision that such an endeavor will also help certain traditional representation of the woman as a wife and mother. The efforts of the woman towards such a goal consist of the focal point of the ideal image of woman in India. Shashi Deshpande is one of the writers depicting these possibilities in her novels as well as stories. Here, the focus is on the recreated moments from the epics and mythologies in her Collected Stories, Vol.1 and Vol.2.

Deshpande fictionalizes epic situations that conventionally blame or to idealize the woman for her nature through her re-viewing, re-reading and re-interpreting women. While Sita Parityaga in Ramayana aesthetizes Sita’s sufferings, Deshpande sketches how Sita suffers due to husband Rama giving in to societal pressure because of which she must renounce her life (‘‘The Day of the Golden Deer”). Similarly, Deshpande weaves her story away from the conventional viewing of Draupadi’s role in the culmination of war in Mahabharata, as sprung from her negative relationship with Duryodhana (‘‘What Has Been Decided’’). Amba’s motif of revenge is justified by the writer who narrates Amba’s death as due to her lover’s denial to marry her and due to the male failure to respect her dignity (“Inner Rooms”). Equally, ‘‘The Last Enemy” explains the spiritual enhancement of Duryodhana and his relationship with his wife. Likewise, ‘‘Hear Me, Sanjaya…” depicts the story of Kunti, the unmarried mother and her struggle with the various
relations in her life. Usually these sections, situations and moments from epics achieve a judgmental or moralistic vision. But the same representation of women based on epics in the fictional works of Deshpande re-evaluates and re-creates these female representations. Thus, each of these stories is unique because the writer leads our attention to an alternative perspective led by narrators who are women and narrate their experiences as real or as normal and ordinary women.

Therefore, in “The Day of the Golden Deer” Sita’s experience and understanding of pain is viewed not merely as due to her being deserted by her husband, but as due to her awareness and understanding of social and ethical values of her environment and her manifest revelation of her husband’s idea of values. For, Sita later realizes that Rama’s manifesto is only to be known as the righteous king. Her experiences teach her to understand people as they are without any complaint against them. Because of these realizations she forgives Ravana. The new realization experienced by Sita’s empathy comes against the normal beliefs of an ‘ideal’ husband-wife relationship, which challenges new as against the usual accepted harmony in the man-woman relationship.

Interestingly, various angles are overlooked, since it is known that it is only through inner strength Sita achieves what is admirable of a woman in this situation. No doubt she achieves independence and individual identity, and yet her achievements, abilities, empathy and realizations make no difference to the society to which she belongs; she is still considered the ‘other’. Her relationships with her husband and brother-in-law or even her kidnapper have taught her that there will never be any appreciation for her abilities and achievements.
Consequently, Deshpande’s re-represented mythical female protagonists like - the conventional, exalted Sita, who wanted the golden deer (“The Day of the Golden Deer”), Draupadi- the adamant woman for whom the war was said to have been fought (“And What Has Been Decided?”), Kunti- the unwed mother (“Hear Me, Sanjaya…”) – emerge as individuals with isolated voice and unique cognizance associated with their lives. These fictional narrations’ appeal depends largely on their voicing their protagonists’ practicality and mature reasoning of their experiences. These women talk with a spiritual awareness, with their empathy towards people like Bhishma, Ravana or even the society emerging from this understanding. So, they are represented as strong mythical heroines commanding honor for their patience.

It is a known fact that forbearance has been identified as an age-old quality and known attribute of womanhood; however, these narrations focus on harmonious living by a comprehension of self and people around and not through denial of the self, thereby defining again the property of patience and empowering women differently. Since women are held up in different relationships, they have given importance to moving far beyond their given roles. So, when a similar longing they observe in men which is to be caught up in their roles, these women can only be sympathetic and not judgmental. Observed in this light, patriarchy looks not simply human but susceptible too despite the hard realities the women experienced.

In the above redefinition of mythical women, Shashi Deshpande succeeds also in redefining women’s relationship with men in the epics. Relations between men and women turn sour in some of her stories like the story “Inner Rooms” wherein Shashi Deshpande, borrowing the plot from the Mahabharata, shows the
anger, humiliation, disgust and suffering of the princess of Kashi, Amba. She kills herself in despair and later is reborn as Shikhandi, the woman who finally kills Bhishma. Deshpande asserts that after being suppressed, women want a little detachment from society. During withdrawal, they question their inner psyche and try to comprehend their personality, their inner strength and their secret capability. Seema Jena says, “the technique of withdrawal becomes a means by which a woman rediscovered her personality and digs up her hidden potential and learns not to repress her talent” (10). Amba refused to marry Vichitravirya because he was frail and weak. She insists on her right to decide a husband for herself, but when her sisters are humiliated, she realizes, “she was only a woman, she was to be disregarded and ignored, her will, her emotions had to be set aside as nothing because she was a woman” (Col V. I 19) Eventually she was taken to Salva and even in this decision she was a mere pawn. Amba’s identity and freedom were gone in the name of compromise, “choice,” “justice,” “dishonour,” “right,” and her weakness takes the form of revolt. She contests tradition when she is not allowed to stay according to her will; rather she takes death by giving away her own self to the burning fire. Her decision of dying was a manner of assertion of her identity against the insults.

Similarly, Draupadi shows her anger to Arjuna when she was denied her wifely rights by him and his decision to give her way to his brothers without any concern or respect for her feelings or emotions in “What Has Been Decided?” a story that views the forced sharing of Draupadi with all five brothers as a shameful act equal to prostitution. Deshpande emphasizes here that woman should not and cannot be treated as object of male pleasures. The short story “Hear Me Sanjaya…” is nothing but an ensuing dialogue between Kunti with Arjuna. Kunti talks about her pain and the quiet suffering she undertakes in the Pandu house. She identifies herself
with the suffering and pain of Gandhari and Draupadi. She was compelled to change her real name after marriage. Pritha was her real name but it was easily done away with and gone; she was now known only as Kunti. Nor was she permitted to show her love and care as a mother to Karna. Deshpande here directs us to a very important indication that even though motherhood is supposed to be the right of women, it is still very much within the domination of patriarchy.

Similarly, in “‘What Has Been Decided?’” ‘we are taken through a labyrinth of Draupadi’s memories and her emotions of her relationships with her male relatives, as she recounts her incidents of her past- firstly her marriage to Arjuna and her eventual marriage to all the other brothers because of their relationship to their mother and their obedience to the mother; her friendship and relationship with Krishna as also a turning point in her life. “Hear Me, Sanjaya…” carries the distinct voice of Kunti, her recollections manifest the power she has achieved in her life and her power to continue her individuality even though she is often referred to as the unwed mother. In her monologue with Sanjaya we observe that she has different roles-as a mother, a wife and as a woman who has lived a life opposing the image of an ideal woman according to society. Deshpande’s short story “Hear me, Sanjaya…” expresses Kunti’s mental agony.

Why do I suddenly remember them? I have not thought of them for a long time. For years, for ages. They seem to be people I knew in some past life, not part of this one at all. And yet, there was a time when I used to brood over them, every minute of the day. Do you know how unfair life is to a woman who does not have beauty, Sanjaya? The day they brought Madri home I knew I was not
beautiful. Until then I had not known it, perhaps I had not thought about it at all. But after that, every day, every moment of every day…

No, I won’t think of it. It was so long ago and what profit is there in reviving old bitterness? But I can still remember how threatened I felt by her two sons. It seems strange now, doesn’t it? Those two, her sons? They are more my sons than my own. Take my sons, look after them, she said. And I was angry. She is escaping, I thought, she’s taking away all the glory, leaving the struggle, the drudgery for me” (Col V.II 84).

Within the family Deshpande’s women deal with various relationships in the family - that of woman to woman or mother to son, all expressed from the narrator’s point of view of voicing their silences. Women’s survival strategies, their relationships with their own children and other women define womanhood and motherhood in different ways. The importance of women and their various relationships is more important also because these stories are a part of the great cultural mythologies that have enabled a diffusion of the ideal women in India. The fearless portrayal of woman displaying her strength in none but herself, still reveals herself to be an outsider in patriarchal world. While accepting the fact that the male dominated society is harsh and immature, it is also interesting to observe that woman is never rendered any appreciation or acceptance nor does she mean anything to the society. It seems that she has no relationship with the society that she belongs to. Neither does she have the freedom of spiritual journey, to search for her identity at a different plane, meaning that the society behaves as though it owes her no answers to her questions.
Women writers like Shashi Deshpande have tried consciously to mark a place for the woman, by shifting attention to the politics of domination, breaking conventional images of the woman to create a space for her, discovering her strength that is within her, bringing forth her imperishable feminine energy and much more. The fact remains that there is a need for a work of literature that shows woman as the tragic protagonist, acknowledging woman as an insider, an important part of the society whose failures are as important as her successes. Only the writers’ effort to bring a change towards perception of society to woman, with her role and importance in society would be understood.

Deshpande’s women have various roles within the family that go to define their relationship within family; one of such roles is that of the mother. She shifts the mother from the “hallowed” altar of worship and places her among us: not a goddess but a woman facing the struggles and the realities of life. She is not the prototypical “Terrible Mother” nor is she the great hearted “Mother Earth” who cares and feeds everyone. She is simply one of the fallible humans, likely to be accused, challenged and unwanted, while alive or after death. A mother’s relation to the family cannot be exalted in the works of Deshpande, they too are humans complete with errors and flaws, sometimes rude and at other times harsh. She might be the impressive Indu or Akka or the ever-accusing Ai of Saru but she has no power to sustain or control her daughter.

This shift is important from the perspective of the latest socio-cultural tendency in Indian middle-class society. Socio-culturally, female obedience without any questions of Sati-Savitri-Sita myths is destroyed; the parents are questioned by their children; girls fight for their rights. They are moving towards self-
consciousness, which is a cry for “feminist autonomy”. Though there are these brawls with the mother, yet the daughters have an overpowering impulse to come back home: the Greek “nostros”; later they do go in search of the mothers. After eleven years Indu goes home to realize that she is an inheritor of the whole property of Akka known for her unconquerable spirit. After fifteen years Saru’s return is also meaningful, it portrays her repentance for having been rude all this while.

*The Dark Hold No Terrors* and *The Binding Vine* are novels that fictionalize the problematic mother-daughter relationships- Sakutai and Kalpana (*The Binding Vine*). *(Dark)*; Inni and Urmi. The father in these cases positions with the daughter and favours her creating despair and anger to the mother, and being pampered gives them a feeling that maybe their mothers are dumb, proud or jealous and so they should remain unnoticed. Kamala asks Sarita, who does not answer:

“You mean you want to become a doctor?”

I *did not reply*, I would not answer…

“Where’s the college?”

Again I *ignored her* and spoke to him [father]:

“I’m not talking to you. I’m not asking you for anything…”

“I *hated* her. I wanted to *hurt* her, *wound* her, make her *suffer*” *(Dark)* 128).

The enmity acquires a change to the point that the mother denies to even recall the daughter in the ending hours of her life:“She cursed me as no mother should”. “Yes,
to be as adamant as that!...To be so unforgiving to your own daughter...your only child!” (Dark 21) In The Binding Vine the skirmishes are frequent between all the pairs of mothers and daughters: “No, she’s laughing at me. You’re always making fun of me. You’re cruel, I’ll never talk to you again, never, never in my life” [Mandira to Vanaa] (31). Kalpana believes that her mother is responsible for her father’s affair with another woman: “…when he left me for that woman, she was angry with me...she was furious with me: ‘You drove him away...you’re always angry, always quarrelling, that’s why he is gone” (93). The consequence of such ill will is bound to get reflected in children. Renu, who is nine years old, resorts to withdrawal and silence: “She stares at me critically at times, a cold shrewd, objective observer behind those little girl’s eyes of hers...she reminds me of a room whose doors are closed. Nothing emerges, neither her joys nor her sorrows” (Dark28).

Further, relationships between individuals within male-female or male-male or female-female associations shape the way they behave. Ravana does not violate Sita because there is some amount of feeling towards her. Sita reprimands Lakshmana for waiting on guard for her since she is more worried about the safety of Rama. This exile too has been forced on them because of the ‘weakness of a doting old husband for a young and beautiful wife’ (71). One fault of Rama became his aim towards perfection and his stubbornness to achieve it which also became the cause of Sita sacrificing her life. The Stone Women talks of stories that challenge the male explanation and depiction of women.

The female’s long-term result of this entrapment inside the male vision passes through society. Deshpande shows that not just men ‘but women as well,
have taken their idea of women from here’. The value of patriarchy dominates not just the thoughts pertaining to women but also shape the thoughts of women themselves, like in power relationships, values are explained on the grounds of power. In patriarchal society women work in a grey area. Deshpande observes:

The fact is, we don’t start with a picture of ourselves on a clear slate. Already inscribed on it are things told to us by others, there is what we read, what we gather from the ideas and expectations around us, what we imagine and dream. Myths form a large part of this baggage we bring to our self-image. How we see ourselves, collectively or individually, depends greatly on myths. They are part of the human psyche, part of our cultural histories (Stone Women 86).

Women in India suffer many indignities, shame, torture, abuse and humiliation and very often they suffer as meek victims. Shashi Deshpande only has scorn for such “stupid, silly martyrs…idiotic heroines” (Dark 98). On the other hand, if they suffered like Akka (Roots) or Sulumaushi and Sakubai (The Binding) the family bond would have remained intact. These women had given up their fate to consent to philosophy. “And these women…I don’t know very little of” (Roots 6). Nevertheless, education prepares the “new” woman towards a tremendous change to renounce womanhood itself. In fact, the thought of being a woman and eventually leading to motherhood is unbearable to them: “I resented womanhood because it closed so many doors to me” (17.)

Due to this attitude towards their gender, they also look upon marriage as an institution of pain, subjugation and slavery, little did they know that “husband, thank God, [could be] a decent man”. “A trap? Or a cage?...With two trapped animals
glaring hatred at each other” (Roots 61) these women felt that they suffer because of “punishment” and “have to pay for all those saris and jewels” (Roots 70). The attitude blurs their vision so much that they believe the ‘conjugal bliss’ as nothing else but rape. Sarita (Dark) and Mira (The Binding) have this unhealthy attitude: the protagonist fears the night as her monstrous husband out of jealousy inflicts pain as he makes love to her and she expresses the “…monstrous invasion of my body pinioned to a position of abject surrender” (Dark10).

Symbols of family and family life depicted by Deshpande further reveal the above sense of morbidity expressed through different characters’ words in various occasions. A woman in her ‘devotional’ trance is compared to a “crescendo of excitement during intercourse” (Dark 93). A suckling baby brings out “erotic response” (147) and the puja-room has an “antiseptic look of a toilet” (Roots19). Then women believe thus: “Men’s minds are like public lavatories full of dirty pictures” (The Binding 182). The women whom they talk of as “martyrs heroines or just stupid fools?” (Roots 67) have a much better perception of their own selves.

In an interview to Ashvini Sarpeshkar-Tandon Deshpande said: “I do not like to be branded this or that because life is more complex than that. My enduring concern is for human relationships. I certainly do not think my novels are a man vs. woman issue at all” (Femina 20). She has portrayed women who are abnormal and men as well-adjusted males. These stories and novels portray husbands as quite insightful, mature and rational. The good thing is that they are compassionate and take in their ego and initiate restoring normalcy to the woman. Indu and Sarita saw their husbands as heroes and because of this reason they were determined to marry these men of other castes or of lower social or economic status. The early years of their marriage were joyful. The gaps started emerging with time, though the female
protagonists gave funny excuses for the loss of love and joy in these relationships. Though these wives think good about them: “I became in an instant a physically aroused woman, with an infinite capacity for loving and giving, with a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved” (Dark 34). “That I can never be complete in myself.” Until I had met Jayant I had not known it…that there was somewhere outside me a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant. And lost the ability to be alone” (Roots 31). “Each time you leave me, the parting is like death” (The Binding 138).

In The Dark Holds No Terror regardless of such level of admiration and love, Sarita felt that she was being “raped” by her own husband and she felt it was more of an attack than love making. The interviewer reminded Manu that his successful wife earned not only the butter but the bread as well (Dark 30), and this novel was previously Deshpande’s short story “A Liberated Woman”, where the job of the husband as a college teacher and as a writer who writes free-lance is considered as something petty. In the novel, this belittling is strengthened even more when the tenants of the chawl start giving respect and importance to the wife compared to him.

In a similar manner, Urmi with her enticements, when Bhaskar advances towards her with a clear aim, moves towards him regardless of warnings by Vanaa and Inni. She thinks: “That this, responding to Bhaskar, is the only way of releasing the mushy adolescent with her dreams of living happily even after with Kishore, who’s trapped inside me…”(Roots 165-6)

Deshpande depicts rape victims in The Dark Holds No Terrors and The Binding Vine and short stories like “It was Dark”. For instance, Sarita thinks that she
is a victim of “legalized” rape. A father rapes his three daughters which kindles Sarita to stand up against this kind of behavior so she commits adultery with Madhav. In *The Binding Vine* Mira is also raped and so is Kalpana. Deshpande’s heroines are outraged towards marriage in all the three novels and some short stories. The female narrator examining, evaluating, and exploring family and relationships, also analyses herself and her relationship with others. Thus, Deshpande’s fiction mirrors relationships, whether man to man or woman to woman or man to woman.

In a story like “Mirrors” Sachideva expresses “I thought of you as the woman who had stolen myself. The truth is that it was you who really gave myself back to me” (*Col V.I 85*). The above quotation expresses the woman’s inspiration gained through her friendship and sharing of experiences with another woman. Centered round the theme of defiance these women form a bond. They yearn for self-assertion and through protest begin their quest for identity. “Lucid Moments,” is yet another example; the girls connect to each other as they are out to find their identity from their mother’s lineage in unison. “The Window” has an almost similar connection, though the only difference is that there is a lesbian undertone.

Through a rapid narrative “My Beloved Charioteer” which also has a lovely language, Deshpande explains the guilt, hurt, tensions, and the hidden enmity evolving between a self-erasing quiet mother and an aggressive daughter who is also a chain smoker. The skinny and feeble daughter, who is a widow of the narrator protagonist Aarti, is a chain smoker who is angry at almost everything and everyone around her to the level that she is unable to believe the contentment and happiness in others’ lives. She chooses to live in a life lost only in memories of her joyful, happy marriage and the close relationship she had with her father: “Life has been cruel to
The relationship of the daughter with her mother has always been casual and not a close one, in this manner Deshpande probes the different relationships within the story: the two marriages, and grandmother’s unity with Priti, the mother-daughter relationship. The remaining relationship is what eventually becomes most important in cracking the impasse within the family when the grandmother is incited to show to Aarti the importance of allowing the memories of the dead people go away, disclosing the facts of her own suppression in marriage. The author is the narrator giving her view about the various characters to the readers. It is a witty explanation of the protagonist’s psyche who in this story is the mother who tries to provide the reader with the typical woman’s traits of guilt, helplessness, and emotional needs; most significant is the jealousy that the mother has towards her daughter. Deshpande defines the variety of feelings like loneliness, guilt, insecurity, isolation, and the fact that the mothers feel unwanted because of their children who do not comprehend their feelings. The mother who is also the narrator, feels that the husband’s death has given her freedom from the control of man whom she never loved; a man who has the cultural permission of a patriarchal system to use her body for his delight and her quiet toil for the maintenance and happiness of the family: “When he wanted me, he said ‘Come Here’. And I went. And when he finished, if I didn’t get out of his bed fast enough, he said, ‘You can go.’ And I got out” (Deshpande Col V. I 135)

The protagonist of the story embodies the typical ‘good woman’ who patiently bears her unhappy lot as determinate and sealed. Like Simone de Beauvoir
mentions in *The Second Sex* after marriage a woman gets: “a gilded mediocrity lacking ambition and passion, aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose” (447). Women endure emotional alienation and moody maladjustments in man-woman relationship and woman to woman relationship, a woman’s awareness of loneliness, suffocation and alienation, their silent wretchedness and weakness, inner battles and trauma of neglected existence are continuously examined by her in many of her short stories. In her complete depiction of the unhappiness of women’s life, she has given importance to female being treated in an inferior manner with a nonchalous indifference, denial of socio-economic privileges, confining practice of behavior and want of intellectual and emotional life, beneath which a woman gets marginalized and in turn divided from the convention of life.

In Deshpande’s short stories we also find unique treatments of relations between father and daughter or brothers and sisters. In the story “Lost Springs” the protagonist stayed with her family but soon after her mother’s death she had to live in her grandparent’s house and was separated from her father and brothers; only when her father is in coma and dying did she have the chance to meet them. Nevertheless, she expresses “I didn’t need any comforting. I had never seen my father exhibit any emotion; the idea of his suffering didn’t seem real to me. I had felt a stranger to my brothers’ grief” (Col V.II 73) In “Why a Robin?” we find the daughter more attached to the father and the mother is alone and kept away from the father-daughter’s emotional bond, it is only towards the end that circumstances allow the mother to come close. Similarly in “My Beloved Charioteer” the daughter is more attached to the dead father than the living mother.
There are also stories depicting women against women relations, “Wastelands,” where the atmosphere is that of a jail and the women are all out against each other. We also observe the jealousy of the woman, attempting to interfere in the affairs of a couple travelling together. Understanding that she will not be accepted as a third person, she commits suicide out of grief and rejection. Another story that depicts woman against woman situation is “Hear me, Sanjaya…” a retelling of Kunti’s story from Mahabharata. Kunti’s jealousy towards Madri is depicted in Kunti’s narration to Sanjaya- “I used to wonder when I heard Madri laughing, beautiful, easy laughter. Perhaps it’s easy to laugh when you are loved.” (Col V. I 87)

Similar to Saru, in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Jayu in the short story “It Was the Nightingale,” is a career woman. She gets an offer to go abroad for two years and she will get a good salary when she is back. Jayu opens the door of her flat for the last time in the opening of the short story. The lines, “the last time,” seems to be important and she tries to curb her heightened emotions. Jayu is filled and spilling over with feeling since she will be leaving the next morning. She does not want to express her feelings concerning her excitement about her trip abroad and so she held her feelings. She is aware that her husband will be full of anger because she is late in coming back as usual. She does feel guilty about being late and as she looks at his face she feels worse. She does not dare to show what she felt since she knows that her husband is very upset about her foreign trip. Even though there is no sign of anger on the face of her husband, she can easily feel the tempest beneath the calm as she knows him too well: “his very stillness is intended to be a loud reproach” (88). Gradually she decides to leave but her emotional identity is with her family, home and this personal relationship. The uncaring attitude of the husband is an example to
Shashi Deshpande’s vision that woman explains her identity grounded in age old traditions and the spaces over it make a divided consciousness in which a woman realizes herself in a place of permanent loss. Jayu’s struggle shows that woman cannot be mentally detached in a “separate self”.

In “My Beloved Charioteer” (Col V, I) three women of three different generations stay together. The grandmother has a happy relationship with her granddaughter. Therefore, the old woman states; “Happiness can mean different things to different people. For me, it is this-the beginning of a new day with this child.” (53). It is painful for the mother to observe that her daughter Aarti finds comfort from her dead father rather than her mother. Once a while in an argument the daughter asks very angrily: “Am I nothing? Am I?” (58) With anger and hurt on her face, to which the mother resentfully says: “You are just smoke and a bit of ash, like those cigarettes you smoke. Like my married life.” (58) For the very first time the mother unfolds her relationship with her husband to the daughter who had nothing but respect and huge love towards her father. The mother realizes that the granddaughter is her “beloved charioteer” (58) asking her to show what has been hidden in her heart for all these years. She says: “He was your father, but what was he of mine?” (188) the twenty-five years they stayed together, she performed all her duties and took care of all his needs and requirements. She never got any credit for this; instead she lived in fear of her husband who dominated her entire life. Only when the daughter learns about the oppression that the mother has undergone all her life and realizes the real nature of the father, does restoration of the daughter and the mother happen. Similarly, many women suffer silently for the sake of moral, familial and financial security.
In one of her observations Deshpande declared her mature realization of the reality of the mother-daughter relationship:

When I became mother, I found such a discrepancy between what I was told about and how mothers felt, that I was deeply disturbed. It was only a writer that could get across the disturbing spirit and approach realizing. And I realized that motherhood does not turn you overnight into a different person, it does not make you a nobler, stronger more loving and lovable individual. You are the same person, except for the enormous bond that suddenly appears between you and the new born. In fact, we know that mother can be selfish, jealous, possessive that they can even at times be cruel (Deshpande: *Writing from Margin*: 51).

Deshpande depicts women’s emotions felt collectively in her short stories. The humble acceptance of life, or even hiding within one’s own self suggests “passivity” that tells of pain, hardships and suffering to the extent of even the breaking down of personality. Shashi Deshpande says:

I have been able to feel more for a housewife, who is most devoted...Women who do not go out to work, who are literally trapped, who are scared to get out of family relationships. Without that, she feels she has no claim to whatever. Most women are still emotionally dependent on the family-they want to be good daughters/wives/mothers always. (Vishwanathan 12)
For these women, to live “within relationships” becomes extremely important; therefore their vulnerable attitude pronounces these women to a lifetime of subjugation. Thus, Shashi Deshpande contemplates upon the dilemma of women in the society of traditional India. She creates anew the different experiments of women who have undergone strict social and patriarchal norms. G.S Amur comments: “She is at her best when she works out her theme in terms of intimate human relationship, generally within the family. She uses the story as a medium of moral and psychological analysis and her focus is almost invariably on the inner life.” (Preface 9)

Lesbian overtones are seen to be depicted in “The Window” which deals with a young couple, recently moved in to an old bungalow in Mumbai whose owner is an old woman. In the absence of the husband the owner who is the old woman subtly starts lesbian advances towards this young wife, ironically this tenant wife too had a lesbian past. Even though her husband is around, yet the wife is always busy with memories of her mysterious and dark past and his presence or absence has no effect on her since she is emotionally and mentally in her own world.

Relationships can cause friction and anger too in “The Cruelty Game.” Deshpande tells us the story of the angry in-laws and a widow. The mouthpiece of the suppressing and negative influence who is the mother-in-law yells at Promila, the protagonist saying, “My son you killed him-enjoying yourself” (Col. V. I 128) this is in response to the daughter in law applying the kumkum on her forehead much to everybody’s dismay. In this traditional environmental when it is learnt that Promila will be leaving with her daughter to Bombay to take up a job and she will then marry her husband’s friend everyone is shocked. The small child Sharu is scorned because of this by her cousins and friends who feel that whatever her
mother has decided is bad. This angry child holds on to her grandmother’s legs, which are the rules of society. But obviously she is taken away when the narrator’s father shouts, “Let her go.” (131) the holder of tradition herself breaks it; women are often treated by other older women in this manner because they have themselves suffered sexual discrimination. This exploitation can achieve freedom only if these women become financially and emotionally self-sufficient.

As observed by Adrienne Rich literary feminists in instinctive motive show, “how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves…and therefore live afresh.” This is right for all women writers whether feminist or not. Through the consciousness of these female protagonists Deshpande brings the story of women along with their past, present also future. In the cultural setting, they are realized because of legends, myths, ritualistic expression socially (like using kumkum) etc.

Human relationships have been rendered as important in Deshpande’s novels and short stories, the ever-changing human behavior have impacted human relationships as well. Sexual relationships also have a very important place; and sex designates the physical and psychological nature of relationships. In The Dark Holds No Terrors problems recur because of Manu’s sexual impotency, which causes sexual sadism that he inflicts on Saru. In Roots and Shadows, Indu tells us “A woman who loves her husband too much… and is ashamed of it.” (92) She tells about Jayant, her husband “We’re on different planes. He chooses his level. And I …try to choose the one he would like me to be on. It humiliates me.” (90) A woman has to pretend as though she is passive and inactive; otherwise the husband might be surprised if the wife starts the act of making love. Hence, she is compelled to act as a novice in this area which results this aggravating her problems. In That Long Silence
Jaya’s marriage is arranged for her by her family resulting in sex even before she knew love. This affects her relationship with Mohan and thus she has to act very calm while her real nature is actually rebellious; thus, she cannot believe anymore that sex can be a form of satisfaction and bonding as well. Therefore, sex upholds the man-woman relationship; the protagonists take to freedom intellectually and sexually. Many a times this hunger impels an extra-marital affair, similar to the protagonist in the short story “An Antidote to Boredom” or the protagonist in “The Duel” here she has sex with a man soon after the death of her husband and child in a car accident.

The sexual and extramarital nature of Deshpande women’s relationships is something to be noted due to recurrence. Jaya has an affair with her neighbour, Kamat. Indu with her cousin Naren, Saru has an affair with Boozie her boss, but just like the protagonist in “A Liberated Woman” a married sadist tortures his wife but she bears all of it from a jealous husband in order to protect her familial relationship. She is ready to even forego the job and stay as a housewife but this is not taken well by the husband since he is now habituated to living comfortably on his wife’s money. One day her old family friend suggests divorce to her but she cannot agree as she cannot see the children in trauma if separation happens; she refuses to even take him to a psychiatrist who may help cure this man. Knowingly she allows herself to keep on suffering quietly for her family and relationships. Later this friend is surprised to see this woman’s quiet gestures and he finds the lady’s interview in a magazine with her picture looking poised and comfortable, where the article ironically reads “A Liberated Woman”. Thus she is the all giving wife and she cannot be offended by her husband’s affair in “A Day Like Any Other” such women
sacrifice their desires, needs, happiness, lives, wants, and neglect pain for familial harmony and relationships.

Sacrifice for her family can be witnessed in “The Awakening” the young girl is suddenly brought into the adult world and asked to behave according to what is dictated to her by her family and society: and in “I Want…” a young girl again who kills dreams and desires along with her rights so that she could marry for the benefit of her family and its well-being. Suffering and sacrifice which a woman has to quietly bear for her family’s sake in spite of her anger and resentment is like the one portrayed in “The Intrusion,” the newly married young woman fearfully submits fearing the savagery of her husband on her honeymoon.

These women submit themselves to their plight, no matter how painful, all for the betterment of their family. Her own belief in family and relationships is depicted in Shashi Deshpande’s short stories she says in Looking Back:

Children accept families unthinkingly and so did I, in the early years, take this family for granted; its size and the complexity of relationships within it seemed perfectly normal. It was much later that I realized how unusual it was. Not because it was a joint family, which was quite normal then, but because of how distinguished some of its members were…..I think it was there that it began-my struggle to understand the complexity of human beings and of human relationships, the dilemma of our life-long yearning for love and our struggle against bonds. The words “a novel about a family” are often used as a derogatory label, but I believe, as I
once wrote, that “in the family, you can see, in a microcosm, the politics of a nation.”(323,330).

Thus the various experiences that a woman undergoes shapes her life and thinking; for her the family and her relationships are most important and she keeps them safe and intact and in the process philosophizes about her life and predicament which shall be discussed in the next chapter.