

CHAPTER - VI

REALISING AND UNDERSTANDING THE FACE OF RELATIONS: A MATTER OF TIME

A Matter of Time exposes the readers to understand the reasons of a wife's silence, speech and action to go on with life after being deserted by her husband for no palpable reason. Sumi like thousands of women in India is deserted by her husband. While in most of the cases women are subjected to various types of violence. Sumi is not a victim in that sense. But Sumi's card house is blown away and her soul is violated when her husband walks on her and their daughters without producing sufficient reason. In case of being a victim of physical violence women generally do not protest in the hope of being united with her husband for the welfare of the children. Different social pressures - fear, family-honour etc. also do not let them protest. Due to age old tradition of considering the husband a sheltering tree, women try to save them by keeping silence. Therefore, silence signifies subjectivity of the women who do not have any alternative but to submit. But Deshpande uses silence to show Sumi's strength.

Sumi chooses to be silent but not in the hope of being united with her husband. She understands that there is no point in placing her case in the court of law. She rather invests her time and energy to empower herself by getting a job. The point is economic empowerment can only save a woman in time of any crisis in her life. The novel showcases three generations of women- Sumi, her mother Kalyani and her grandmother Manorama - all standing in solidarity, silenced by various societal pressures. Sumi's daughter Aru, a present day young woman, becomes vocal against her father's step but is frustrated finding no way out. Manorama and Kalyani accept their fate and mould themselves according to the need of the males in their lives. Sumi goes a step forward, she accepts her fate as it comes but recognizes the need of the moment and proceeds forward with her life. She is not stalemated or cursing her lot as her mother. She goes on with her life to make a better future for herself and her daughters. Sumi had lived a life of a home maker after her marriage. In spite of having sufficient education and a creative soul she confined herself within the home for the welfare of the family. Even though she is an urban, educated, new woman, she submits to tradition. She tries to become ideal

wife and mother and thus submerges herself in so-called marital bliss. But her happiness deludes her. Soon she realizes that the ambience of happiness that had been created was deceptive and impermanent. The irony is that her husband has no grudge against her. She is not mal-handled either. Yet she is deserted without any reason. Deshpande has not taken any of the domestic violence as the cause for Gopal's desertion of Sumi. She has shown how a wife can be deserted without any reason also. The strategic representation gives importance on that what becomes the condition of a deserted wife. The home maker is suddenly left at her own to run the household. The concern for money becomes one of the urgent factors to be dealt with to go on with life. Sumi is a classic stoic who does not bear any grudge against her husband. Her stoic acceptance of the fact exhibits her strength not weakness. She is truly a new woman completely unlike her mother and grandmother who blamed their fate and submitted. Sumi is not swept away by emotion; she is courageous enough to fight the crisis in her life. Sumi had taken her marriage as a profession-it was her sole economic refuge. As she was solely dependant on her husband she could not exercise her freedom and was habituated to lead a life of a dependant. Had she been economically free she could have dealt with the crisis in a better way. The dependence syndrome in her was so much that she loved to live a life of dependent. Her home was her life and soul. She made her home beautiful, took all responsibilities of her family and restrained her movement in the world at large. Thus she isolated herself from the world and made her home her whole existence. Her husband Gopal never encouraged her to take a job either. But he leaves her without arranging economic security for her and her daughters. Had their marriage been an association of perfect comradeship with no dependence on one another, their children would not have felt like refugees in their maternal grandparents' home. They could have continued to stay in their home if they could afford it. Sumi's elder daughter even accused her mother that she did not care about his having left them.

I want my home back, I want my father back.... (21)

Like her daughters others were also surprised by Sumi's placid reaction. Sumi did not make any furor of the fact of being deserted. She was dawned by a new realization that she can not spare time for all this. Sumi had made it clear to Devi on being asked why she does not talk about it.

And what do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don't know why and maybe he doesn't really know, either? And that I'm angry and humiliated and confused...? (107)

Sumi too protects her husband like any other Indian woman by saying that Gopal does not really know why he deserted them. But to Sumi the reason for desertion bears no significance. She stresses on the fact that she has to move forward regardless of what has happened in her life. When Gopal had told her of his plan she could not react. She was watching T.V. where the clown was singing:

jeena yahan, marna yahan. (9)

She was puzzled to find the meaning of the words. What she deciphered as the meaning of the words perhaps became her guiding force:

That this world is all we have and therefore there is nowhere else for us to go?
That we have to live here and die here? Or does it mean: *this* is what we have,
this area of action is enough for us, we live here and die here, we need no more?
(9)

Sumi is no escapist. She is down to earth and very much practical. She was deeply in love with Gopal and after being married played the role of a devoted wife. She had been earnest in her every role. So she knows the duties of a mother. The welfare of the children is her prime motto. Sumi can recognize the call of the moment all the time. After being left alone Sumi is trying to adjust with her loneliness as she had once tried to share her time with Gopal after marriage. She knows that time is the best healer and she has to cope up with the situation. It takes time to get used to sharing one's life with another person. She has to get used to being alone. It would be unfair on Sumi's part to say that Gopal's absence has left no mark in her life. Obviously Sumi has become totally alone without her husband on whom she depended so much. She was habituated to lead the life of a wife. Her life pivoted round Gopal. The earnestness of wifeness is seen when she thinks of the vast emptiness that his absence has left. She can't find her bearings and there are no markers any more to show which way she should go. The desertion has left her awe-struck. She wants to ask Gopal what made him to walk out on his family in this age of acquisition and possession. She remembers Gopal's words and wonders at his decision.

I remember this so clearly, 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 everything in your life? Will you be able to give me an answer to this? (27)

Gopal left his family-the only possession he had but Sumi has greater understanding. She has taken Gopal's words seriously and cannot leave the family she has nurtured so long. Sumi and Gopal had once argued about the meaning of the word '*sa-hriday*'. Gopal had told that there is no word in English to fit the concept as English is a practical language. He had told that '*sa-hriday*' means oneness which is an impossible concept. He had pulled Sumi close to himself and asked her to listen the heart's beating. And he had concluded that they can never beat in such unison that they can produce only one sound.

At first these unexpected quirks in Gopal fascinated Sumi. But gradually she ceased to be amused by them. And now she realizes that they were the potential hints that he would someday walk out on her and her children. Sumi and Gopal were die-hard lovers. When they were married, their happiness too was complete. Sumi remembers the words she had once read in the book on Gopal's table. The words aptly describe their relationship:

*What could my mother be
to yours? What kin is my father
to yours anyway? And how
did you and I meet ever?(112)*

Sumi could not control her tears rolling out violently by the intensity of her feelings for Gopal. Sumi's marriage of twenty years had made her life complete. But suddenly the blow came from Gopal which ruined the family. Gopal has made their life tragic by his absence. Sumi who felt so complete in life realized that the bliss is for the moment. One cannot be certain when tragedy befalls in one's life. The happiness is almost like a bubble which can burst at the slightest prick. Even after the tragedy in her life they waited with hope that Gopal might come back. Sumi could not share with her daughters how she felt. She could not open her heart to them. Instead she feared if her daughters blamed her for it. It was her constant torment if her daughters accuse her for what has Gopal done. If they think that it was Sumi's fault that the break up came. This is another effect of Gopal's walking out. Sumi is anxious to know how her daughters' felt about it. This is another kind of punishment if her daughters account Sumi for their father's decision.

Gopal has inflicted pain on Sumi without any fault on her part. Still Sumi never wants to make him accountable for what he has done. Gopal's words best describe how Sumi felt regarding his Walking out:

But when Sumi came, it was not to call me to account; in fact, she seemed distracted, only half aware of me, blown in by some violent feelings I had no clue to. I could only sense her distress; something had happened, but she did not, perhaps she could not, share it with me. (85)

Sumi visits Gopal in his new residence i.e. Shankar's house. She looks around the room with a feeling of *déjà vu*. Like Gopal she too connects the room with their outhouse where Gopal lived before marriage. She remembers Gopal singing the Purandaradasa song:

*...like a bird that flies in
perches in the courtyard
and then flies away
the very same instant.
So should one live. (84)*

Sumi found the similarity in his way of living between the outhouse and Gopal's new residence. Sumi wonders if Gopal still sings the song and if so how does he feel at that time:

What does he think of when he comes to the lines, 'like children at play/who build a mud house and then/tiring of the game/destroy it and go away'? Does he think of himself? (84)

Then she finally meets him. She finds that Gopal has gone on living without her and the children. She becomes conscious of the actuality of their separation. Sumi realizes that Gopal's life has moved on in its own space apart from them as has her life. She realizes that their lives diverged and they now move separately. They cannot merge their ways. But Sumi had shared a happy marital life with Gopal. She knows that love is required in life. It provides the vital sustenance to one and enables one to hold positive outlook to life. Love brings fulfilment in life and makes one's life complete. Sumi is a wise person who wants that everyone should experience the bliss of love. Sumi wants her daughters to

be complete in life. She is disturbed by the thought that Aru has been stormed by her father's action. Sumi understands that it is hard for Aru to accept the fact that they are deserted by their father. A teenager who is about to start her life is made insecure by her estranged father. Sumi is worried for Aru's future.

She has been disturbed by the fact that Aru has started to see her mother as a victim. She has begun to see not only her mother but every woman as a victim and a betrayer in every man. Sumi did not want her to live and start her life with that kind of a generalization. Sumi thinks it is unwholesome for her daughter. Sumi can reach out to her daughter's psyche. She knows her daughter wants to bring back the life that they had lived together with their father. She does not want that they should set sail in life without their father's existence. Sumi knows Aru is trying hard to steer her mother and sisters through the tumultuous passage of change. Aru just can not let go the matter that their father can evade his responsibility so easily. She is keen to bring back the past family life back. Sumi understands that Aru is trying to proclaim not her father but a situation of which her father is a part. But she can never get it back. She wants her to learn it herself. Sumi like the wise mother wants her daughter to learn the lessons of life. At the same time Sumi cannot think that her daughter should have any negative idea about love and marriage. Sumi is worried about her daughter's future. She is anxious and puzzled. Sumi knows that marriage too is important. Aru has to learn that love may be brief and unsatisfactory, even tragic but it is necessary. She has to realize that without that kind of a comradeship some part of people's life withers and dies. Sumi who is suddenly cut off from her family life does not possess any grudge against her husband. Neither does she want to present love and marriage as insignificant. Even after standing in the critical juncture of life she is bold enough. She can evaluate things as they should be. Her marriage did not work for life long. It was only for twenty years. Yet she is happy with whatever she got. She does not want her daughters to be scared of the nuptial knot. That is why she does not want her daughter to look at marriage and love sceptically. Sumi is loaded with responsibility now. She has to look after her daughters at the same time she has to keep her psycho-physical balance intact. For when a wife is deserted people raise finger towards the wife. Wife is always thought to be the offender even if she is innocent. Sumi is not an exception. She too has to come across the untoward words for no fault of her. Gopal's student Shankar's mother may be said to be the representative of the inquisitive outside world. Shankar's mother is representative of tradition which always wants women to submit. Sumi like

other women had led the life of a creeper. In patriarchal society often the women want that women should cling to her husband even when he disowns her. So as an elderly woman Shankar's mother advises her to go back to her husband.

Go back to your husband, he's a good man. If you've done wrong, he'll forgive you. And if he has-women shouldn't have any pride. (161)

Sumi had nothing to answer because she knows this is how the world is. She has to face all this. Unlike her mother she does not believe in fate either. Her mother Kalyani too is deserted by her husband though they live in the same house. Her mother who looks after her father's well-being leads a lonely life without her husband's care and affection. It seems to Sumi that her mother's story is repeated in her life. Kalyani who is so deprived by her husband has turned to fate as the guiding force in life. She worships Ganapati to protect them. Sumi retorts when Kalyani prays to Ganapati for their protection and well-being:

He doesn't do such a good job of looking after the women in the family, does he? (115)

Kalyani seems to be stunned by her daughter's reaction and adds:

What can even the gods do against our destinies. (116)

Sumi finds her mother's logic queer that even the gods cannot fight human destiny. But Sumi later thinks that her mother is right for the idol is after-all a picture, a piece of stone only. Kalyani who has suffered in life does not want the same fate for her daughter. She is obviously worried about the future of her three granddaughters. So she wants Ganapati to protect them. Sumi too falls in the same class as her mother when Gopal deserts her. She finds the similarity queer and wonders at the fate of the women in her family. When she comes to the realization that the idol is a piece of stone after all, she knows she has to shape everything in life to make her life smooth. Like her mother her relatives are too anxious and worried about Sumi and her daughters' future. Her father too wants to help though he seems to be aloof from the family activity. This is how life is when a wife is suddenly deserted. She becomes the hot news among the family, friends and relatives. At the same time she is the object of sympathy. But Sumi wants none. She wants to remake and reshape her life. She doesn't want to take help from anyone. Sumi needs money to run the family. She is back in her father's home but she does not like it. Soon she wants

to have a home for herself and her daughters. She knows the family sentiment; she knows the family's adoration for a male child. She feels to be an intruder in her parents' house. The idea has come to her from her childhood that '*The male child belongs*'. (71) So she finally declares to her father that she is not going to stay there for long.

'I have no right to be here,' Sumi says to her father. 'I feel a parasite.' (71)

Sumi cannot accept that she has to depend on her parents whereas she does not belong there. She makes it clear to her father that she is not going to take help from anyone:

There's Ramesh ready to give me money, and Devi and Premi, of course. And now you're asking me if I need any money. It's so easy for me to take it from all of you, to go on living here free, sponging on you. (71)

Sumi cannot accept help from anyone not even from her own father. She hates to be an object of sympathy. Due to her high self esteem she talks of being a parasite in her father's home. But her father assures her that:

Don't talk nonsense. This is your home. You belong here. (71)

Sumi is also reminded by her father how he wanted her to be independent. He wanted her to be a distinguished lawyer perhaps a judge and fulfil the ambition he had given up. Sumi is now in need to be independent but the seed of independence was sown by her father. She had not obeyed her father and walked out on everything when she married Gopal. But now she is going to do the same as her father had once wanted:

I'm looking for a job, Baba. I have some money right now, but I'll need a job soon. (72)

So she is now frantically searching for job to meet up family expenses. The transition in Sumi is notable. Sumi who had once left out the dreams of future in the arms of Gopal is back on the track; life has brought her in a critical juncture and made her realize the importance of economic independence. Her husband has failed her and made her subject to shame and disgrace. Now she has to revive her whole strata. She is intelligent and sharp but she has drawbacks too. She doesn't have any experience and then there is her age which is against her. But she has to win anyhow. She searches for job earnestly and finds one which is a source of great relief to her. Her daughters point out that with Sumi's accepting the job their family life would be over. Her daughters hoped that if their father

returned they would get back their family life. But they have not thought that Sumi might not accept him. Sumi makes her daughters understand that their family life would have been over anyway. After their daughters' departure with marriage it was certain to be over. The only difference is that Gopal and Sumi would have been together. But now Sumi has to lead her life all alone after her daughters' departure. Sumi becomes emotional and impulsively adds:

This is the first thing in my life I think that I've got for myself. I was sure I wouldn't get it, there's my age, it's against me, and I have no experience at all. But one of the members of the Board saw my play.... (231)

Aru was taken aback when she came to know about the play written by Sumi. Sumi tells her that she has written the play '*The Gardener's Son*' for the school. She tells Aru that she had written the play for children. She reveals with excitement that she is planning to write another play. Sumi has discovered her creative self. She knows that writing can give her immense pleasure. So long she never thought of it. But the success of the play at school has given Sumi the required confidence. Sumi has recognized the creative soul in her who can do so much. Sumi tells Aru the exhilarating experience of creative writing.

It feels so good, you can't imagine! I've been so lazy all my life. And now suddenly I want to do so many things. (231)

Aru noticed her mother's face sparkling with radiance when she spoke. Aru tries to point out how everything has changed in their lives. Sumi who has gone through so much pain and suffering made her daughters accept the change in life.

One day is never exactly like another, each moment is different. When you think of it, we are always on the brink of uncertainty. (231)

Sumi showed extraordinary strength of mind when she spoke these words. She wants her daughters to accept the change in life i.e. to fight with any challenge that may crop up in their lives. Sumi herself has accepted what has come in her way. She seems to have great understanding about the relationships in life. Though she depended on her husband so much, she did not play the role of a doting and nagging wife. She understands and respects the individual's right to take decision in life. She has tried to respect her husband's action and so she did not try to restrain him from doing so. The challenge that

came in front of Sumi made her bold and confident. So long Sumi did not know the outside world. She was confined within the four walls. But an individual irrespective of gender should know both the home and the world. With Gopal's desertion of Sumi, she comes out of the stupor. She tries hard to stand on own feet. She can no longer depend on anybody not even on her parents. So in spite of assurance of monetary help from her father, she wants to earn her own living. She finds out a job for herself and at the same time she is able to discover her creative self. The personality of Sumi takes proper shape after getting the jolt from her husband. The blow was necessary for her for it made her understand how any relationship can fail us without any sufficient cause also. We should be prepared to face any consequence from any relationship. Sumi remained satisfied in her marital life for twenty years suppressing her other potentialities. Perhaps she did injustice when she did not pay heed to her inner capacities. She broke her father's dreams when she married Gopal ignoring her father's wish to make her a distinguished lawyer. The irony is that this need to be economically independent as her father had wanted her to make later becomes very much important in her life. From this Sumi learns the lesson that everything in life should be given the due attention. Any imbalance in life may prove to be fatal. Sumi is very much cautious of her duties towards her daughters. She has seen her mother and grandmother to suffer due to patriarchal dominance. She too is the victim of patriarchy who falls prey to her husband's whims. Her husband had wanted to be free evading his duties. But it is Sumi who becomes really free from everything. Sumi becomes '*Runamukta*', free of all human debts with her death. Sumi goes to the region of everlasting peace and happiness. Sumi ultimately wins because she had the guts to face any challenge. Gopal who had wanted to escape responsibility is left uttering '*My daughters have only me*' Sumi is victorious because she ultimately made Gopal realize that he owes three daughters and towards them he has the foremost duty.

The novel focuses on the point how Sumi is made to realize and understand her relationship with her husband. Sumi moves from bondage (confinement as a wife) to freedom (finding economic independence); from life (entanglement with this Maya world) to death (the abode of God). And in this Journey her relationship with her husband plays a vital role. Sumi respects her husband's decision to be free from the family responsibility. She accepts her lot but this acceptance gave her immense scope to introspect and understand her own self. She found out that in order to fulfil her motherly responsibility, she must have money for her daughters. When she gets the job another prospect crops up in her life i.e. the pursuance of her inner talent latent so long. She

discovers her flare for writing and wonders at the appreciation that her work brings. The appreciation makes her more confident to pursue creative writing in Dramatics. In doing so she feels immense pleasure and happiness. Sumi is the optimistic who understood her husband's motif and did not waste time in teaching him a lesson in the court of law. She realises the utter failure of human relationship that may come up with no cause and without any intimation. This crisis in husband wife relationship makes her wiser. Her perspective becomes broader and deeper. She is able to work in totality about some incident. So she is able to take bold steps for materialising her dreams and to build her daughters' future. So many implied things and undiscovered pockets in her maternal home got cleared when she came back to stay with her parents. In a year she learns so many lessons which helped her to unfold different facets of relationships. The unravelling of Sumi's merit as a creative writer is possible only because of the crisis in her relationship with her husband. She may seem to be a typical traditional woman who in order to safeguard her husband does not take the help of law. But she is modern woman in the sense that she realises very clearly what she should do in order to proceed in life. She doesn't waste her time in trying to bring justice in their relationship. Rather she tries to do justice with her own self. So long she had neglected her true self but now she is able to recognise the real Sumi:

Whenever she looks into the mirror, which for so good-looking a woman she rarely does, she thinks: This is the real me. (71)

Her relationship with her own self also becomes vivid in the process. The novel therefore presents its protagonist Sumi understanding and realising the different aspects of different relationships.