

CHAPTER VI NEGOTIATING MODERNITY IN THE LATER NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

The novels of Shashi Deshpande are representative of a social world of complex relations. In an interview to Geeta Gangadharan, Deshpande says

"Human relationship is what a writer is involved with person to person and person to society relationships – these are the two primary concerns of a creative writer and, to me, the former is of immense importance. My preoccupation is with interpersonal relationships and human emotions." (Pathak 1998: 252)

The quantitative as opposed to the qualitative relations have become the pre – dominant issue since the progress of science and establishment of modern nation, industrialisation etc. Modern life is infested with rules and procedures, which are often mechanically followed. In the later novels of Shashi Deshpande, the healing touch of love seems to be the barrier remover in the sphere of problems inherent in human nature. Though she accepts destiny as the ultimate factor in life's journey, yet a hope for some change is not altogether absent. In *Small Remedies*, she talks about such little healing solutions to put some ray of hope in the otherwise gloomy horizon of life. The later novels specifically herald a message of 'moving on' from the rigidity of patriarchy. This is a journey with resistance towards a better life.

The Binding Vine (1992) is a tale that encompasses four generations of women, though the first and the fourth one are not in the focus. Baiajji, the grandmother is the only woman belonging to the first generation we find in the novel. Basically she is a traditional type of woman who performs once a year Chaitra –Gouri Haldi – Kumkum. Urmi, her granddaughter remembers how she looked on that day:

"her tiny wrists encircled by heavy gold pattis, the pearl choker round her neck giving her a stiff, haughty look." (BV 132)

Such a simple woman was, however, compelled by circumstances to learn three languages besides her mother tongue. First her father made her switch to Marathi from a Kannad school as he thought it would open her chances of getting a better husband. Then she learnt Hindi in response to Gandhiji. Again after her marriage, she had to learn English as the status of her husband demanded it. An English woman Miss Grace Taylor taught her the language.

Baiajji was loving and caring to her granddaughter Urmi. Urmi reciprocated her feelings and went to the extent of preferring Baiajji's 'old or shabby' clothes to the expensive ones given by her mother. She did not mind that it made her the worst dressed child in school. When her granddaughter was twelve, she transferred her books to Urmi and awakened the passion for books in her. She was the source of wisdom and love to Urmi.

But wisdom and love did not prevent her from being cruel to the other family. She kept her husband away from 'the other family', that is his own daughters. When Baiajji's orchards were sold after her death, it was her son who persuaded him to give the money to those half – sisters of his.

Inni, Mira and Akka are the women belonging to the second generation in the novel. Inni was a beautiful, mostly self reliant and humble woman in her youth. Though her beauty is fading with age yet she retains her other characteristics. She is educated as evident from her interest in cross word puzzles. She is particular about dress and wants to see her daughter, Urmi well – dressed. She asks her daughter to keep her clothes properly and not to make a mess of them. As a loving mother, she is worried about her daughter when she comes back late. Urmi's visits to the hospital are particularly worrying to her. Sticking to the convention, she wants to get her son married to a Maharashtrian girl, preferably to her friend Malini's daughter. She gets disappointed to learn that she is going to have instead a Tamil girl Radha as her daughter – in – law.

Inni is weak and submissive by nature. No wonder her husband dominates her. The worst case of domination is his decision to remove Urmi from her mother's care and to keep her in the custody of Baiajji at Ranidurg. It is a punishment meant for Inni for leaving their baby with Diwakar, a male servant. Though Diwakar is caring, gentle and old enough and above all, better in handling a baby than Inni, he is a man and cannot be trusted with a female baby. That arbitrary step leads to a misunderstanding and embitters the

relationship of the daughter with her mother as she holds Inni responsible for neglecting her. Urmi realises the helplessness of her mother much later. Until then, 'skirmishes' between them go on.

That does not mean she is kind and fair to all. She has her limitations. Her 'real and unshakable' hostility to Bal kaka is an instance to the point. She is insensitive about what will happen to Bal kaka if the house at Ranidurg is sold. She grudges to admit even the relation as there is 'a skeleton in the family cupboard' to hide. That is Bal kaka's grandmother was Baiajji's father's mistress. Her hostility springs from her concern for family honour.

Mira, the first wife of Appa, is Kishore's mother. Born the daughter of a school teacher, she developed interest in literature early in her life and began to write as early as thirteen. Venu was a favourite poet with the young in those days. Mira appreciated his poetry and aspired to write poems like him. Venu who became recognized as one of the great poets in the course of time, was however both arrogant and a chauvinist. When she gathered courage to show him some of her poems, he said:

"Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for young woman like you to give birth to children. Leave the other poetry to us men."

(BV 184)

Mira's studies were abruptly ended by marriage. A man saw her at a wedding, became obsessed with her, got his name suggested to Mira's parents and succeeded in getting married to her. Thus her role in the entire process was

passive even though it was going to affect her life. She was renamed Nirmala after marriage which did not please her. She denounced the custom of renaming in one of her poems:

“A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold

Can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira.” (BV 41)

Mira's husband was insensitive and tried to possess another human being against her will. The marital rape leads to pregnancy followed by miscarriage. Then she conceived again, a son Kishore was born but she died after the child birth. Married at 18, she died at 22.

Marital rape had made Mira's married life painful. She developed an intense dislike for sex, a physical repulsion from her husband. As she puts it in her diary:

"Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I

have learnt to say 'no' at last, but it makes no difference, no

difference at all.Why can't he leave me alone?" (BV 36 – 38)

Mira was fond of books and read a variety of books, both in Kannada and English. Long after her death, her trunk was found loaded with books, notebooks, diaries and writing pads. The habit of writing she had developed continued even after marriage. As she found herself so lonely in her married life, it became an outlet for her thoughts and feelings. She expressed her thoughts in English in her diaries while she wrote poems in Kannada. One of the remarkable things about her poetry was she wrote no love poems at all.

Before her marriage, her poems dealt with the topics like the road builders, singers etc. and after the marriage they expressed her feelings aroused by the traumatic experiences of her own life. She did not win recognition for her creative writing as it remained concealed until Urmi discovered it and decided to publish it. Thus the story of Mira in the novel shows how the literary talents of women are ignored and discouraged by the chauvinists in society and it also highlights the problem of marital rape which ruins the life of many a woman.

As we read about Mira, we are painfully reminded of Simon de Beauvoir's remark about the condition of married women in society:

"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 contacts with the male caste upon a footing of equality". It bears out her contention too that the aim of the institution of marriage is "to make the economic and sexual union of man and woman serve the interests of society, not assure their personal happiness." (BV 60, 26, 164)

We do not know if Mira's husband was happy with the marriage but we are sure it brought no happiness to Mira, it ruined her life.

The third generation in the novel is represented by women like Urmi, Vanaa, Prithi, Saku and Sulu. Priti, a minor character in the novel, is a film maker. She has made a film about Sati. She was in America with her parents.

Both her parents were working there and she became accustomed to living alone early in childhood. But she had to leave America eventually. Her mother had run over a number of people sleeping on the pavement during one of her annual visits in India and turned manic depressive and alcoholic. As life became impossible at home for Priti, then sixteen, she had to leave. Quite understandably, she wants to blank out the truth and in the process of hiding it makes herself a heroine. She links her decision of leaving America to the murder of Robert Kennedy:

"...I knew at that moment that I could no longer stay in a country that could suffer such pointless violence. I knew then I had to come home. It was my moment of truth." (BV 80)

That is dramatic and dishonest. As a matter of fact, she is pretentious. Though she is self – centered, she talks a lot about "her love of togetherness and family warmth and closeness." (BV 81) Vanaa rightly dismisses all that talk as phoney.

Priti claims to be a realist. She criticizes conventional movies as "so divorced from reality" and full of "male fantasies". But she herself is not so realist. That is revealed from her excitement about a judge's ruling to the effect that a wife cannot be forced into a sexual relationship with the husband against her will. The excitement is misplaced as the ruling can be appealed against and overruled and not all women can afford to go to the court. The woman who has got the ruling in her favour is an actress earning a lot of money which makes

her family willing to back her lest her husband control her money. Not all women are fortunate enough. Urmi has a better perception of reality in this respect and we cannot but endorse her contention that the laws cannot change people's lives. Something else, something more effective is needed for the purpose.

Priti learns about Mira from Urmi and decides to make a movie about her. She demands Urmi's cooperation for the purpose and expresses her willingness to pay her for it. She dismisses Urmi's objection that Mira is Kishore's mother. To her Mira is nothing but a symbol. Eventually the plan does not materialize as Urmi

"could not trust the integrity of a person who could so glibly speak of the need to know our mothers and grandmothers, yet so successfully block her own mother out of her life." (BV 141)

Thus Priti represents the wealthy, educated women who have taken acting to their real life, who care for naught else than impressing others, who have neither honesty nor any regard for the feelings of others. In the name of modernity and objectivity, they display selfishness and cynicism and thereby annoy persons who come into their contact.

Urmila (or Urmi) presents a contrast to Priti by her sensibility and commitment. She is a lecturer in a Bombay college who has planned to start research work for a doctorate degree. The death of her daughter, Anu, upsets her and it is during this emotionally disturbed state of mind that she confronts

the events described in the novel. She lives with her mother Yamini (Inni) and her six year old son, Kartik. Her husband Kishore remains away from home for long spells due to his job in merchant navy and she has to manage her own affairs independently. She is a strong willed woman capable of doing that well.

She reveals her strength even at 15 when she stays alone with the dead body of her grandfather who hanged himself. She refuses to leave the place until her father comes. Then, she falls in love with her neighbour Kishore and rushes to tell her father about it. Though her father is furious and her mother cries, she fights her battle with determination and wins. Again, we find a case of exceptional courage when she walks out on wedding night in response to Kishore's parody of a film song - "The two of us in a closed room and we can't get out". (BV 147)

As she likes an egalitarian relationship with her husband, she hates economic dependence and lives on her own earnings. All the money her husband sends her, she deposits in the bank. Even her childhood friend, Vanaa fails to understand it and says: "You're stupid....why don't you use it?" (BV 183)

Urmi's perception of a wife – husband relationship differs from that of Vanaa (who is also her sister – in – law). Vanaa's husband Harish (a doctor) is an admirable and understanding partner, but Urmi dislikes her constant refrain of "Harish says" and asks her to stop being submissive and assert herself. To Vanaa her submission is not mere surrendering but just doing what she prefers.

Urmi disagrees as she finds Harish ignoring Vanaa's desire to have a son. He strongly holds that husband should not leave all the work at home for the wife but help her. That is why when she finds Vanaa clearing bedroom cupboards and lofts, she says: "Why can't Harish help?" (BV 60)

That does not mean she does not wish to submit like Vanaa at times, but she fears the consequences: "I want to submit too. But I know that if I walk the way of submission once, I will walk that way forever." (BV 109)

Thus, what prevents submission in her case is the fear of losing independence, the desire to preserve her identity.

As we have seen earlier, Urmi married Kishore, her neighbour at Ranidurg as she fell in love with him. Their sexual relationship is passionate and satisfying. Yet she feels: "there is something in him I will never reach." (BV 143)

She has a fear too: "the fear of Kishore never returning home...the fear of his not wanting to come back to me...that's what I am most afraid of." (BV 110 – 111)

She never asks Kishore why and never dares tell him to change his job though she needs his physical presence. Often she wants to say "Each time you leave me, the parting is like death", but fails to utter the words to Kishore.

However, "marriage with a man who fits into life a few months in a year and flits out again" is not entirely free from troubles to a young woman. Such women with intense bodily hungers are not unlikely to develop extra-

marital relations. Urmi comes into contact with Dr. Bhaskar Jain who despite her marital status seeks intimacy with her. She is almost tempted to respond to his advances, but her love for Kishore being real, she resists the temptation finding it "so much easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue and chastity and being a good wife." (BV 110)

And she proves herself a good wife. She manages everything in absence of her husband. She earns; she looks after her children and also her parents who have become dependent upon her in their old age. Not only her parents but even her friend Vanaa had doubts about the success of the marriage and they had warned her in advance. But she stands the test as well as she had done earlier after the death of her grandmother. Her achievement at home justifies the statement - "Urmi's so smart, so competent." (BV 90)

But her competence as a social activist surpasses her success at home. She meets Shaku tai, Kalpana's mother, a poor working class woman. Kalpana, a girl of tender age, has been brutally raped and lies in coma as a result of injuries both physical and mental. The police want to record it as a car accident and Shaku tai is willing to accept it in the name of family honour. But Urmi argues with her and convinces that a raped girl is not at fault and it is the rapist who deserves and must get punishment. Her intervention and Dr. Bhaskar's cooperation makes it possible to set the record straight.

But a new problem arises as Kalpana remains in the hospital for a long time. The hospital authorities want to shift her to a suburban hospital as there

are not enough beds. Then she publicizes the case with her friend Malcolm who was a classmate and is now working with the press. As a result there are demonstrations for Kalpana, uproar in the Assembly, the Government backtracks ordering an investigation into Kalpana's case and cancelling her transfer. She gets involved in the case despite the disapproval of her mother and sister – in – law.

Discovery of Mira's poems and diaries open a new chapter in her life. It makes her aware of the trauma of rape whether it is a marital rape or rape of an unmarried girl. Her involvement with the case of Kalpana seems to be related to a large extent to the revelations about Mira. While Priti wants to exploit Mira's story for commercial purpose and is rebuked by Urmi, the latter discusses with Vanaa and Akka and decides to translate Mira's poems in English. However, she is not going to publish the translation without taking Kishore in confidence as Mira was his mother.

Urmi differs from and surpasses heroines of previous three novels in self – confidence, independence of mind and strength of will.

While Indu, Sarita and Jaya are confined to their personal or family problems, Urmi goes far beyond and decides to fight another woman's battle, a woman who dwells in a slum. That is somewhat unusual in a society rigidly divided into classes as people rarely bother about people belonging to the lower sections of the society.

Shakuntala (or Shaku tai) is a poor working class woman. She works in the principal's office in a girl's school. She has three children (two daughters and a son) called Kalpana, Prakash and Sandhya. She has a loud voice but a soft heart. She meets a girl in the hospital who has come to attend her paralytic mother and volunteers to help the stranger. She loves her children and does all that is possible to keep them happy. She has bought a TV set for them and mirror, nail paint etc. for Kalpana. She conceded even the luxury of keeping a cat and feeding it with milk for the sake of her eldest daughter. Thus, she proves to be a loving mother.

Her married life, however, has not been happy. Unfortunately she is married to a man who loves to remain idle, who never tries to have a permanent job. The fellow failed to take her to Bombay where he lived even after six months of marriage, so she had to go to his place herself. The man shared a room with his cousin in the police chawl. The couple under the circumstances had to sleep in a common passage where people were often moving. Shaku tai could not think of sex in that awkward situation. She wanted to improve her condition by working and got a job at a grocer's shop. But her husband's lust would listen to no reasoning and she got pregnant. Thus Kalpana was born and then Prakash and Sandhya. Shaku tai worked hard and took several odd jobs to maintain the family. Her husband rewarded her for all that by leaving her and living with another wife.

Her bitter experiences have shattered her dream of wearing a mangalsutra made in gold. As she confesses herself:

"Then one day I thought - the man himself is so worthless, why should I bother to have this thing made in precious gold. That's been the greatest misfortune of my life, Urmila, marrying that man." (BV 179)

Now, paan and tea are the only pleasures left in her life.

Shaku tai is not educated. She is quite ignorant of the Marxist theory of state which includes the police in the instruments of class oppression and class domination. But she has discovered the truth from her experience. She tells Urmila that the police will not bother about finding out the culprit, but "just harass us". (BV 146)

That is borne out by Dr. Bhaskar Jain's odd encounter with the police officer who is reluctant to set the record straight and talks a lot about the morals of "the girls of that class". (BV 190)

Obviously, the state apparatus is biased against the lower class and least interested in truth. It is class that matters, not the truth.

Besides her bitter, almost instinctive realization lie all the misconceptions, prejudices and fears that the poor are generally subjected to. When Dr. Bhaskar Jain examines Kalpana and finds it a case of rape and not a car accident as recorded at first, she wants to hide the fact recoiling in fear:

".....don't tell anyone, I will never be able to hold up my head again. Who'll marry the girl, we are decent people." (BV 146)

She is worried about the prospects of the marriage of not only Kalpana, but also the other daughter Sandhya. She ignores in that worry the need to trace the rapist and get him punished.

Dr. Jain finds that intriguing as marriage has given hardly any pleasure to Shaku tai. So he comments: "Women are astonishing. I think it takes a hell of a lot of courage for a woman like her even to think of marriage." (BV 111)

Urmi with her better awareness of women's conditions and thoughts supplies the answer:

"women like Kalpana's mother do find something in marriage.

"Security. You're safe from other men." (BV 93,195)

Women of the poor sections are particularly vulnerable if they remain unmarried, they become easy targets for the rapists. It is not unusual in our society to blame the victim instead of the rapist and that is why helpless women like Shaku tai generally do not want to disclose any incident of rape. Most of the cases are, therefore, unreported and the guilty get away scot free. As the cases of rape are tough to handle, the police too are reluctant to register and pursue them. The act of rape is supposed to smear the name of the girl and her family. As Shaku tai puts it,

"There are always people waiting to throw stones at us, our own people first of all." (BV 93,111)

This deplorable attitude of the society dampens the morale of the victim and her relations. That is evident from Shaku tai's remark:

"Sometimes I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is death." (BV 191)

Urmila has a hard time explaining to her that the fault lies with the rapist and not the victim, that the rapist must be traced and brought to book. Circumstances compel her to submit to the logic of Urmil and the doctor. As Kalpana has little chances of recovery and her treatment lingers on for a long time, the hospital authorities decide to transfer her to some suburban hospital on the ground of paucity of beds. It will be difficult for Shaku tai, a poor woman, to go there and see her daughter. At this stage, the reporter friend of Urmil comes into the picture and publicises the case. Initially Shaku tai's reaction is that of embarrassed one. They try to stay inside to the maximum extent possible and Prakash becomes difficult to deal with. However, the publicity given to the case leads to protest marches by women, questions and scenes in the Assembly which halt the transfer and result in a fresh enquiry. As most of the papers support the cause, she is impressed and concludes: "The whole world is my friend." (BV 111) Thus, she learns the lesson that hushing up leads to a blind alley while one has to fight in order to win.

Breathing in a society that blames women for the outrage committed by men, "she believes that women must fear." (BV 193) This fear leads her to think that young women must cover themselves well and avoid make-up. "And

if you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they'll leave you alone?" (BV 192 – 193) That is how she argues blaming her daughter for the rape.

Like most of the poor, uneducated women she has got traditional ideas about marriage. So when Kalpana decides to marry she disapproves of it:

"I said, you can't, How could I let her? We don't even know the boy's caste, leave alone his family. How could we hold our heads up among our people?" (BV 194)

This strict adherence to tradition leads to tragic consequences.

Shaku tai is naïve and fails to understand her daughter. There is also a communication gap between the mother and daughter but for which the fatal tragedy in the novel might have been avoided. She fails to understand it when Kalpana refuses to wear the first sari given to her and forces her to wear it. She fails to make out when Kalpana tears up her photograph with her mother's sister Sulu and her husband Prabhakar. She sends Kalpana to her sister with the hope that she will live there happily as her sister was childless and loved Kalpana. Kalpana, however, runs away and goes to her father and refuses to go back despite scolding and beating. That too remains but a paradox to Shaku tai. She does not suspect that Prabhakar has set her eyes on her daughter. Then, she commits a blunder when she asks her sister to persuade her daughter not to marry the boy she wants to. Prabhakar, thereby, comes to know of Kalpana's resolve and forces himself on her. Kalpana as a result is injured physically and mentally. Thus Shaku tai's naiveté proves disastrous.

Shaku tai's sister Sulu is the other woman who belongs to the lower class. She is delicate but active. She never remains idle. She keeps her home neat and clean and all her vessels shining. Shaku tai still remembers how well she had arranged Sankranti haldi – kumkum for her once:

"She did it all so beautifully. She had embroidered a table cloth for the table, she arranged the haldi – kumkum things on it. She made little boxes of coloured paper to put the tilgul in, she got tiny mirrors and combs to give the women. They talked about it for days." (BV 129)

Sulu loves her sister deeply and she is always helpful to her. When Shaku tai went home after work, tired, hungry and thirsty, Sulu waited for her with a cup of tea and hot meal. She looked after her children - Kalpana, Prakash and Sandhya - when they were babies and Shakutai went to work. It would have been difficult for Shakutai to survive and manage, had she not stood by her all along.

It was Sulu who chose the names of her sister's children. Her affection and care for them is immense. Kalpana, however, remains the most favourite among them. She loves her as if she is her own child. As soon as she begins earning, she buys things for Kalpana - frocks, pins, ribbons etc. and Kalpana too becomes fond of her. Later she wants to keep Kalpana with her and "look after her schooling and everything else." Shaku tai accepts the proposal as god

– send as she thinks it will ensure a better life for her. Eventually the plan fails but her feelings for her niece cannot be doubted.

Sulu's married life, however, proves a disaster. Her husband is neither a drunkard nor a wife – beater nor a waster like her sister's husband. Still, her life becomes devoid of joy and she is always frightened. She feels insecure as she is childless. That provides adequate excuse to a husband to throw out his wife and take another. Social convention does not listen to reason. It does not care to find out if the childlessness is solely, invariably the fault of the woman. Again, it leaves no room for adoption, a course open for a couple who really love their spouse and do not seek an excuse for remarriage. Childlessness, however, is not the only misfortune that befalls Sulu. White patches appear on her face, her arms and her neck. Then, her husband Prabhakar stops touching her. That is what makes her feel extremely insecure. She fears her husband will throw her away sooner than later.

In that state of mind, she commits errors that prove fatal both for her and Kalpana. First of all, she does not confide into anyone, not even to her sister about the trouble she is facing. Then she hides the mischief of her husband and goes to the extent of conceding to his unjust demands. Her husband tries to molest Kalpana and that is the reason she leaves her house in three days. But she asks Kalpana not to tell that to her mother or anyone else. That is her desperate attempt to save her marriage without straining relations with her sister's family.

Emboldened with the timid response of his wife, Prabhakar demands Kalpana as the price of preventing the dissolution of marriage: "Get Kalpana, he kept telling her, and you can stay on here.." (BV 192 – 193) Sulu discusses the matter with her sister who accepts it as the best thing for Kalpana. But Kalpana dismisses the proposal despite Sulu's entreaties. Neither Sulu nor Shaku tai stand justified in the move but the worst thing she does is the blunder she commits in telling her husband that Kalpana has resolved to marry a boy of her choice. That hastens the rape of Kalpana and when the involvement of her husband is revealed in it, she commits suicide.

Sulu's plight represents the state of women belonging to the poor, illiterate sections of society. Men are seldom blamed for childlessness, though scientifically, they too may be responsible for it. White patches may appear on the body of a man too, but his wife dare not humiliate him for that. Without helplessness and hopeless sense of insecurity no woman can concede to the unjust demand of her husband to get a girl of tender age she treats as her daughter. Thus we find that while one section of women is getting educated and empowered, the other remains deprived and suffers.

A Matter of Time (1996) is a tale of three generations of women who face adversity in their lives and respond to their difficult situations in different ways. They have potentialities that do not attain fruition. They are victims of their circumstances that deprive them of peace and happiness. Their conjugal life ends in discord and despair. These are the things the three women –

Manorama, Kalyani and Sumi share in common. But their times, circumstances and temperaments vary and that is why they face the odds before them in different manner.

Manorama, tall and beautiful, was the eldest of the four daughters of a poor Brahmin. It was customary in those days as it is even now, for the parents to get their daughters married before puberty. So the parents or guardians had to seek grooms and arrange the marriage within the time limit. In case of Manorama they did not have to worry. A visitor from Bangalore “notices her confidence, self – assurance and intelligence more than her shabby clothes” (MT 44 – 45) and choose her for his son. Moreover, though she grew up just a month before the date of wedding and the groom’s father was informed about it, the marriage took place. Thus Manorama’s marriage was arranged and she herself and her parents could think of it as god send.

Manorama was lucky enough to have some education as her parents dared to send her to a school set up by a non – Brahmin woman where most of the students too were non – Brahmins. That was an unusually bold step as unlike later times, “schooling for a girl was something that could come in the way of her marriage prospects.” (MT 24)

Eventually it proved otherwise. Her schooling changed her into a better being that pleased Vidhal Rao’s father. She lives happily after marriage and feels proud of her husband’s position in society. As her schooling had

enlightened her, she got involved in a number of public activities, including the institution of The Yamunabai Pawar School for girls. Her husband supported her in all those activities.

There were, however, factors that eroded the bliss of married life. She was disappointed as she had only a daughter after several miscarriages. It was clear she would have no more children. Absence of a male child was a sufficient pretext in those days for a husband to remarry. So, she felt insecure: a son would have been “the main crutch while the girl would get married and become part of another family.” (MT 191) That was the beginning of her troubles.

Instead of facing the reality boldly, she found a scapegoat in her daughter and treated her rather unkindly. The girl was good at Mathematics and aspired to become an engineer but Manorama took her out of school and gave her in marriage with her youngest brother Sripati hastily. Then, as Kalyani bore a son only once and that too an idiot, Manorama became even more disappointed. But that was the end of the story. Kalyani was deserted by her husband and returned to her parental home. A sane mother should have consoled her daughter under the circumstances and stood by her. Manorama was not sensible enough to do that. That created a rift between Manorama and her husband, Vidhal Rao and hastened the death of the latter. That Kalyani was deserted did not necessarily mean they must withdraw from public activities.

Had they not withdrawn, they could have proved useful to the society and benefitted themselves by gaining peace of mind and strength to overcome all the odds in life. But Manorama did not choose that course and pushed her husband too toward disaster.

Manorama's daughter Kalyani is victimized first by her mother and then by her husband but acts more sensibly and kindly than her mother despite her ill – luck. Her mother behaves rather callously by ending her schooling at 15. Then, within a year Kalyani is married to a man she does not love and who too does not love her. Despite that, she stands by both her parents at the critical moments. First she consoles her father when he collapses into a broken, suffering human being, wipes his tears and when he is about to die she removes him from the bed and places him on the floor to let him die peacefully. Then, she serves her mother too patiently during her last days despite her tyranny, suspicion and fear as Manorama will not allow anybody else to look after her.

Kalyani's marriage is a loveless, arranged marriage – a marriage of convenience. She marries Sripati as she has no option and Sripati marries her as he cannot disobey her eldest sister who has looked after him and enabled him to be one a lawyer. Such marriages sanctioned by custom disregard the feelings of the persons who are made partners and companions for life. However, such marriages are quite common and couples do their best to make them successful. But the marriage in case of Kalyani fails.

Kalyani bore only one son, Madhav, who grew well physically but remained retarded mentally. She was going home to Bangalore for the holidays. Her husband went to check reservations at V.T. leaving her with the children. Unfortunately, Madhav, then four, suddenly disappeared from the platform. When Sripati returned and did not find his son, he left his wife and daughter with the luggage on the platform and went about the city searching like a mad man. Anil's grandfather brought them to his house and later Kalyani went to her parental house. Sripati remained missing for two months. Ever since then, Sripati has not spoken to her. That is a punishment she does not deserve.

It is unjust as she was not negligent. As a young and inexperienced mother, it was not easy for her to manage two children alone. More so because the boy was not normal mentally but physically well – grown. It was difficult to control him. Somehow, he slipped unnoticed and as a mother she too felt the loss.

Kalyani proves better than her mother by allowing her daughter to marry the man of her choice. When she learns about the desertion of Sumi by her husband, she cries out, “no, my god, not again.” (MT 200) That is, she does not want a repetition of what happened to her, in case of her daughter. She goes to Gopal and argues with him, trying to convince him to change his decision.

She goes to the extent of saying that

“how could she have known what being a good wife means when she never saw her mother being one? Taught her nothing. It's all my fault, Gopal forgive me and don't punish her for it.” (MT 20)

Similarly, she shows her concern and anxiety for her daughter when Sumi who is learning scooter gathers speed and goes out of the gate.

Sumi, the daughter of Kalyani, is another female character in the novel that deserves our attention. She was quite advanced in her approach to sex in theory and practice. Born in a society that inhibits sex, she was not allowed boy – friends by her father. Once he saw her with a boy and said, "Remember my dignity." (MT 12) But then he let in Gopal as a tenant and Sumi found the man of her choice. True, Gopal was enchanted by Sumi. Her sight filled him with the same astonishment and delight that the idol of Parvati in the temple of Dilwara had. One afternoon Gopal is awakened by the voices of Sumi and her friend and watching them from his room, he felt like Dushyanta watching Shakuntala and her two friends. Despite that it was not Gopal but Sumi who became the initiator. She broke out of her father's authority at eighteen, went to Gopal's room at night. Gopal sat out in the veranda all the while but accepted her in the morning. That shows her confidence and boldness as a contrast to the diffidence and hesitation of Gopal.

This confidence and boldness issue from her sane approach to sex. Quite contrary to the tradition, she holds that woman need not be ashamed of their sexuality which is quite normal. That is what enables her to interpret popular tales in a heterodox way. She interprets the fairy – tale about ‘The Princess and the Gardener's Son’ as a tale of princess who had fallen in love with the gardener's son and tricked her father with a queer condition to get him. Similarly, to her Surpanakha was “neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it.” (MT 21) Female sexuality is reality that woman cannot and should not disown and men too ought to recognize it.

There are several traits in her personality that set her apart from others. She is a keen observer of the world around her and a good learner from experiences. Formerly, life seemed "a magician's bag, full of odds and ends" to her. Later she comes to concur with Gopal: "Destiny in just us and therefore inescapable, because we cannot escape ourselves. Certain actions are inevitable because we are what we are." (MT 165)

Her conception of destiny is thus different from that of her mother. It does not make her a fatalist. While her mother invokes Ganapati to protect her family, she remarks: "He doesn't do such a good job of looking after the women in the family, does he?" (MT 59)

So, he believes that women have to look after themselves instead of depending on some deity or some male. The philosopher in Sumi knows the inevitability of change and brings home the point to her daughter Charu in the following manner:

"You silly girl, you're dying to finish pre – university and get into medical college. Isn't that change? But that will be my doing. I don't want things to change because of what other people do.

It's never possible to avoid that" (MT 60)

Her marriage with Gopal is based on an understanding. At the time they decided to marry, Gopal had said that at any time if either of them

"wanted to be free, the other would let go". They were "not going to be tied together." (MT 123)

He was only twenty – six and she only eighteen at that time. Yet the marriage lasted for over twenty – three years and she found it, unlike her mother's, satisfactory.

"Our life was complete", she tells Gopal reflecting on it. (MT 123)

As in marriage, so within the family Sumi like Gopal, practises democracy. Unlike her father, she does not exercise her despot rule over her

daughters. However, she does not claim any credit for it. She gives all the credit to her husband. She contends it was her laziness, her desire to avoid unpleasantness that made her follow Gopal in that respect. That is how she explains her position to Devaki but in the light of her experiences of early life at home, she seems to have chosen that course of her own will.

Her married life lasts over two decades and then Gopal decides to walk out and tells her about it. She does not protest as agreed before marriage. The desertion unburdens Gopal of his responsibilities as a husband and father, but brings in a lot of problems for Sumi. First, she has to face the reactions of not only of the society at large but also of her near and dear ones. Secondly, she has to maintain the house hold properly. Thirdly, she has to look after her daughters, to educate and guide them alone. These are no mean challenges and she accepts them courageously rising up to the occasion.

The desertion does not throw her off balance. She remains calm and goes on with her routine work. Her stoicism seems enigmatic to her near and dear ones. They find it difficult that they have parted without any quarrels, without any apparent reasons. They have learnt from their experience that such things happen very often before married couples separate and therefore it is quite inconceivable on their part to think that separation with discontent and resentment is ever possible. But it is a fact that she does not ask Gopal to

explain his decision at the time he declares it not even later. Thus she remains true to her agreement with Gopal till the end.

Reactions of her three daughters differ. Seema, the youngest of the three finds the development very painful and bursts into tears while telling about it to her grandmother. But she is not volatile. Charu perceives it as the hassles of her parents and bothers about nothing but her career. She is determined to complete her studies at medical college. Quite unexpectedly, Anu the eldest takes it quite hard. She wants her family intact with her father back. She argues with her mother and father and even contemplates about taking legal measures against her father. Sumi is aware of the futility of her pursuit but she deems it better to let her learn it herself.

Sumi is always open and above board. She has the courage to accept and face the reality and does not like to hide it.

Soon after Gopal's desertion, she disapproves of Ramesh's euphemism and says:

"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?"

(MT 232 – 233)

Even when Rohit falls in love with her daughter Anu, she does not bother about it. She believes that marriage like other human relationships should not be based on falsehood and pretensions.

Gopal's desertion leaves no option before the family but to leave their rented house due to financial reasons. Sumi moves with her daughters to her personal house. She takes the decision at first as a temporary measure. She thinks: "I don't want my daughters love with a hand clasped over their mouths like Premi and I had to do." (MT 119 – 120) She does not want to place her daughters in a house where her parents are living in a queer relationship. Eventually, however, she realizes the futility of seeking another house while the big house has ample room for the family. Even her father "Sripati is not the same to his granddaughters as he was to his own daughters." (MT 225) She observes the change and gives up her intention to leave it. That shows her ability to comprehend her situation and make necessary adjustments to it.

As the novelist puts it:

"It was – the economics of the situation that had made the decision for her". (MT 27)

Despite her problems and despite the willingness of her wealthy relations to help her, she does not like to become a parasite.

As she puts it:

"There's Ramesh ready to give me money, and Devi and Premi, of course. And now you are 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." (MT 218 – 219)

So she rejects all the offers of money, including that of her father and seeks a job in order to become independent. Again she rejects the proposal of Ramesh which would have made it possible for her to have a home of her own. Thus we find she has got dignity and self – respect which do not wane even in her adversity. She stays with her parents only on the condition that they accept her help in the household and gets a temporary job in a school to support her family.

Her progressive attitude is evident from the fact that she feels glad about Anu's participation in a demonstration for women's cause. Also, she does not feel uneasy about the growing intimacy of her two daughters Anu and Charu with two young men, namely Rohit and Hrishi. She allows it to develop as a normal human relationship. Strangely enough, it is Anu who feels uneasy when Kumar calls Sumi thrice in connection with her school play as if Kumar was going to become her stepfather.

The new situation also brings forth Sumi's hidden literary talent. She hears one of the teachers in her school speak of wanting a play for the inter – school play competition and remembers the story of the princess who married a gardener's son. Then, she writes the play 'The Gardener's Son' in two nights. It is a success on the stage and brings praise and recognition to Sumi.

The play impresses Lalita who recognizes her even after a year. It also helps her in getting a teacher's job in a residential school in Devagiri despite her age and inexperience. She is about to join the school when an accident cuts short her life. Her departure from the scene leaves a message not only to her daughters but to many other women fallen in similar circumstances to think rationally and act boldly never losing their nerves.

Small Remedies (2001) has several women characters remarkable for their traits – positive or negative ones. There is Lata who works in a bank. She loves her husband Hari and does her best to make Madhu comfortable. Gradually she becomes free enough with Madhu to talk about her love affairs, her worries and her problems too. Her in – laws are rich but she does not like to depend on them. Rather, she feels awkward in their presence as she is not accustomed to the life style of the extremely rich. She does not feel that the responsibility of being the wage earner of the family is solely with the husband. That line of thinking places her apart from the traditional stereotype. On the other hand, we find characters like Paula and Munni too. Paula dislikes her

father's second wife Leela, showers abuses (whore etc.) on her and makes life hell for the orphaned girl Madhu and compels her to leave for hostel even before the college opens. Then, there is Munni who loves light music and movies but rejects classical music. Early in her life she finds pleasure in scandals and goes to the extent of asking Madhu to steal money from her father's drawer. In search of leading the life of a traditional Hindu wife of a respectable family, she blanks out her parents from her life and ends as Shailaja Joshi. She succeeds in her endeavour by sacrificing truth at the altar of respectability. Lata's mother is the typical representative of the superstitious woman in the society while Leela's mother who summons her daughter after about three decades simply to confide the secret of her deceased husband's illicit relationship with a widow – a relationship that gave birth to a son – reveals a queer aspect of the human nature.

Savitribai is the control figure of the novel never the less. Born in a wealthy Brahmin family, she was the first child of her parents. She learnt music from her mother in childhood. As her mother sang devotional songs, she recited them. Thus grew her passion for music.

Her lessons began in

"a small unused room on the first floor of the house, a room that looked down on the back courtyard." The room was "musty smelling" but there she entered a new world for removed from the

world of – a daughter – in – law of the house." A month or two later, a tabla – player was introduced into the classes. (SR 148 – 149, 200)

Her aspiration to become a great musician, however, could not be realised within the walls of her marital home. So she leaves it at last with the tabla – player, Ghulam Saab. In the meantime they have become parents of a girl, Munni. Her ambitions do not pay heed to that daughter at the time she leaves, though later the daughter joins the two at Neemgaon.

Kashinath Buwa of the Gwalior gharana was a well known singer at that time. So she decided to become her disciple but it was not easy. He had settled down in the vicinity of Bhavani temple in Bhavanipur in the last years of his life. Students from all parts of India came to learn music from him. The man stayed in the Guruji's establishment in the temple but she had to live in Bhavanipur town in a house which had just two rooms with an outside toilet shared by others. There was neither electricity nor running water. She had to travel by the local shuttle train and walk two miles through the fields to reach her guru's establishment.

That, however, did not happen all of a sudden. She heard Kashinath Buwa for the first time in Pune during a Ganapati festival and made up her mind to learn music from him. Later after a year she went to Bombay for a family function and she went to meet him but he turned down her request.

Then after a year or two she went to live in Bombay with Ghulam Saab. There she started music lessons with Ghulam who was not only a good tabla – player but a good musician too. But that was only a stopgap arrangement. Again she approached Kashinath Buwa with the same request and he dismissed that too. Then she began to visit him almost every day with the same request not thwarted by his refusal and continued her attempts to persuade him. However, he persisted in refusing as he thought music was not a profession meant for a married respectable woman. If she wanted to take up music as a hobby, there were others to teach her. He was a traditional man and did not want to encourage her to step out of her traditional role.

She tried to approach him through various people with the same result. Then he fell ill and left Bombay for his home town Bhavanipur. After recovery she too followed. One evening she went to his house and told him she would not leave Bhavanipur until he took her as a student. At last he conceded but laid down some conditions. She was to live in Bhavanipur town, nearly ten miles from the temple and do come thrice a week in the afternoons. As a married Brahmin woman she could not live in his house with the male students, hence such conditions. Besides, she was to learn music afresh and forget what she had learnt earlier.

The official gauda – tying ceremony was held on Dasara day. Savitribai sold her gold bangles to pay her guruji on the occasion. But she

needed more for maintaining a household in the town and living there. Ghulam Saab came to her rescue at that time.

"He worked as an accompanist, he worked for a while in a professional drama troupe, he worked with a music director for films, he gave music lessons." (SR 180 – 181)

Thus Ghulam Saab played a no mean role in fulfilling her aspirations.

After the death of her Guru ji, she left Bhavanipur and went to Bombay. She passed through a difficult time there and had to sell all her jewellery for survival. Worst of all she had an ailment that affected her voice and she could not sing for about a year. Luckily she met a doctor (Chandru's father) who cured her. She won recognition and a lot of success in her profession after her recovery.

From Bombay, she moved to Neemgaon where she found several admirers and patronisers who advanced her career. They included the Station Director of Neemgaon Radio Station. Ghulam Saab contributed a lot during that period too. "He met people on her behalf, he arranged her programmes, he made the contracts for her." (SR 231 – 232)

She would never have been able to manage that part of her professional life without him, as Hasina puts it. It was during her stay at Neemgaon that her daughter stayed with her, though she did not have a good

opinion of them. Ghulam Saab, a kind soft spoken man was nothing but a villain to her. At last Munni left her to marry and become Shailaja Joshi and Ghulam Saab too returned to her family in old age. Then, like her guru, she too went to Bhavanipur to spend the remaining days of her life. Madhu, her biographer who had seen her at Neemgaon, went there to interview her and collect materials for her biography.

Savitribai had survived her first stroke before Madhu came to her house in Bhavanipur. Though she hated rules and conventions of orthodoxy formerly, she had become orthodox Brahmin after the stroke and would not accept food from Hasina, the grand – daughter, her student for fifteen years and a care – taker of her household for two years. Sometime after Madhu's arrival the second stroke took place. Savitri bai survived but lost her speech though she could recognise people. Madhu and Hasina were the only persons to attend her when she was admitted to the hospital.

That was virtually the end of her story as nothing mattered in life to her but music. She had lost her ability to sing after the first stroke and that was a great catastrophe for her, as she puts it to Madhu:

"The only thing that mattered to me, the only thing that mattered about me, was my music. And that's over for me now. ----- I never though this would happen to me, I thought I would go on until I died. And then it was over" (SR 233)

The second stroke left her speechless, unable to even talk about music.

As Madhu puts it, she was

"the last of the musicians of the great classical style, one of a handful of purists, indeed of all musicians." She "made no concessions to change, to innovation, to the demands of contemporary audiences" and considered "innovations to be cheap gimmicks." (SR 46)

Her single – minded pursuit of music, her determination to achieve the goal and her success in reaching her goal are really remarkable and distinguish her among her contemporaries. She passed through a lot of difficulties and social barriers to reach the height and won a position for her in a sphere forbidden for married women of respectable families. She had to break the tradition to accomplish it.

That is but one aspect of her life but not the whole of it. There is another aspect of her life which does not present her in favourable light. She acted rebel in early life but proved a coward and a hypocrite in her later life. She put on her mangalsutra which she had discarded earlier and turned orthodox refusing to take food from Hasina. Then she blanked out her daughter out of her biography. Similarly, she did not acknowledge the debt of Ghulam Ahmad . Often we wonder whether she was devoid of all feelings for her lover,

daughter and disciples like Hasina. Though it is highly uncharitable to suggest it, we are left with the impression that all the human relations were simply a means to further her ends and nothing else to her. If she outshines many as a musician, she appears wanting a lot as a human being. That explains the strange phenomenon that despite all her name and fame, she finds only two persons – Hasina and Madhu around her in her most critical hours.

Leela presents a happy contrast to Savitribai. While Savitribai was obsessed with music and disregarded everything else, Leela who took to politics seriously, remained sincere and truthful with her relations. She did nothing that she felt ashamed of or had to hide. Though she did win the recognition she deserved, her benign presence was felt and appreciated by all who came into contact or came to know her.

She was not lucky enough to get higher education but she started her career as a teacher. Then she organised factory workers. She played a role during the Quit India Movement. She had no faith in the Gandhian methods and preferred direct action against the foreign rule. She joined the Communist party out of her conviction but she was disillusioned to find people around her who were unconcerned with ideology. Though she was elected a corporator, she could not do anything worthwhile under the system as she had disagreements with the party on Tibet and Sino – Indian war ("The Chinese Invasion" as the novelist puts it) and she resigned from the CP to join the Socialist group.

Then she took part in the anti – price rise campaign. Saddened by her husband's death, she was out of her spirit for a while but regained it during the Railway strike. She refused to go underground during the emergency, was arrested and spent a year in prison. Unlike many who led the workers and lived luxurious lives, she spent most of her days in Maruti Chawl with the working class people and left it only when the land mafia left no option for her. One may or may not endorse her views, particularly on Tibet and China, but one must admit that she practised what she preached, that she was neither a hypocrite nor an opportunist.

Her personal life is no less remarkable. She was born in a Brahmin family. The family was proud of their caste and also of the fact that they were inamdars. She was one of the six sisters – all named after rivers. Her real name was Sindhu. She and her sister Kaveri were the rebels who disowned caste and rejected the false pride of the Inamdars. Kaveri married a non – Brahmin and she too married a Christian after the death of her first husband.

Leela was married at 15 by her grand – mother who thought it was a punishment. She began her married life at Maruti Chawl with her husband Vasant. Fortunately, both her husband and her mother – in – law were good and she got the opportunity to attend school and pass Metric. Then Vasant died of TB and her father came to take her back to her natal home. She could have gone there and spent the life of a widow in as much comfort as tradition

allowed. But she preferred to stay with her husband's family. She became self-supporting by taking up a teacher's job, helped her mother – in – law and got her two brothers – in – law educated.

Her concern for the health of the workers led to her meeting with Joe – a doctor and they fell in love. It was a strange love as Joe's Marathi was terrible and Leela's English almost non – existent. Yet communication between them was perfect. Paula, Joe's daughter from his first marriage, hated Leela and opposed the marriage. So she delayed her re – marriage, though Vasant's family had no objections to it. Even after marrying Joe, she lived on her own and after his death, she returned to Maruti Chawl very soon. As long as she lived with Joe and his children, she did her best to adjust and endure so that Joe was not perturbed. With the sole exception of Paula, everybody in Joe's family was satisfied, nay, pleased with her. Thus her second marriage was based on love. She did not expect monetary gain, comfort or riches from the marriage even though Joe was a doctor and as such, a rich man. Instead she had to remain patient and do a lot to keep peace and make everybody happy there which was a no mean task.

Leela hated idleness. That is evident from her comment on Bimal Roy's movie Devdas; "Now I know why that poor man drank so much. He had nothing to do, he didn't have any work at all." (SR 254 – 255) She wore 'ayah saris' and lived among the working class until she had to leave Maruti Chawl.

She died in Dadar in a small place which had but a room, kitchen and balcony. She suffered a lot during her last days as she was suffering from Cancer but refused further tests after undergoing surgery for breast cancer. She had friends and relations to stand by and three of them Sunanda, Shanta and Madhu were particular about attending her. She died of cancer at last.

Herself a rebel, she invited her sister Kaveri to stay with her husband at her Maruti Chawl when Kaveri left her natal family to marry a non – Brahmin. They stayed there for some time. Surely, Kaveri's husband was impressed with Leela. That is why he chose not his brother but Leela to look after his daughter after his death. The choice aggrieved his brother but he could not help as he had put it in black and white to avoid problem. Thus she got guardianship of Madhu after the death of her parents. That shows the faith Madhu's father had in Leela's sense of responsibility. The faith was not misplaced. Leela's love and care, her protective personae stood in good stead to Madhu. When Madhu passed a letter to Leela in prison during the Emergency, she told her :

" Don't do this again. Tell them I don't want you involved." (SR 191)

That shows how seriously she took the responsibility given to her. Thus we find a healthy balance between her private and public life, one does not affect the other or jeopardise it. She is great in her public life as well as in

her personal life. No wonder Hari would like Madhu to write a biography of Leela, instead of Savitribai.

Moving On (2004) is a novel full of numerous cases of unconventional marriages. Manjari's grandfather first married a Harijan woman and then a woman who had Mangal in an inauspicious place in her horoscope. Gayatri his daughter married a man of her own choice. His son, Badri Narayan married a non – Brahmin Marathi girl. Manjari married a Sindhi, while Raja's wife Rukku was Tamil. Such marriages seem astounding to us but for the fact that the novelist born in a Kannad Brahmin family is herself married to a non – Brahmin Marathi speaking doctor. Multiplicity of such marriages when initiated by the women in particular shows the extent to which they are asserting their right to choose.

Moving On has a number of women characters that arrest our attention. Gayatri who sacrificed her promising career for the sake of love, who had a clarity of vision and read enormously, a woman who had no children but proved a pillar to her brother's and brother – in – law's family, a source of light to them is one of them. Then we find Vasundhara (or Vasa for short) who was a writer of romanticized marriage stories published in popular Marathi magazines.

"Living among woman who had to be aggressive and strong to survive the endless drudgery and continuous lechery, she wrote of

silent sacrificing women An independent woman who hated being questioned, she wrote of woman who found happiness in submission, not only to their husbands, but to their families as well.” (MO 257)

Even the youngest of them, Sachi is a smart girl who finds no difficulty in communicating with people, who sleeps well in a running train and is confident enough to decide not to go to college but choose the career of film making. Most remarkable about her is the absence of greed and her sense of justice. She questions the propriety of her grandfather's will who bequeathed his house to her alone and wants to sell it to buy a flat jointly in the names of Anand, herself and Manjari in order to set it right. But, Manjari out shines all of them.

Manjari, the daughter of Badri Narayan and Vasundhara is far from an ordinary girl if we take note of her parentage. Her father was a doctor who taught anatomy to medical students while her mother was a Marathi story writer. They belonged to different linguistic groups and castes. Badri Narayan was able to overcome the barriers of language and caste after he fell in love with Vasundhara during her visit to hospital where she had come to see her injured brother Laxman.

Manjari decides to become a doctor but soon strays away disappointing her parents. To her father giving up studies is something like

"giving up your life", "like committed suicide." (MO 222, 227) That is why he disapproves of her decision. Her mother too objects to it and asks her to complete her studies. But she does not like to wait for four years to graduate and one year more for internship. She has fallen in love with a Sindhi, Shyam, a cinematographer and wants to marry him soon. To her mother it is only physical: "your body is confusing you", she declares. (MO 283) But she has made up her mind and announces her resolve by kissing Shyam twice on his lips before her mother.

Manjari's married life begins at eighteen in a single room she occupies with her husband. Though Shyam lives in the same house with his family, he has a separate existence and pays rent to them for his room. Though Manjari cannot make out what they speak, it is obvious to her they are bickering all the time. Thus they present a striking contrast to her natal family. Shyam's brother, not a very successful lawyer, is the only exception who looks after his unpleasant father and has given his difficult sister a home. Even the "unpleasant father" deserves readers' pity when we learn that his mother, a Muslim who had married a Hindu was killed by her own people during the partition leaving him as the sole bread winner for three younger siblings. Her ugly room, all the harsh voices and even the urine stinking bath room become bearable to her under the spell of love.

Though she has married much against the wishes of her parents, soon reconciliation takes place. She is invited to her natal home for the ritual of Mangal Gauri and spends a few days there. When she returns, she learns that Shyam's boss Feroz had offered him Ocean Vista for six months. That is the seaside house where Shyam and Manjari have spent their week long honeymoon before going to their tiny room. So they move to live there and thereafter she does not meet anyone of Shyam's family again with the single exception of Shyam's brother who comes to see her twice after Shyam's death.

Manjari's married life is cut short when she is twenty one as Shyam dies of drowning in the sea. But a lot of mishaps occur before that. Manjari's sister Malu becomes pregnant and Shyam is found to be the man responsible for her pregnancy. Malu is taken to a suburban flat, delivers a daughter and dies of post – natal complication after a few days. Her death is supposed to be a case of meningitis. Manjari's mother expects her to take the baby with her and go to Shyam. But that plan does not materialise as Manjari has lost contact with Shyam. Gayatri, her father's sister takes charge of the baby in the meantime. After Shyam's death, however, she makes up her mind and promises her mother (who is diabetic and nearing her death) to adopt the baby as her own daughter. Thus, she becomes the mother of two children Anand and Sachi, instead of the one (Anand) alone.

She proves a caring mother to both Anand and Sachi. She does her best to get them educated well and keeps them in good residential schools. She is not dominating or meddling to them. Instead of taking all the decisions for them, she prefers to listen to them. That is particularly true about Sachi. The house in which she is living, is bequeathed to Sachi by her father Badri Narayan and she respects her decision to sell it even though she does not think it expedient. She does not object to it when Sachi chooses a career of film making after completing her twelfth class exams. She is wise enough to realize that Sachi needs a family after observing her with BK and Raja. She is satisfied to note that she has found one.

Life of a woman who owns a house and is living alone in a city is hardly safe in Indian cities nowadays. There are real estate dealers, promoters and land mafias to make life hell for them. And that is what happens to Manjari after the death of her husband. There are threatening phone calls ("you're a woman, don't forget that") and break-ins, but she does not submit. She deems it her sacred duty to keep the house for Sachi, who is the sole authority to dispose it. She has to serve as a trustee and she does that well.

Raja, the son of BK, aware of the threats she is receiving from the land mafia, wants to play the role of a protective male in her life. She buys her own car and learns driving and refuses to depend on a driver. Raja who has lost her spouse like her wants to marry her and his son Pavan as well as Anand

and Sachi like the idea, but she rejects the idea as she feels she has gone too far. No considerations – physical, financial or emotional – prove enough to persuade her to remarry.

That is not to gain say her sexuality. A widow since barely twenty one and now at forty one, it proves difficult for her to control her sexuality. She cannot resist the relentless demands of her body. She discovers a way to gratify it by sleeping with her tenant on her own terms, not his: "Only the body, his body, only my body, and my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensation." (MO 227) The affair is eventually revealed to Raja whose proposal Manjari has turned down.

He rebukes her sharply:

"I never thought you could sink so low. With a chap like that. In reply, she tells him about what respectable men have done. A friend's husband tried to induce her to become her mistress secretly. An employer about her father's age slobbered all over her and then fixed her finding fault with her character. A man could have raped her in own house but for her resistance. Then she goes on: "I gave up wearing Saris because I didn't want to look womanly, I cut my hair short like a man's, I wore my most forbidding expression. But it was of no use." (MO 317 – 323)

So it is useless to raise the question of respectability, it is the woman's right to choose.

Thus, she believes that biological need cannot be accepted as a pretext or excuse for subordination of the woman. She upholds a woman's right to sexual freedom. Female sexuality like the male one is a biological fact and woman need not be ashamed of it and deny or hide it. She does not deny the institution of marriage as such but she holds that it ought not to be based on considerations of expediency like social security or making two establishments one. She does not love Raja, nor is she willing to be dominated or dictated by him. Moreover, growing up together, she is too familiar with the curves of his body to feel erotically aroused by him. That is why she has rejected Raja's proposal and she will not permit him to exploit her affair with the tenant to compel her to change the decision.

Sachi does not like her frequent change of jobs and places and Raja calls her a rolling stone. Frequent change of place deprives children of the opportunity to be friends with boys and girls of their age. Indeed, she has changed them again and again. She has served as an ayah in a school, sales girl, typist, P.T. Teacher, nurse, etc. Roshan, a Parsi woman senior to her by thirty years provided her accommodation and gave her a job. So she served as a school principal's secretary for some time and found an opportunity to graduate. So she left that job only after Roshan's death. Even later she does not remain

idle. She takes yoga classes she plans to become a professional driver and again she applies for the post of a teacher in a residential school. She needs jobs as she does not want to become a burden on her parents or relations. As for the frequent change of jobs, it becomes inevitable due to uncompromising nature of Manjari and with it comes the change of place. Her reply to Raja quoted above suggests that frequent changes of jobs are partly explained by the behaviour of male employers or colleagues too who look upon women merely as sex objects.

To conclude, we may well quote Chanchala K. Naik who sums up her character as follows: "An affectionate daughter, a loving sister, a caring mother, and a good friend she is hardly imposing or demanding, and is not dependent on anyone. She is not over protective of her children and allows them their own space. Her engagements with life adopts a middle path -- be yourself and allow others to be; live on your own terms and let other live on their own." (Naik 2005: 227)

In the later novels of Shashi Deshpande, most of the lead women characters are well aware of their subjugated status in this androcentric society. The journey in search of individual identity other than that of wife, mother and daughter are portrayed in these novels. Deshpande plays the role of a social reformer also when she tries to project the ever growing consciousness of women of the society especially in the field of their sexist experiences. For

example Urmila and Vanaa in *The Binding Vine* share each other's suffering and come to solve other's emotional crisis.

The later novels try to introduce the idea of female bonding with a woman lending a helping hand to another woman who is not of her stature, who is less fortunate. The rigid lines dividing the society into classes somewhat get blurred. This change in condition of women probably refers to a marked shift in the societal attitude. The society which once saw woman only as house wives has gradually changed its notion and started to look up to them not only as home makers but also as working professionals. This change in outlook perhaps marks social progress, if it may be called so.

Thus Shashi Deshpande's novels reveal a lot of progress so far as the middle class women of India are concerned. Once it was a disqualification for women to attend schools. Then it became necessary to educate girls as grooms wanted graduate brides and even guardians of orthodox families like Akka had to send their girls to schools and colleges. That opened the world for them. Now we find they are learning several languages and becoming writers, journalists, lawyers, doctors and lecturers. They are also taking part in politics, trade union activity and social work. Even the professions once deemed exclusively fit for men are now open to them as it is possible for them now to enter into the professions like that of a musician or film – maker. Enlightenment is ridding them of prejudices and superstitions, even though they

have not disappeared altogether. Education and financial independence is enabling them to protest and choose, to decide for themselves. It is possible now to marry the man they love disregarding caste, ethnicity or religion and several women in the novels have married the same way. Most remarkable of all is the attitude to sex which has changed radically over time. Formerly women were ashamed of their sexuality and would not admit it as they were expected to be passive by the norms of the patriarchal society. Now they have sexual freedom too. That is, they want sex relations based on equality, devoid of coercion and domination. Deshpande preaches ambivalence between tradition and modernity to address the issues related to the problems of contemporary women. Tradition cannot be negated because of its inherent Indian values and modernity is essential for assertion of individuality and establishment of women identity.

However, the picture is not that rosy in case of the poor and uneducated. Shaku Tai in the *Binding Vine* and Mini in the *Roots and Shadows* are instances to the point. And even the home is often disturbed by the sexist attitudes of their husbands as is evident from the experiences of Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Jaya in *That Long Silence*. However the novelist hopes some solutions to such problems can be and ought to be found within the institution of family – an institution she deems timeless and universal. It is essential to assert one's individual identity and gain freedom in social sphere.

Deshpande seems to be saying that it is the women themselves who have to exert and come out of the mire of patriarchal oppression to emerge as individuals and human beings in their own right.