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THE DELINEATION OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S FICTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to present the woman of today who stands poised on the threshold of social change in an enviable position. She is intensely aware of the injustice heaped on her and unlike her counterpart a generation ago; she does not believe that woman is an inferior being who must remain passive and submissive. This awakening of the woman's consciousness as delineated by Shashi Deshpande in her novels deserves a close study to assess the extent of articulation of a woman's point of view. Shashi Deshpande's novels as a product of feminism and that of a humanist writer offer a fresh perspective for critical analysis linking literature with real life situations.

My paper is looking forward to evaluate the novels of Shashi Deshpande as a humanist writer. Deshpande has gained reputation as a serious writer with tremendous potential. Most of Deshpande's protagonists are women who are educated and exposed to Western ideas, but are caught between tradition and modernity. The paper also explores the delineation of human relationships in Shashi Deshpande's fiction And an attempt is made to explore man-woman relationship in her novels. Shashi Deshpande presents her point of view through her protagonists, thereby filling her self-confessed desires to write of human beings, and not of man and woman.

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INTRODUCTION

"In childhood a women should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's and when her husband is dead, under her sons, she should not have independence..¹".

The first generation women novelists wrote mainly to voice their concerns for and sympathize with the sufferings of Indian women, rather than to censure the society. The post- Independence India witnessed a spirit of fiction writing by women writers of greater quality and depth. Kamala Markandaya, an outstanding

¹ King, Adele. Shashi Deshpande: Portraits of Indian Women. In Viney Kripal Ed. *The Postmodern Indian English Novel*. Bombay; Allied Pub, 1996, p.159-67.

novelist presents a cross section of the transitional society in post independent India, where her female protagonists are in quest of their autonomy.

Nayantara Sahgal delineates with Keen perception and sensitivity the problems and sufferings of women in marriage, who feels entrapped, oppressed and doomed to the care of husband and home and show her own reaction in her novels. Most of her women protagonists are aware of the injustice meted out to them in marriage. Anita Desai differs from other writers, through her method of psychological exploration of her women protagonists, who are essentially lonely and sensitive. The isolation and insecurities that her characters suffer is underlined and the growth of the women is from self-alienation to self-identification. Bharati Mukherjee liberates her women protagonists for a "New World Order". Her portrayal of women is inspired by her experience in India as well as in abroad. Her protagonists are sensitive and they lack a stable sense of personal and cultural identity.

Shashi Deshpande as a writer is to a large extent different from her contemporaries as well as her predecessors, and her fiction explores problems and issues relating to contemporary middle-class women. Her women protagonists are sensitive, intelligent and career-oriented. She does not merely describe the pathetic life style of Indian women, but also tries to understand and suggest measures for amelioration. Her women are aware of the cultural and social shortcomings to which they are subjected in the male-dominated society. They rebel against their men in search for freedom and identity, but ultimately find themselves up against well-entrenched social inertia. The author presents her women as longing to become economically and ideologically independent. She finds her women caught up in a conflict between their family and professional roles, between individual and aspirations and social demands. Her women stand at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. They seek change but within the cultural norms, to seek not to reinterpret them, but merely make them alive with dignity and self-respect. Her women seek anchorage in marriage. They look at it as an alternative to the bondage imposed by the parental family and opt for it.

The Man-Woman Relationship

According to Shashi Deshpande, marriage is a complicated relationship; in her novels she mainly focuses on the man-woman relationship which to her is an institution, as there is no blood tie, and expectations are more and there is a physicality of sex. She is interested in the family, not just marriage, the child-parent relationship and so on.

As an Indian English novelist, Shashi Deshpande stands apart, for she writes about certain specific concerns after her own manners. Shashi Deshpande's values matters such as experimental sense of knowledge a great deal more than what is derived from other people's statements or is based on mere theories. Her writing career thus reflects an ongoing process of problematizing life's conflicts and compromise, resolutions and irresolution, ironies and affirmation, triumphs and tragedies, and so on. The mode of human conditions without any closures concretizes the major themes of her fictions such as man-woman relationship, human desires, longing, body, gender discriminations, marginalization, rebellion and protest. To vindicate and authenticate her selfhood and self-expression, she insisted on being called simply 'a writer' and not a woman writer' much less 'a feminist writer'. She maintains that she writes about "person to person and person to society relationships", that she should not be evaluated by gender, and that her authorial position stays beyond male or female dichotomy.

It may however, be noted that the trajectory of feminist concerns that Shashi Deshpande writes about does not necessarily correspond to that of the feminist women writers in the West. In her case these concerns are essentially relational whereas for feminist women writers in the West they are individualistic. Her perceptions of women's liberation and autonomy, for instance, are deeply entrenched in the Indian women's situations within the socio-cultural and economic spaces and paradigms of the country while the Western women feminist writers often stays independent of them.

Woman's search for her identity

Shashi Deshpande's novels are concerned with a woman's search for her identity an exploration into the female psyche, her protagonists undergo an arduous journey to discover themselves and this lead them through a maze of self-doubts and fears . In her novels, she depicts women in a myriad roles- wife, mother,

daughter and an individual in her own right. Shashi Deshpande's straight forward and uninhibited discussion on a wide range of topics concerning women has prompted several reviews to categorize her as a feminist. Her work also reveals that she is highly a sensitive writer who is clearly aware of the male - female imbalance in the society. Her male characters conform to the standard feminist description of a middle-class husband who is insensitive, egoistic and sometimes over ambitious. Whereas, her female protagonists, like the author, hail from middle-class family. Deshpande's women are cultural hybrids, in the sense that they struggle with the cultural conflicts of native tradition mixed with an English education.

However, Deshpande with her liberal humanist ideologies seems to systematically deflect questions relating to women as writers, women as readers, and the representation of women in literary texts'. In her novels, she deals with issues surrounding a woman writer's struggle to reconcile the private and the public sphere; in the novel, *That Long Silence*, Deshpande explores the circumstances and expectations surrounding Jaya, the protagonist who gives up writing in favor of light, non-threatening magazine columns. The ambiguity does not mean that her works are not at all rewarding for a feminist Indian readership. She does explore issues relevant to contemporary middle-class women, even if such exploration remains within a framework of marriage and motherhood Deshpande's characters realize that the privilege of angst and insight is not their alone. While her women are confused and unhappy about their roles and the expectations placed upon them by a patriarchal society, they are often aware of the strength a woman can have in a traditional marriage. Deshpande's modern women characters sometimes envy the certainty gained from willingly accepting a denned role in society, for freedom brings with it uncertainty about the benefits of individuality, as well as responsibility for choices made. Responsibility is a particularly charged issue in the world of Deshpande's passive narrators which again is typical of women who have internalized patriarchal constructs of the inherently sinful nature of women, and of feminine wiles as leading to men's corruption.

Deshpande effectively explores the liberating aspects of passion and the problems of remaining caught within the definition of passion as female. This emphasizes Deshpande's position on the condition of girl children beginning at birth. She shows how, women internalize the patriarchal norms and feel guilty when transgressing them. Sam, in the novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, blames herself for causing her brother's death when they were children. Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, also blames herself for worrying about conventionality, rather than reporting her friend Kamat's death. It is in her analysis of the varied emotions, rationalizations and miscomprehensions that make up the relationship between married couples, that Deshpande's novels are particularly effective ii.

The recurrent themes explored through Deshpande's novels are- man-woman relationship, motherhood; mother-daughter relationship, isolation and the need for physical and emotional space, the awareness of the impossibility of a unified, monolithic identity and fixed narrative position. Most importantly, there is a move towards self-knowledge, which involves a long and painful process of introspection and analysis. As we see in Sam's comment about her brother:

" Poor little scared boy, who never grew up to know the dark holds no terrors.
That the terrors are inside us all the time²".

Through these recurring themes, Deshpande creates a space from and into which silenced voices can emerge. Her texts reveal patriarchy's attempts to marginalize and efface its women, whether educated or not. Deshpande's skilled delineation of working-class women and reconstruction of the lives of house-wives of past generations though problematic in terms of the politics of representation, give voice to a suppressed, silent, often brutally treated group. Shashi Deshpande not only speaks of liberation, within the framework of marriage and motherhood, but also attempts to trace the actual processes by which women are 'womanized'. In Deshpande's world, women who do not break their silence contribute to their own oppression and to that of their gender sex. Deshpande's work achieves an added texture because she does not portray her characters

² Deshpande, Shashi. *The Dark Holds No Tenors*. Ghaziabad: Vikas, 1980, p. 76.

in black and white. Her characters are oftendivided into the categories of good and bad, but the author herself views human relationships in a greater complexity.

Representation Of Men

Deshpande's men in her novels are enormously respected; there is often a male figure, very different from the husband, not so constrained by convention that the female protagonist turns to for advice; For example, male figures such as Saru's father, and Jaya's friend Kamat, in *That Long Silence*. Fathers are always trusted and loved more than mothers. Idealized attitudes towards father figures are very strong, and Deshpande's female characters have a tendency to be passive, in terms of political acts of agency. The grey areas in reading the novels as feminist comes from the fact that the protagonists are sometimes extremely critical of other women, and often perpetuate conventional patriarchal attitudes towards as them we can see in the case of Deshpande's mother characters. The mother-daughter relationship is fraught with differences and disagreement, and daughters, instead of finding an affirmation of identity, struggle to establish an 'anti-mother' identity in order to grow as women. This is seen in Deshpande's women, whose greater fear is becoming the mother. It is also interesting to note the similarity of depiction through her novels in terms of the constant denigration of Sam, Indu, and Jaya's needs by their mother and other female relatives.

Deshpande's work articulates the problematic position of middle-class, educated women in India today, caught between the demands of playing the traditional role of a good daughter, wife, mother, and struggling with the notion of autonomy, identity and self-realization. In Deshpande's novels, the female protagonist realizes that androgyny is indeed a fiction. Marriage starts falling apart the moment gendered binaries are interrogated. Sam's husband rapes her to vent his rage at the fact that she overtook him, professionally and financially (*no Dark Holds No (errors)*).

Deshpande's interest in the women's situation and her struggle to carve out a little space for herself is the culmination of a long line of fiction, where she speaks of the interdependence between the aesthetic dimension inherent in women and the social aspects which restricts the space inhabited by women. In her novel, *Come Up and Be Dead*, which is a different novel based on crime and murder mystery. Deshpande's main theme focuses on the human relationships, not the traditional ones but the redefined human relationships between sisters, mother and child, father and daughter, brother and sister, between women and society, and between women and men with whom they live. The space that women occupy is primarily domestic; it is in the elaboration of the changing equations within the private domain, consequent upon a change in the women's consciousness that Shashi Deshpande is most skilled at. In their slow awakening to realization and action, lies the transformation of the domestic space and all relationships constrained there in.

The circumstances of women's lives and the lack of choices that characterize their situation are highlighted through a microscopic, but not unsympathetic examination of the familial and domestic, the so-called natural domain of women. Deshpande also declares that nothing could be more universal than the family unit and no relationship more fundamental than that between the members of a family. Human relationships are the most mystifying, hence, the most exciting thing for a novelist. Within these relationships, it is a woman's place that is of greatest concern to Deshpande, because of the extreme difference, that women experience in relation to men. Deshpande's novels and her latest short stories dwell on the daily slights and humiliations that women suffer, mostly in silence. The device is of describing the reality of many middle-class women in India. Deshpande lays bare the social discrimination and hypocrisy that underlies society's treatment of them. Deshpande is also able to acknowledge the power that women manage to wield despite their disadvantaged status, especially within the family. Most of Deshpande's novels engage with women's silence and reveal the truth that lies behind their silences, like- silences of a mother, daughter, sister, widow, a young girl, silences to speak a thousand words that pave the way to search for one's own space and voice, to come to terms with oneself. Her novels depict the situation and experiences of the modern, educated, urban middle-class Indian woman which are filtered through the hopes, fears and uncertainties of an urban middle-class consciousness. The woman suffers, but she also endures the emotional world.

Another theme that recurs in many of Deshpande's novels is rape- both as a random violent act and one within marriage. In the novel *Come Up and Be Dead*, there are several instances of rape within marriage as in

the case of Sonali's mother, who having had a terrible experience on her wedding night could not accept such sexual act as a part of marriage. The experience she had that night Jen her mentally scarred for the rest of her life. She Jeamt about the physical and sexual relationship that exists between man and woman the hard way. She felt violated when her husband touched her:

" And yet, she had home it silently. Something had told her it was just between the two of them. She knew you couldn't scream 'rape'... not when it was your own husband And even if shedid, who could hear³".

When her husband realized that she could not hear his touch, it shocked him and as far as he was concerned it was the end of their marriage. They decided in favor of a divorce. It alienated Jyoti Raman from their family along with her family as they blamed Jyoti for everything After all these things, she completed her education, got a job and moved away from her disapproving family along with her daughter to start a new life. Through the character of Jyoti Raman, Deshpande hints at the sexual aggression of men tolerated silently by women. Her treatment of marriage and sex is quite significant. In the midst of all these, Deshpande presents a ratherdissatisfied picture of marriage. The relationship of man and woman is what concerns her most. The images of domesticity and marital unhappiness are explored in the novel. Also, the image of mother is constantly portrayed in a negative light. Kshama remembered her mother with distaste. Devi the other character in the novel did not even want to think of her mother, and Sonali was really averse to her mother to whom she attributed all her negative qualities. A distance in the parent-child relationship is also highlighted in the novel. Sonali's mother did not approve of any sort of man-woman relationship and in fact also discouraged her daughter from talking to those girls whom she suspected of having relation with men. Thus, when she saw her daughter with Bunny, whom she disapproved of, she ordered her daughter to come home at once. Sonali was so annoyed that she burst out saying:

" Aroma,why do you shout at me like that?
You insulted me; you humiliated me before my friends.
It's not fair. I'm ashamed.....
She develops hatred towards her mother
who always seems to be controlling her life.

Once she said with immense disgust: " Mothers! I hope I never become one⁴" .

Kshama, the chief female character, too, did not enjoy a good relationship with her mother. She was closer to her father, so close that she resented any attention given by him to her brother, Pratap. Deshpande reveals how Kshama's father had a tremendous influence on her life and in fact encouraged her to have ambitions and pursue them. This attachment that she had towards her father was one of the reasons why she resented Pratap and hated any sign of affection that her father showed towards him. She was not inclined to send for Pratap when her father lay dying and went on asking for him. In many of Shashi Deshpande's novels the female characters seem to resent male domination as well as certain rituals which undermine the importance of the girl in the family. Kshama too, resents the fact father when she believed that she had the right to do so, as she was closer to her father than Pratap.

Representation of Women

The woman in Deshpande's fiction is dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural roles assigned to her from the unconscious dawn of life. She views herself as the object of cultural and social oppressions and attempt to rebel against them consciously or unconsciously within her living space. But at the same time she reflects the inability to reject her social background totally and hence fails to transcend the horizons projecting a revolutionary spirit. Shashi Deshpande's other novel, *The Binding Vine*, is a work that can be read as a projection of such ideas as women's solidarity, female bonding and values of sisterhood in a male-dominated culture, the basis for their bonding, however, being shared oppression and victimization.

Mira's unhappy life was a sort of repetition of her mother's, who remained a distant onlooker of her

³ Deshpande, Shashi. *Come Up and Be Dead*. New Delhi; Vikas Pub, 2003, p.141

⁴ Ibid. P. 176.

daughter's dull existence and did nothing about it. A traditional woman herself, she had her own world of dream about her daughter and hence she remained contented seeing Mira married and pregnant. Normally, one shares one's sorrows with one's near and dear ones, particularly mother, to unburden the heart and overcome grief. Mira had however no regrets that she did not share her feelings with her mother since she had felt alienated from her, the immensity of her unhappiness was though known to her mother:

"She knew I was not happy,
know she knew it:
but she was afraid to ask me;
afraid I would admit it⁵.

According to A.G.Khan, the title of the novel, no *Binding Vine*, is significant since mother and child are bound by the binding vine of love, though sometimes it takes a heavy toll. That is how relationships are built, always at some cost. However, beyond their anguish, pain and suffering, in their nameless moments of intimacy and bonding, we find that Urmi discovers the binding vine of love, the 'spring of life', the glimmering of hope' overcomes her own sense of loss and despair and rises above all shades of misunderstanding. This novel celebrates women's coming together with other women as friends and companions, and sharers of life rather than as rivals for approval by men. It is also a story of mothers and daughters, where Urmi grieves for her baby girl who is dead and Shakutai sorrows for Kalpana, her daughter who is dying. There are other pairs of mothers and daughters who, in spite of their differences, reinforce the idea of the binding vine. Here, the most important thing that stands out is the need to identify oneself with other women. Sharing of experiences and supporting each other is the essential part of the novel.

The title of the novel too reflects its predominant theme; *The Binding Vine* presents a female world in which women come together in a feeling of fellowship. The other theme that emerges as equally powerful is that of resistance in different modes of women's experience. Like most of the protagonists of Deshpande, Urmi is not dependent upon men for survival and asserts both her economic as well as psychological independence. She is the voice of resistance in the novel that registers a 'protest against the patriarchal attitude to the issue of rape. Two forms of the gender violence are juxtaposed in the case of Kalpana and Mira. If Kalpana lying in an unconscious state represents the silenced subaltern, in Mira's poems and diaries, writing itself becomes a mode of resistance. Hence, female bonding and resistance are the central issue.

In another novel of Shashi Deshpande, *A Matter of Time*, it depicts the dilemma of wife-dissertation. We can say that this novel also deals with the female bonding and resistance as in the case in *The Binding Vine*. *A Matter of Time* underlines wife-dissertation as yet another dimension of betrayal and cruelty to women. The dissertation of Sumi and her three daughters by Gopal, her husband leaves the family with despair. The novel weaves an intricate pattern of relationships with an extended family spanning across generations. Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru belong to four generations of the same family, each representing a specific mode of experience. Manorama is a typical product of patriarchal value system, for he wanted a son. She forces a marriage between two unwilling partners, her daughter Kalyani and her younger brother Shripati, and she even holds Kalyani responsible for all her sorrows and calls her an enemy. But it is Kalyani who represents the survival power of women which tides her across her mother's ill-treatment and her husband's rejection.

In the novels of Shashi Deshpande, she does not only aim to merely document female resistance to patriarchal ideologies, but also to focus on the strategies of re-adjustments her female protagonists undertake in order to forge an identity of their own. Her women characters struggle to learn to become 'one's own refuge', and value the fellowship of other women. Shashi Deshpande recreates sensitively the female world and through modes of women's experiences which she gives a mainstream position. She also refuses to isolate women's experiences, like her contemporary women writers do. Memory also plays a very significant role in Deshpande's fictions; characters imprisoned in their memories dominate the narrative space of her novels.

⁵ Deshpande, Shashi. *The Binding Vine*. New Delhi; Penguin Books, 1993, p.126.

They keep revisiting their past in a manner that threatens their present and future.

In Deshpande's other novel *Small Remedies*, the protagonist and narrator Madhu, discovers that she cannot live in the present without coming to terms with the past that she wanted to erase from her memory, that is the reminiscent repetitions of death, loss, failed marriage, rape or involuntary sex, betrayal, humiliation, and the multiple roads that may have led ordinary and talented people to fame and success or to defeat and oblivion. *Small Remedies* explores the relation between memory and mimesis. The narrator tries to come to terms with a maze of intertwined memories. She is made to recollect events and experiences associated not only with her own life, but also of others. In the novel, the narrative involves Madhu's proposed biography with Savitribai Indorker's life. This story takes Madhu to Bhavanipur, where Savitribai's reputation that is at the heart of the labyrinth has been clouded by controversies. She wants to clear the controversies, for the reconstruction of her public image. A rebel Brahmin bride, she eloped with her Muslim table accompanist and also had a daughter from him. Savitribai wants to recreate her past in such a way that the revisited and reconstructed links give greater clarity to her fading image. Madhu, whereas, is swallowed into the life not only of Savitribai, but also of others of the small town, as she discovers that Savitribai's life is intertwined with other lives. Chandru, Som's best friend, has commissioned Madhu's project which would launch the publicity business of Chandru's wards Yogi and Maya. Madhu, the protagonist of the novel, has recently lost her only son and has to be helped by this heart-specialist, to bury the ghost of her dead son and come out of the pain and grief she had lived with for so long.

Madhu feels that she can give Savitribai the immortality she desires only if she is willing to pay the price of revealing her daughter to the world, a daughter whose existence she had successfully obliterated until then. Madhu cannot understand why, when Savitribai had the courage to walk out of her marriage and family, she was so frightened to reveal the existence of her child. Madhu wonders how:

"She gave that child the name 'Indorker's' the name she adopted as a singer-not comprising either her maiden name or her married one.... This surely is a statement I cannot ignore?⁶".

Madhu, apart from Savitribai, also narrates the saga of another equally or perhaps more, remarkable woman, her aunt Leela, who was fiercely an independent woman and was strongly committed to the communist ideology. She participated in the *Quit India Movement*, but was critical of Gandhiji's principles of *Ahimsa* and *Saagraha* and thought it was ridiculous to allow oneself to be beaten up. Though Leela was a generation older than Madhu, she was financially independent and supported herself. When her first husband Vasant, died she took up a job and educated her brother-in-law. She lived in the crowded chawls among the cotton mills and worked for the welfare of the women afflicted with TB. It was this which first brought her into contact with her second husband, Joe, a doctor who had established a clinic especially for TB patients.

Leela disliked the superior status her family gave itself and wondered what made them so special. She did not find anything even remotely worthy in their holding on to the lands which they inherited. She did not believe in caste system and was the only among Madhu's relatives who accepted Madhu's parents' marriage and invited them to stay with her when they had no place of their own.

Projection Of Quest For Self- Realization

Shashi Deshpande, through her novel *Small Remedies*, projects the quest for self-realization of Indian woman in a hostile patriarchal society. She makes honesty an important tool in the quest for self and projects Savitribai and Munni as failures due to their denial of a certain part of their lives. Madhu and Leela's ability to accept the facts of their life, achieves them success in their quest. But what really forms the crux of the novel is the fact that we experience of Savitribai, "Munni and Leela, but Madhu alone finds her identity by understanding her life. The next novel we are going to deal with is about the secret lives of men and women who love, hate, plot and debate with intensity that will absorb everyone. It is a story that begins, conventionally enough, with a woman's discovery of her father's diary. Manjari, the central character and the reader of her father's diaries, feels as if there is a message for her. The novel, *Moving On*, by Shashi Deshpande

⁶ Deshpande, Shashi. *Small Remedies*. New Delhi; Viking, Penguin India, 2000, p.169.

is basically a family story of intimate spaces, of emotional pains and of such intrusions, which are absolutely unexpected. As Deshpande suggests:

"The family is a timeless and universal institution-everything begins here, everything that happens outside the family mirrors what happens within it"⁷.

As the narrator Manjari is a woman, Deshpande brings in the complex components of narrative faced by a woman like the contestation of self, of other man, woman, bone, body, physical, emotional, sexual, ethics, individual and social binaries. These are the questions in the process of self-realization of her own position. The novel starts with Baba's diary and gradually Manjari is introduced, remembering the moments of her father's life. *Moving On* is a family story of intimate spaces, of emotional wounds and of intrusions.

Manjari, the protagonist, in order to achieve her dreams, started writing giving an ideal image of her family in her write-up. Manjari revisits her parents' past through reading of her father's diary and discovering the hidden curves of their lives. Through her father's diary, Manjari discovers the true nature of her parents' relationship and confesses the inadequacy of her knowledge about them. There is a disconnection between the apparent and the real. Even the so-called real cannot vouch for one truth or its singularity. Manjari's mother too, however, escaped her husband's physical passion, a man who had all along believed in the singularity of the bodily need, its fire, whose passion for his profession matched with his passion, for his wife who did not live up to his expectation. Manjari's mother escaped those passions by creating a world of the larger disharmony in which the complimentary relationship between that holds the family together in love and understanding flounders.

For Manjari unshackling herself from the past and to move on has not been easy, as she is entangled in the past. Manjari displays enormous courage and steadfastness in her decision to give up studying medicine to marry Shyam, and again during such trying moments when it is revealed that her sister Malu is made pregnant by her husband, Shyam. And later, the death of Malu after giving birth to Sachi, which followed Shyam's suicide, Manjari faces a painful period of struggle and strain. Estranged from family, living among strangers, she grapples with innumerable difficulties to support herself, to survive with her baby son. She says:

"I had no time to brood or grieve. It was down to the basics; work, eat, sleep wakeup, go back to work."⁸

According to C.K.Naik, "the title of the novel indicates that moving on is a detour; it is both a journey from within to without and from without to within. Manjari has always, in her many acts of violation, sought freedom, autonomy. These are the crucial questions not only to Manjari as an individual and a woman but central to feminism as well as to humanity"⁹.

Therefore, in *Moving On*, the bonding among women does not take place as one finds that Mai, Malu, Manjari, Gayatri, and even Sachi do not have similar views on love, marriage, Deshpande, on the other hand, underlines freedom, as well as speak of the internalization of patriarchal values as in case of Vasu and Gayatri. Manjari, as the survivor, is the new woman, who redefines freedom and also relationships, 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. Manjari challenges the essentialist notion of female identity as male fabrication and leaves the door open for social and cultural change.

Deshpande's novel *The Count: v of Deceit* explores the theme of love which is about man-woman relationship. She explores the way in which love can take us through the Devayani, the protagonist is an unmarried woman in her mid-twenties who lives all alone after the death of her parents. She has just recovered from the loss of her mother and is starting a new life. In the first chapter of the novel, we can see the demolition of their ancestral home, making it a ground zero, in order to build a new and modern house.

⁷ Deshpande, Shashi. *Small Remedies*. New Delhi; Viking, Penguin India, 2000, p.179.

⁸ Ibid. P.90.

⁹ Ibid. p. 201.

Symbolically, the demolition of the ancestral home denotes on, to future. Devayani is the only well developed character in the novel. She is generous, long-suffering and patient with all the calamities on her way; she is also honest to her own self. The narration is in the first person.

"I can promise you nothing. Nothing¹⁰".

This conversation denotes that Ashok cannot promise anything to Devayani, and that their relation does not have any future. Another theme of destruction and demolition can also be seen in the novel. There is also a constant struggle in the protagonist's mind as she tries to forget everything that happened and also wishes to remember it. As Devayani says in the last chapter:

"Is this what my life is going to be like from now - a constant struggle between trying to forget and wanting to remember? No, I don't want to forget. I want to remember, it is not remembering, but forgetting that will be my greatest enemy¹¹".

In Shashi Deshpande's novels the women are particularly caught in the process of re-defining and re-discovering their own roles, position and relationships within their given social worlds. Deshpande uses the experiences of women to view the present social reality. She presents the world of mothers, daughters and wives, which also presents indirectly the fathers, sons, and husbands, the relation between men and women, and between women themselves. In presenting women's point of view, Shashi Deshpande is mainly interested in the clash of tradition and modernity, as reflected in the generation gap and conflict between women. Her young female protagonists rebel against the traditional way of life and patriarchal values. Jaya, Sarita, Sumi, perceive the structuring of men and women in gendered roles, restricting their human potentiality and fullness. They struggle to transcend the restrictive roles; they rebel, reject and seek freedom from the traditional norms and ways of life. Shashi Deshpande's portrayal of the women of different generations presents the world of women divided into the traditional and modern. Most of her themes in her novels are the relationship between human, her novels mainly focus on the human relationships. Deshpande believes that all good writing is socially committed writing. It comes out of a concern for the human predicament. Her wish is to be recognized as a writer who deals with issues that are human and of interest to all humanity. In Deshpande's world, women who do not break their silence contribute to their own oppression and to that of their sex. According to Rajeswari Sunder Ranjan;

"For women to 'speak' rape is itself a measure of liberation, a shift from serving the object of voyeuristic discourse to the occupation of a subject-position as 'master' of narratives¹²".

Even in Shashi Deshpande's novel, *The Binding Vine*, the novel tells us of women's liberation; it also tells us of their bondage, which is of their human bondage. In the male-dominated society, a woman has many times to take recourse to putting an end to her life. Deshpande, unlike hard-core feminists, does not agree that being a wife or mother is something that is unnecessarily imposed on a woman. She says:

"... maybe I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women or men. ... For I don't believe in having a propagandist or sexist purpose to my writing¹³".

Conclusion

The strong point about Deshpande's novels is her delineation of the woman's inner world. Her protagonists are women struggling to find their own voice and are continuously in search to define them. Therefore, while remaining well within the bounds of the Indian middle-class respectability, the novelist has raised some significant points pertaining to the position of women in society and gender issues. Deshpande's protagonists finally try their best to conform to their roles, and the novels end with an

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 123.

¹¹ Ibid. P. 143.

¹² Sunder, Ranjan Rajeswari. *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Post Colonialism*. London and New York; Routledge, 1993. p.7

¹³ Naik, K. Chanchala. Ed. *Writing Disobedience: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande: Creative New Literature Series 9*.

New Delhi; Creative Books, 1998. P.223.

optimistic note with the possibility of some positive action in future. The novelist emerges in them as a bridge-builder between the old and the new, between tradition and modernity. For this and for portraying the basic reality of Indian society and the place of women in it in a sensitive and authentic manner, her novels are of immense value. One may find in some of Deshpande's novels occasionally autobiography strains, but her characters and incidents are not directly lined from her own life. What the novelist does is to make creative use of her experience and memories in her work.

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