FAMILY IN SELECTED NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

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BY

MERRY BARUAH BORA

Roll No. 03614104

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI

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Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Guwahati 781039
Assam, India

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Ms Merry Baruah Bora has prepared the thesis entitled **"Family in Selected Novels of Shashi Deshpande"** for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The work was carried out under my general supervision and in strict conformity with the rules laid down for the purpose. It is the result of her investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university / institution for a research degree.

IIT Guwahati **Liza Das**

June 2010 Supervisor

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Guwahati 781039
Assam, India

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled **"Family in Selected Novels of Shashi Deshpande"** is the result of investigation carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Dr Liza Das. The work has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university / institution for a research degree.

IIT Guwahati **Merry Baruah Bora**

June 2010

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All the stories that have ever been told are the stories of families …

Shashi Deshpande

Preface and Acknowledgments

Shashi Deshpande's intense fascination with human relationships and the family is reiterated by the fact that almost every novel explores in a compassionate manner the complexities that concern every individual living within families, within relationships. Her fictional world begins and ends with families, the minutiae which she delivers into her narrative allowing the reader an opportunity to contemplate on the family, an institution so core to our lives that it is often taken for granted. This taken-for-grantedness – often unquestioning and unconditional – towards the family, appears to be problematised by Deshpande whose creative engagement with it exhibits how families do operate, especially in the context of the Indian urban middle class.

Reading Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* for the first time a few years ago, I felt the urge to read Deshpande's other novels and the affair took off with such intensity that I was tempted to read all her novels that were available and her short story volumes besides the fiction written for children. Within this time I was also supposed to decide on a topic for my doctoral degree, and for me what could have been a better topic than Shashi Deshpande's treatment of family in her fiction! Given my fascination with her passionate treatment of the family which I found reflected in almost all her novels, and also the fact that I could actually visualise and recognise the familial drama being enacted both in the novels and in and around me, it seemed only natural that I should embark on my chosen topic. Significantly, it was around this time that I felt, after having read secondary works on the novelist that her intense involvement with the family novel after novel has for some reason escaped larger

critical focus and this was also one of the driving factors that motivated me to take up the study of family as my research topic. And thus, Deshpande's fictional world became a living world around me – my family, all my relationships, I felt, were only varied versions of what Deshpande has so skilfully delineated in her novels.

This feeling, almost a sensation, continues to stay with me even today when I feel I have come to the end of my work. However, though I realise that the family is not a divine institution to be endured at any cost and that an individual should be accorded his or her due space and a fair chance to excel in life irrespective of gender, I would also like to acknowledge with all humility that it is finally the family and human relationships enacted therein which enable the nurture and flourishing of the individual spirit without which the individual would be left in isolation and utter loneliness. And therein lies the greatness of family.

It is needless to say that all aspects of a writer of Shashi Deshpande's stature could not be encompassed within the confines of a work like this which does not go beyond a cultural study of the family as reflected in her novels. It is a humble attempt to understand the manifold complexities involving this very vital structure concerning individuals and society in general and which has by now been successful in renewing my understanding of the family at both personal and academic levels and I hope that it would also be successful in opening up new avenues of understanding Deshpande's novels.

This work would not have been possible had I not received unflinching support and cooperation from my supervisor Dr Liza Das at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Guwahati. I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to the members of the Doctoral Committee, Prof Archana Barua,

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Merry Baruah Bora, IIT Guwahati, June 2010

Chapter I

Introduction: Family and the Novels of Shashi Deshpande

> *… the term family is not neutral but historically variable and ideologically charged by religion, culture, politics, economics. The family, whatever its form, is also the location for the formation of the individual and for the reproduction of psychologies of gender. Thus social-historical, feminist, literary, and psychoanalytic concerns meet in the concept of family.*
>
> Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson

Family is a complex outcome of discursive meditations and everyday meditations, a structure of sentiment produced through imagination, recollection and memorialisation. As a structure, it entails a state of attachment, a network of longing and belonging, a call to love and sacrifice, if not to die, for one's family. As a cornerstone of society, families are a matter of enormous preoccupation for societies and individuals alike, both pre-modern and modern. A singular, uniform homogenous definition of the family acceptable to all would be an almost impossible task to accomplish owing to the fact that the very structure and foundation of the family appear to be situationally diverse. Traditionally regarded as an indispensable institution universally, the family accommodates variety in terms of structure and functionality which takes into account paradigms of social and cultural interaction. Scholars belonging to different schools of psychology, sociology and anthropology have developed a variety of theories which may be applied to a theoretical analysis of family as an indispensable component of society. Different theoretical schools define the family from different perspectives which take into account the structure and

composition, function, interactional status and symbolic aspects with relevance to the family. A common aim in formulating a family theory by social scientists might be to arrive at a generally acceptable definition of the family that takes into account the size, structure, cohesiveness, and manner of organisation (for instance see Hill; Figley; White). The structural theory of family takes into consideration the composition of a family in terms of the members who inhabit it, who may be tied by blood relationship, marriage or through legal relationship in the case of adoption. The structural study of family may also focus on the types of relationships shared among the members within the unit which is influenced by elements such as level of communication, power, daily work, leisure, gender, age and affection. The functional theory approaches the family in terms of its functionality and explores its necessity as an institution within the society. It is needless to reiterate that every society has its own familial set-up. But as far as functionality is concerned it might be commonly agreed upon that the family exists as an essential unit in the society legitimising the function of reproduction and the nurturing of dependents therein. Functionality of a family is to a large extent affected by the structural composition too since some functions within a family can be successfully performed only when the family satisfies a particular structure. The interactional theory of family involves an assessment of the ongoing interactional activities within the family which reflect the degree of coordination and cooperation within the family as a social unit. The fourth approach to family is founded on a symbolic perspective which takes into its purview a study of the symbolic significations produced through language and various artifacts, gestures, non verbal intonations, spatial arrangements and conditions of possessions within the family. In this sense the family may be then visualised "as a self-regulating system in which members control each other's access to meaning,

power and affect" (White and Klein 120). The structural and functional theories may be considered macroscopic since they attempt to understand the family as a system embedded in a society at large and address the ways in which familial life has emerged from significant social, economic, political and cultural developments. On the other hand, the interactional and symbolist theories are microscopic in their approach to the family since they tend to move inward into the soul of the family while analysing various emotional, symbolic, nonverbal gestures, spatial arrangements within the familial unit situated within a particular society.

Family Development Theory emphasises the dynamics of the processes through which family structure and organisation change over time. The concept of family career implying "all the various role clusters at each point in time tied together sequentially over the life of the group" (White 39) may be considered as one of the core issues which needs to be taken into consideration to analyse the direction and level of family development: "Family development is the process whereby stages of family life are sequenced so that the probability of any stage is determined by the duration of time in a specific previous stage" (42). Family Development Theory considers family activity as governed and controlled by institutional norms and regulations. These norms and regulations also determine the activities that are permissible or forbidden. Further, these norms also determine the roles and relationships within the family and any given degree of development would suggest a corresponding alteration in the roles and role relationships within the family over a given period of time. In his pioneering work *Families Under Stress* (1949) Reuben Hill made a case study of the families affected by the devastating World War II and developed his Family Stress Theory (ABC->X Model) to analyse how families

undergo, endure and survive their experience of stress. In Hill's model, A represents stressors, B family resources and C stands for family's perception of events/ stressors which finally leads to X, the crisis affecting the family. Family Stress Theory may be applied in family research to arrive at an analytical understanding of how certain families are able to cope and negotiate in a better manner their way through a particular crisis afflicting them:

> Family scholars have struggled with the design of research and development of theories aimed toward uncovering why some families are better able to negotiate their way through transitions and tragedies and to cope with and even thrive on life's hardships . . . stressors or family transitions . . . . Family stress theory has been advanced and adapted to guide this line of scientific inquiry and family system interventions. The importance of family stress theory to the study of normative family transitions and adaptation to major life changes and illnesses is based on the central roles that family type and family strengths and capabilities play in understanding and explaining family behaviour. Family stress theory highlights the complex but meaningful role which certain family typologies play in buffering the impact of stressful life events and in facilitating family adaptation following a crisis situation . . . family stress theory sharpens its focus on and targets the strengths and resistance resources families have as a part of their innate abilities to endure hardships. (McCubbin and McCubbin 5)

Family Stress Theory has been fruitful in psychoanalytical case studies of patients who suffer from stress related disorders.

One of the pioneers who led to the development of the Family Systems Theory was Murray Bowen who conducted extensive research to arrive at an understanding of how a family exists as a system within which individuals learn to emotionally cope, survive and handle the external stress factors that affect them. Bowen was of the opinion that the primary source of human emotional experience is the family and individuals could not be understood in isolation owing to their interconnectedness and interdependence within the family as a system. He provided eight interlocking concepts that were fundamental to an understanding of the theory. In brief they are:

Differentiation of Self – The variance in individuals in their susceptibility to depend on others for acceptance and approval.

Nuclear Family Emotional System – The four relationship patterns where problems may develop in a family: marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children and emotional distance.

Triangles – the smallest stable relationship system where one side is usually in conflict with the remaining two sides existing in harmony.

Family Projection Process – The transmission of emotional problems from a parent to the child.

Multigenerational Transmission Process – The transmission of small differences in the levels of differentiation between parents and their children.

Emotional Cutoff – The act of reducing or cutting off emotional contact with family as a way of managing unresolved issues.

Sibling Position – The impact of sibling position on development and behaviour.

Societal Emotional Process – The emotional system governs behaviour on a societal level, promoting both progressive and regressive periods in a society.

Conflict Theory of family is fruitful towards an understanding of the hierarchical structure of the family that takes into account an understanding of power, gender, age and social class within it. Individual members within a family may be motivated or otherwise to advance and protect their individual interests. Hierarchy depends on age and gender while the exercise of power, authority and privilege are in turn, hierarchical. Conflict appears to be an integral part of family since

> Family life is fraught with tension of conflicting emotions precisely because it is based on coalitions and every coalition involves an opponent. Begun with a husband-wife coalition, continued by a mother-child coalition, a family is sustained by the interlocking forces of love and hate in somewhat the same way that buildings are held up by opposing forces of tension and compression. (Caplow 78)

This theory necessitates an understanding of concepts such as conflict and competition, conflict resolution, persuasion, negotiation and bargaining, coercion and constraint, power, authority and privilege, confrontation, appeasement, threats and promises and finally, consensus, which would enable one to understand the history of conflict and its resolution, if possible, within relationships and the familial system. Such perspectives enable one to develop a theoretical interpretation of how the family as a system functions and how within such an apparently homogenous unit, differences and other resistant tendencies develop and eventually converge which in turn perpetuate and sustain an individual's attachment and belief in family.

An earlier study by George Peter Murdock entitled *Social Structure* (1949) examines the family as an institution while realising the possibility of a wide range of varieties and concluding that the family existed universally in some form or the other. He defines the family as "a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction… [which] includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted . . ." (Haralambos and Heald 325). From Murdock's analysis the emergent picture of family reflects an image of many-sided-utility accounting for its universality and inevitability. However in its entire scope Murdock's analysis tends to overlook the underlying complexities and intricacies that are actually woven into its fabric. Recent perspectives on the family do not dwell solely on the positive facets and include the grey areas within the family and more significantly make a renewed attempt to view the family not as a divine given but rather as a social and cultural construct created out of man's individual and collective need to live in society. The family is viewed as a social unit that is located within multiple sets of interactions where the individual sheltered within develops alliances adopting various strategies while playing off one or more individuals against others. Such survival strategies give rise to a more complex game that is played within the family that borders on 'political' or power-based lines of exploitation. R. D. Laing, a phenomenological psychiatrist, presents a radical alternative to the functional perspective of the 'happy family' in his work *The Politics of the Family* (1976) in which he refers to the family as a nexus within which there is a perennial pressure demanding reciprocal concern and attention that leads to "reciprocal interiorisation" Thus within such a structure, the individual members exhibit a propensity to internalise or interiorise the family. This process of internalising, feeling "the same

family" (Haralambos and Heald 336) inside may also disrupt the psychological as well as the social growth of the individual smothering the process of self awareness and autonomy restricting the individual under the blanket of the family. And problems in the family may create problems in the society. But such observations by Laing are not meant to belittle the significance of the family as a potent constituent of society. Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and State* (1884) remains one of the pioneering studies of the family in which he argued that with changes in the mode of production, the family also registers change in its overall structure. Engels argued that the family is evolutionary in its character and has evolved from its earlier primitive nature through a series of changes from various forms including polygamy to the present form of the monogamous nuclear family. It has been inferred that this change in structure towards a monogamous entity had in turn initiated the emergence of private property and more specially the system of private ownership of the modes of production. Subsequently the necessity of the state arises which would enforce laws for the protection of private property through the institution of monogamous marriage. Private property owned generally by males required legitimate heirs for the continuity of ownership and, therefore, a greater control over the female was required to leave no suspicion about the paternity of the offspring. His analysis is one of the significant contributions to an understanding of the family and its underlying power relations within which it is essentially located.

A resurgence of Marxist theory in the study of family in the late 1960s and 1970s may be considered to have positively affected the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement. Several feminist writers employed Marxist approaches to their analyses of the family visualising it as a unit of capitalism that indulges in the

production of cheap labour in the form of the unpaid labour performed by women which is profitable to those who own the means of production. The women in the family not only provide cheap labour but also act as anchors to the family in providing emotional support to the wage earning male, thereby stabilising the whole system in their absorption of the frustrations created in the male who works within the capitalist frame.

Studies on the Indian family chart anthropological and sociological phases of growth and change in the history of the family in the early works of some of the key researchers like Henry S. Maine who attempted a discussion of the patriarchal family, nature of kinship groups studying the family as a unit of production, reproduction, distribution and consumption. In his seminal work *Ancient Law* (1861) Maine draws attention to factors such as caste and the unchanging contractual foundation of social life, to the family and other related areas of customary law and also to the injurious restrictions under which women had been traditionally living in Hindu society. With recognisable changes in India's socio-cultural scene, the family today has assimilated some of the changes while still trying to balance itself between tradition and modernity. Dinesh Sharma's edited volume entitled *Childhood, Family, and Socio-cultural Change in India: Reinterpreting the Inner World* (2003) is multidisciplinary and traces the nature of socio-cultural change in India with a focus on social, developmental and psychoanalytic theory. Concentrating on the growing Indian middle class in the process of adapting to the changes from the traditional set up to a more modernised structure, the writers focus on the creation of a new sense of 'Indianness', a transitional identity that has been the root of dilemma for the middle class in India at present. *Domesticity in Colonial India* (2004) is one of the recent

studies on the changing landscape of the family by Judith E. Walsh. Situating the changing facets of the family in historical context, Walsh attempts to read into the family of colonial India examining the politicisation of this generally private space which reflects, in miniature, the contours of a larger national vision. Walsh focuses primarily "on how the contestations among and within urban, elite, 'middle-class' Indian families came to define the Hindu woman of the twentieth century and the domestic world in which she was embedded" (2). Walsh engages in a reading of Indian domestic literature, particularly from Bengal, to find that the established norms of an old Hindu patriarchy was gradually giving way to a "new patriarchy" in which "the authority of women elders in the extended family was to be replaced by that of the colonial modern husband" (4). Thus the subordinate status of woman in the family continued to prevail but with a change of hands in the exercise of power and authority which was now transferred to her husband.

In *Recasting Women* (1989) Sangari and Vaid engage in a study of the functioning of patriarchy in India taking into account the historical processes that initiate the formation and reconstitution of patriarchy among various and castes and classes in India. The essays included in this anthology attempt to consider diverse issues such as culture, social relations, economic and legal processes while engaging in a broader research concerning the reconstitution of patriarchy. However, all individual essays seem to engage upon a focal concern of that of the "changing position of women both in its material specificity, and in its often inverse representations in the discourses which legitimise their social status" (4). The essays in *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India* (1993) edited by Patricia Uberoi undertake, as suggested in the title, a study of the Indian family including within its purview

other associated areas of relevance like kinship and marriage within a sociological and social anthropological perspective. Uberoi concedes that marriage "both as event and as structure" provide a creative scope in the study of the Indian family. Though sociological reflections upon the Indian family and kinship studies tend to overlook issues concerning "the emotional tenor of family relations" and "the recognition and understanding of domestic violence", Uberoi's collection, however, attempts a meaningful and relevant evaluation in its acknowledging the family not merely as a "unit of social structure but a cultural ideal and a focus of identity" (36) as well.

Of the recent studies undertaken on the Indian family, it would be worthwhile to mention Gitanjali Prasad's *The Great Indian Family* (2006) which attempts to arrive at an understanding of what it takes to be a family given the primacy of the institution in every individual life. Prasad's book is an outcome of her quest to know the family as an institution, one that has lived through time and has registered changes. She attempts to explore the nature and direction of change that has affected the Indian family. The family in India can be traced back to the Vedic society when it acted as the very foundation of social and political structure of the time. The importance of this institution over other social institutions continues to prevail even today. What is focal, however, in the recent times is an analytical exploration of the family that would enable one to engage in a comparative study of the family in the past and that of the present, to arrive at an understanding of how reformative changes if any, have been incurred by it to reach a new level. Prasad encompasses in her work the joint family, changes in lifestyle and culture of the urban Indian middle class with more women opting for a career, extended families, image of family aired by popular media and new generation fathers, to arrive at a comprehensive inference about the

Indian family at present. Given the rapid changes in the economic, social and political spheres of life in India, it would be interesting to note the subsequent reforms and modifications that would be registered in the Indian family in the recent future.

Sudhir Kakar attempts a psychological analysis of the relationship between the sexes in India in his book *Intimate Relations* (1989). The book may not essentially survey the family as an institution but there are relevant and associated areas which are manifested through the family at large and which provide the point of reference in Kakar's study. In his attempt to understand the relationship between the sexes in India, Kakar takes into account "Indian sexual politics and its particular language of emotions" because he believes that "such an inquiry cannot bypass the ways the culture believes gender relations should be organised nor can it ignore the deviations in actual behaviour from cultural prescriptions." The Indian mind seeks to create and express collective meaning through narratives that occupy a place of central importance in Indian social and cultural life. Narratives act as a vehicle of the thought processes and also as "a way of reasoning about complex situations, as an inquiry into the nature of reality" (1). Kakar's book engages in a study of marriage as a socio-cultural construct and analyses how the embedded images that come through the way of culture continually inform and shape it. Thus "cultural injunctions become significant for the family . . . the way we arrange our families practically shows what our culture is like . . ." (21). In *The Indians: Portrait of a People* (2007) Sudhir and Katharina Kakar undertake an explorative study of what essentially constitutes Indian-ness and state that "a grasp of the psychological dynamics of family life is vital" (8) in any attempt to understand Indian behaviour in relation to authority and variegated socio-cultural situations. The primacy of Indian family in the lived life of every

Indian is asserted by the authors as they state that "it is the family, and the role family obligations play in the life of an Indian, which is the glue that holds Indian society together" (11). Thus the family constitutes one of the most powerful and influential forces that shape and define Indian-ness that include the individual's view of life and their understanding of their lived experience. Any understanding of Indianness would invariably direct itself towards the predominant emphasis of class and caste in Indian socio-cultural life, the society's collective understanding of marriage, sex and various prejudices that constantly inform and direct the daily experience of living.

Any reading of the family as a social institution would appear incomplete if cultural forces are not taken into account. There has been a move in recent studies on family in India to highlight the socio-cultural factors that are responsible in determining the functionality of the family in a given situation. The family as a gendered construct has significant implications in the socio-cultural domain of the nation. This is the subject of research in Pernau et al's *Family and Gender* (2003) wherein the concepts of family and gender are viewed as occupying a common socio-cultural terrain and sharing interdependence. The concept of gender is not culled directly from biological sex and the importance of culture in its construction is now established. In a similar manner family may not solely indicate natural blood ties but also, more importantly, the cultural factors that enable its construction with culture here viewed as influences over individuals, roles, relations within the family. It is no longer viewed only as an anthropomorphic entity of harmonious space but also as a space encompassing crucial sets of power relations. Given such an understanding, therefore the 'functions' of the family are also increasingly not considered natural; rather there is a marked tendency towards a change and shift in relation to social and

economic developments. *Cast(e) as Woman* (1995), Vrinda Nabar's illuminating study on various issues reflecting a woman's situation in contemporary India, also throws interesting light on how tradition incorporated through religious texts and scriptures continue to have a predominant influence in determining the position of woman within marriage and the family at large.

Marriage is one of the basic institutions that provide a networking formula to forge an alliance with the unrelated units in the society in the process of creating a family. Marriage is of crucial importance as it exerts tremendous influence on the rules of inheritance and display the centrality of the role of the family in the reproduction of local power structures within a larger socio-cultural set-up. The family may acquire multiple meanings corresponding to an individual's age, gender and generational position. Therefore, it becomes all the more important to understand the conflicting interests and power relations operating within the family that arise from divergent interests of the individual members. Family as a construct thus tends to resist harmonising ideologies and in terms of functionality operates along the lines of power and the resultant conflict arising from an unequal distribution of power within it. The concept of power being very vital to the family, its gendered nature then, acquires significance. The family produces gendered subjects through language, rituals and customs that initiate a separation of roles and the production of cultural ideas and values that enable the individuals of both sexes to construe an image of themselves within the given socio cultural norm. As Nabar would have us believe "from beggar to bai to housewife, the one common denominator linking these women together is their more or less unquestioned acceptance of their role as male/husband/father-defined" (34), and her observation is based on her study of a

cross section of the female population in one of India's most Westernised metros, Mumbai. Not only does the position of the woman need to be reviewed in the present context of socio-cultural changes, but *family* as an independent entity in itself with its community of members belonging to both the sexes with their conflicting, diverse and at times, even converging, range of interests needs to be analysed and understood so as to possibly arrive at a comprehensive idea of the survival strategies adopted by one of the oldest institutions in human civilisation.

Rooted in culture the family offers interesting avenues within the purview of literature. The exploration of the institution in literature may be broadly divided into two types, especially in fiction – the family saga which is multi-generational and has a sweeping spatio-temporal canvas, for instance, Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds* (1979), and Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901), and the novel of family life and relationships, for example, D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), and Ivy Compton-Burnett's *Men and Wives* (1931) and several other. From a critical perspective, the family in literature offers multiple avenues of analyses and commentary. Of these, mention may be made of the psychoanalytical approach (Lewiecki-Wilson), issues of inheritance (Sadrin), gender and patriarchy (Langford), incest (Corbett), children's literature (Alston) and others. The study of family in the literary perspective reveals marked changes with the change of time. In the twenty-first century, with a whole generation of novel ideas associated with global culture and the post-modern situation, it is beyond doubt that our ideas about our most important institution should also undergo changes. However, change is not very easy in the sense that there are conflicting and divergent issues related to the family in terms of individual experience as well as that of the society as a whole which provide

resistance to such an attempt at modification. Given such a situation, literature which works as an intimation and exploration of society, also reflects the variegated conflicting voices of the times, the heteroglossic voices within which it is situated.

Shashi Deshpande's fiction reveals her consistent preoccupation with human relationships firmly rooted in the Indian social and cultural context without displaying any major inclination to move out of it and experiment with diverse themes and issues which interest her contemporaries in the canvas of Indian English Writing. Her total dedication to the symbolic presentation of family and familial relationships in her fiction appears effortless while she continues to resist the unyielding meanings which society and culture has created around this vital structure. Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka, in the family of Adya Rangacharya, a renowned Kannada writer and Sanskrit scholar, better known as Sriranga. Her father was a man of learning who composed plays of ideas and young Deshpande must have surely been influenced by the profound thoughts of her famous father. Quite early in her life she cultivated the habit of reading, having had the opportunity to read some of the best known works available to her then. Deshpande's autobiographical comments would be a sufficient proof to establish this fact. She states:

> . . . I was born in a writer/teacher's family and lived in a home in which the intellectual life mattered and ideas were what excited one. It was also, what mattered more at that time, a home that was full of books. I read enormously as a child; my passion for words was so great that I even read all the dictionaries at home . . . I read them as one would read novels . . . [l]ater there was the school library . . . I went through all the books here as well . . . With

> this reading I was laying the foundation for my future writing . . . . (*Writing from the Margin* 2)

She grew up to acquire degrees in Economics, Law and English and also a diploma in Journalism which only added to her erudition. Writing, however, came at a much later phase in her life when she had been married and was abroad for a while with her children and husband who was a doctor. It was to tackle her monotonous living abroad with few acquaintances and having nothing significant to do besides the routine domestic chores that she began writing at her husband's suggestion. She sent her article "Innocents Abroad" to her father back home which got published in three parts, with her father's initiative, in the *Deccan Herald*. This provided her with the much needed confidence and she joined a diploma course in Journalism at Bhavan's College of Journalism after which she worked with a magazine doing features and interviews. It was only after a colleague had requested her to contribute a short story to a magazine annual that she wrote her first story which she felt "was a rather imitative and derivative story" (*Writing from the Margin* 4) but which was published. Though she continued writing articles covering various topics it was after her story got published in the *Femina*, a widely circulated women's magazine in India, that writing stories became a more frequent affair.

"The Legacy" was her first story published in a collection of the same name in 1978 and as a story it carried undertones of Maugham as she admits "[m]y first story 'The Legacy', was pure Maugham" (*Writing from the Margin* 6). Deshpande continued to be a story writer until the publication of her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in 1980 though *Roots and Shadows* published in 1983 was the first novel to be written and completed by 1978. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* went on to receive

the Nanjangud Tirumalamba award for 1990 and *Roots and Shadows* on the other hand was awarded the Thirumati Rangammal Prize in 1984. *If I Die Today*, a crime novella, was published in the year 1982 which however was quite different from her two earlier novels. She also published three collections of short stories entitled *It was the Nightingale, It was Dark* and *The Miracle* all of them in quick succession, in the year 1986. She won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel *That Long Silence* published in 1988. Deshpande's next novel *The Binding Vine* appeared in 1993 after a long recess. In same year another novel entitled *Come Up and Be Dead* was also published. Barring the similarity in the year of publication, both these novels reveal a vast difference in terms of plot and theme since *Come Up and Be Dead* is predominantly a crime novel "but stands in between children's literature and adult fiction as it is a story located in a girls' school" (Jain 14) unlike *The Binding Vine* which once again reiterated Deshpande's preoccupation with family and relationships. In 1996 appeared *A Matter of Time*, her first novel to be published in the United States, was followed by *Small Remedies* in 2000 which continue to reveal Deshpande's forte in dealing with relationships within the family. Her next novel *Moving On* appeared in 2004 which was followed by *In the Country of Deceit* in 2008. Besides the short story collections mentioned earlier other short story volumes include *Intrusion and Other Stories* (1993), *The Stone Women and Other Stories* (2000), *Collected Short Stories,* Vol I (2003) and Vol II (2004). She has also a collection of essays entitled *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays* (to her credit. Deshpande's has also contributed towards children's literature through her works namely, *A Summer Adventure* (1978), *The Hidden Treasure* (1980), *The Only Witness* (1980) and *The Narayanpur Incident* (1982). Shashi Deshpande wrote the story and screenplay for Govind Nihalini's film 'Drishte' (1990) which won the National

Award Best Hindi Film and was also showcased in the Indian Panorama section. The wide readership and critical acclaim which she has justly received establishes the popularity of all her novels which is vindicated by the fact that more than one of her novels have been translated into other Indian languages as well as European languages. Her foray into the field of translation is marked by her translation of her father's works originally in Kannada with the title *Opening Scenes: Early Memoirs of a Dramatist and a Play* published in 2006. She was awarded Padmashree in the year 2009.

In the domain of Indian Writing in English, writers have been experimenting with various genres with an equal variety of subject matter. Writing at a time when stereotypical readings are gradually giving way to a more critically endowed global culture; writers have taken up relevant issues involving diaspora, multiculturalism, travel and myth to engage in a close reading of the human situation located within the larger fabric of the family. Writers like Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Amitabh Ghosh and Kiran Desai may be seen engaged in the enterprise of reading individual lives and the life of the society as well through a creative presentation of contemporary changes in national culture within the theoretical presumptions of the modern and the postmodern novel. In their attempt to trace the contours of contemporary lives, they have widened their horizons, at times beyond the national borders while creatively exploring the lives of people who are culturally uprooted, away from their native land for various reasons and now experiencing the impact of such a situation in their private lived lives. The immigrant experience is central to many writers who weave the narrative of people engaged in a strenuous struggle to cope with the tragic

consciousness of surviving in an alien culture, being dislocated from their native culture.

The fictional world of Shashi Deshpande, however, offers a sharp and conspicuous departure from the aforementioned perspectives in her treatment of the family. The difference lies in Deshpande's concern with contemporary issues nearer home; she deals with the family in a manner which reflects the complexity of family as a structure in the context of Indian culture, more specifically, the Hindu world-view. Primarily engaged in the task of analysing the urban Indian middle class family, Deshpande embarks upon an exploration of family as a given structure to arrive at a reading of socio-cultural politics that generally informs and defines the family. Shashi Deshpande's fictional world caters to multiple renderings of the Indian urban middle class family caught between the changes of structure in the face of emerging nuclear families and the now fading great Indian joint families while she attempts to indulge in a re-reading of Indian-ness, the essential criteria permeating the lived lives of the people. Her explorations of the family analyse the symbolic elements associated with the family in terms of the experiences of her fictional characters who make an effort to challenge, construct, reconstruct and at times alter the given meanings within which their individual lives are enclosed so as reach at an understanding that would enable and empower them.

The Hindu family is an age old institution which has existed since Vedic times, having been "the foundation of the political and social structure of the Rig Vedic age" (Prasad 4). As such its structure and function have been largely shaped and defined by various cultural injunctions incorporated in numerous texts of scriptural and epical importance including the *Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas,*

Upanishads and *Manu Smriti*. Most of these texts act as points of reference for people in their lived lives and there is an internalisation of the ideas and concepts provided by them to such an extent that, as Deshpande accepts, have become "a part of our psyche, part of our personal, religious and Indian identity" (*Writing from the Margin* 88). Thus the family seems to be moulded along the lines of the ideal provided by them and is understood in its most ideal sense, as an entity which is complete in itself and is able to nurture and sustain anyone who is its member. An important point to be noted is that within a family, however, the requirements of the individual members are of lesser importance compared to that of the greater interest of the family. This aspect of the family also has its negative connotations in that it curbs individual freedom and choice thereby sometimes leaving little or no scope for the progress of the individual self. The need to put the family before the individual is the consequence of a greater value system which one imbibes through his or her initiation into the Hindu life. It is not only the Hindu worldview contained in traditional texts that are responsible in fostering such an ideal image of the family. A large section of popular culture represented in Indian cinema, television soaps and advertisements continue to reinforce the established concept of the family and Indian values related to it in a manner which seems highly biased and prejudiced (see Uberoi, *Freedom and Destiny*).

Shashi Deshpande's novels invite the reader to an illuminating and interesting exploration of the family located essentially within the established, usually orthodox, Hindu worldview while she engages in a re-reading of culture. She animates her narrative with individuals caught in the quagmire of their socio-cultural existence attempting to resist hegemonic structures in their endeavour to establish a family that

would accept rational reforms and modifications so as to provide the individual a sense of liberty and freedom and thereby enable the flourishing of the individual self. Working towards such a goal, the novelist presents a re-reading of stereotypes associated with the construct of the family while engaging in an indepth exploration of the subtle operation of cultural politics that endows legitimacy to the inequalities existing within the family. Deshpande seeks to engage upon a creative journey that would open up avenues "for a fresh knowledge" of our lives and cultural significance with an equally vital realisation that ideals are a necessary element of our socio-cultural existence. As a novelist engaged in the task of acknowledging and representing the human condition with utmost sincerity, she feels that the attempt at this has led her "to the discovery that above all we are human" and that all people irrespective of gender, role and space culturally prescribed, "have the same potential as any other human being" (*Writing from the Margin* 100). Shashi Deshpande's novels start "with people" (Pathak 16) and the family provides a potent force in her study of people in the human situation. It may be argued that for every writer the human condition becomes a loaded subject but then there are differences of emphases on the elements that build up this condition. Thus, for Deshpande, human relationships provide a never ending fountain of interest through which she attempts a re-reading of the family and culture that sustain it. Commenting on the significance of human relationships in her fiction Deshpande has remarked:

> 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 17)

Critical tendencies by and large have located Shashi Deshpande's novels within traditional and more stereotypical purviews of feminist perspectives. One of the earliest full length studies on the writer is Sarabjit K. Sandhu's *The Image of Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* (1991) and is valuable in its position of being ranked as one of the earliest critical works though it largely focuses on the image without seeking a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural processes that go into the making of that image. *The Indian Women Novelists* Vol. 5 (1991) edited by R. K. Dhawan compiles several essays on Shashi Deshpande which focus centrally on the woman factor -- love and death, marriage, selfhood and Indian womanhood at large form the substance of study in this volume, and in reiterating the fact of the protagonists as well as the writer being woman the emphasis inevitably falls on such issues held important to a woman. Such critical stances stand the danger of being repetitive and of a narrowed vision. Viney Kirpal and Mukta Atrey have attempted a full length study of Shashi Deshpande's fiction in their work entitled *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of Her Fiction* (1998) in which they locate the novelist in a gendered light while associating her works with a reading that generally has a feminist orientation. *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande* (1998) edited by R. S. Pathak may perhaps be considered a better collection in its evaluation of Deshpande as the essays attempt to shed light on multiple perspectives encompassing a variety of areas that are significant to the understanding of Deshpande's fictional art though the prevalent critical idiom appears to be again dominantly feminist. The essay entitled "Gender Identity and Inner Space in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*"

(1998) by Nalinabh Tripathi finds in the novel "deconstruction as well as reconstruction of gender roles" (43) while reading in it the protagonist's constant and unconscious search for an inner space. Locating the text in a postmodern light, Tripathi tries to explore and analyse the predicament of a woman in the givens of a patriarchal power structure in which the woman seeks to establish self identity. Analysing the protagonist Sarita's character in this light, Tripathi comments on how Sarita, "goes out to deconstruct the socially imposed gender roles framed by a patriarchal society but she comes back to reconstruct her intuitive role(s)" (47). Elsewhere some of the essays included in this volume dwell primarily on a feminist reading of Deshpande's novels critically reviewing her portrayal of the female characters, their existential predicament, sexuality, death and disease which remain vital pointers to the woman's situation. One of these essays, entitled "Myth and Folkore in Shashi Deshpande" (1998) by Vimala Rama Rao, directs the reader's attention towards the application of myth and folklore by Deshpande through which the latter engages the text into a re-reading of the given conventional understanding of myth thereby achieving, in the process, a richness of narrative art. The essay, however, does not seem to go beyond the woman factor to enquire how myth and traditional understanding as applied in Deshpande's fiction serve a significant purpose of subverting the stereotypical reading of the Indian family, and studying these as the novelist's innovative technique of delineating the character's mind especially the woman's inner spaces. Thus Rao observes: ". . . . many of her novels have woman for the central consciousness, these devices are specially useful to the novelist as a means of illuminating the inner landscape of women's mind" (208). Included in this volume are also essays that deal with imagery of death, decay and desolation and recurrent metaphors in Shashi Deshpande's fiction which once again, dwell upon a feminist

angle in reading Deshpande's employment of these while interpreting them as the novelist's attempt to provide a study of the female psyche, their existential problems and quest for identity. The feminist stance once again finds expression in Indira Nityanandam's essay "Shashi Deshpande: Road to Self Realisation" included in *Three Great Indian Women Novelists* (2000) in which the critic observes the primacy of women characters in Deshpande's fictional world. Engaging herself with the reading of three selected novels – *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983) and *That Long Silence* (1988), Nityanandam studies the principal woman characters and comments on their "conflict in a patriarchal society" (59) and how these characters display unique strength in achieving their goals of self realisation emerging from a state of passive acceptance to that of active assertion without succumbing to societal pressures. Anne Collete in "The Relationship between Existentialism, Materialism and Feminism in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande" included in Meenakshi Bharat's *Desert in Bloom* (2004) observes how the novels of Deshpande make evident the "social and political history of Indian woman's subordination of the existential self to the relational self" suggesting that "for the Indian woman, the personal is political, in this case, that the personal nature of the existential quest is necessarily allied to the politics of feminism" (60). Within its larger frame the essay charts a comparison between Western and Eastern feminism while emphasising multiple issues of independence, individuality, problems of self and identity in the feminist context. Rajeswari S. Rajan in "The Heroine's Progress" (2004) brings into discussion the family which according to her "constitutes the dominant milieu and constructs the primary identity of women" (80). Rajan makes a case study of three novels, one each by Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan and Manjula Padmanabhan and analyses the female protagonists' progress in the context

of their degree of independence from the family, their opposition and their subversion of the familial values and systems in their seeking out of space beyond the construct of the family. Taking up Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, Rajan comments that in it Deshpande voices protest against the "limitations of bourgeois women's lives" (82) through the autobiographical narrative of Jaya, the protagonist. Deshpande's forte lies in her ability to endow solidarity to the predicament of her protagonist by foregrounding similar instances between her and other female characters from Indian history and myth including women from her own family and also others outside.

In Mrinalini Sebastian's *Novels of Shashi Deshpande in Postcolonial Arguments* (2000) a new move in reading Deshpande is initiated in that an attempt has been made to open up the fiction of Deshpande to several other relevant contexts including that "of reading differently and contrapuntally and of relating Deshpande's work to questions of resistance" (Jain 29). P. G. Joshi's *Shashi Deshpande's Fiction* (2003) takes up postcolonial theory in reading Deshpande's novels. Engaging a postcolonial theoretical framework this work explores various novels of Deshpande situating them in the relevant contexts of representation, ambivalence, centre-margin binary, subaltern and subjectivity. In this context it would be pertinent to refer to Joshi's reading of *That Long Silence* which he feels is "about the importance of fearless and meaningful communication that can help us to unlearn the inherent dominant mode" (74). Employing such a method of reading enables one to do away with the hegemonic structures provided by traditional patriarchy and also to liberate the woman from the confining stereotypical images. Joshi also encompasses feminism, both Western and Indian in his study of Shashi Deshpande's fiction. Employing Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "othering" (119) Joshi examines how

this is relevant to an understanding of Deshpande's fiction. The systematic enterprise of othering in Indian society is permeated through what is generally understood as tradition and it is one of the vital factors that provide sustenance to patriarchy. The critic, however, asserts that Indian feminism being evolutionary in nature has "not disturbed centuries-old institutions like marriage or family" (240) and that it is probably for this reason that Deshpande's protagonists seek to establish their identity beyond the confines of the family. What they attempt to achieve is self dignity as an individual in the society with an understanding that the lived life is always more important than any theory and it is through them that Deshpande reiterates her belief when she comments: "people were, still are, more important to me than theories and when I wrote I always saw an individual, a human being, a woman -- I never saw a class called 'women'. My stories came not out of the ideas and theories, but . . . my ability to enter into one person, one woman, and write through her" (*Writing from the Margin* 10). Thus critical accounts regarding Deshpande's fiction have been generally directed towards feminist and more recently towards postcolonialist readings.

Premila Paul's essay "*The Dark Holds No Terrors*: A Call for Confrontation" (1998) initiates a psychological reading of the novel. Paul is of the opinion that the unrevealing of the female protagonist's psyche is significant as it leads to an understanding of the workings of the male psyche too. These are in fact the micro elements that constitute the macro concept 'family' and it is in the context of the family that these associated ideas stand relevant. Shashi Deshpande's exploration of the family stands unique in its treatment thereby establishing it as a potent force in society that provides ample opportunity for further study and assessment. As far as critical evaluation of Deshpande's fiction is concerned, her treatment of the family in

her novels remains to be fully explored and given due importance in the context of Indian culture and the lived lives of its people.

Jasbir Jain's critical study entitled *Gendered Realities, Human Spaces* (2003) marks a visible shift from conventional approaches to Deshpande's fiction as the critic engages in a close reading of Deshpande's fiction beyond the stereotypes of feminism and post-colonialism. Jain's is an aesthetically enriched evaluation which opens out Deshpande's fiction to socio-cultural histories. In her attempt to liberate Deshpande from the confining image of a feminist writer, Jain examines psychological inputs, deployment of myth and native concerns, narrative strategies including the poetics of loss. Jain takes up the institutions of marriage and family situated within the given patriarchal set up and examines how Deshpande employs them in her attempt to subvert the conventional understanding of these socio-cultural constructs and providing, in the process, a refreshing and innovative re-reading of the culture of the land at large. Deshpande's obsession with family seems to be appropriately voiced in her comment, "[b]ut I can't see people in isolation, they are part of families" (Jain 34). Jain seems to take a cue from this assertion by the novelist herself to engage upon a wider perspective of critical enquiry, to read into the ideas that lay hidden beneath the blanket term family which make the family operate in the way it does. Thus engaging in a reading of the family as portrayed in Deshpande's novels Jain finds that associated with the concept of family is the idea of space. Families are "powerful agencies of socialisation and transmission of values and ideas" (34) working through sharing, caring, relationships and interdependence. But because it is a construct and invested with power, it has its moments of rebellion and dissidence, gossip and secrets, triangulation and scapegoating. Understanding man-woman relationships

sanctified through the institution of marriage to be the basis of family life, Jain observes that a family "is a superstructure, the base of which is marriage" (72). Jain's close examination of marriage as portrayed by Deshpande initiates a shift from the traditional picture foregrounding the idea of romance associated with it. Marriage is a culturally dictated institution which proposes to unite individuals in order to fulfill familial and social concerns. In India marriages are structured by myths, cultural models and even popular media including movies that often establish it as an institution perfect and complete in itself. The romantic notion of marriage that is foregrounded in rituals and customs seem to remain oblivious of the intricacies of marital life. Jain observes, "[t]he conventional idea of marriage fails to take into account the nature of reality and the physical and emotional separateness of an individual. It claims too much for too long" (113).

Perhaps it is this realisation of marriage claiming too much for too long that prompts Jaya in *That Long Silence* to break her silence and emerge from the cocooned haven of her marital life. Jain's assessment of Deshpande's narrative world is in the context of the cultural givens that have tremendous sway over the Indian mind, the collective unconscious as it were which seems to work often to the disadvantage of the woman. Deshpande critiques this straitjacket of culture "questioning the place of Indian womanhood in the Dharma of the land" (Jain 95). Jain's assessment also takes into account the narrative strategies employed by Deshpande in the latter's rendering of individual as well as familial lives.

Though the family features in Jain's critique in general, there remains considerable scope for further study along similar lines. The family in itself is one of the most ancient institutions that are in the process of evolution in the global context.

Changes in lifestyle, economy and culture are also implicated in the family. Given such a perspective, where does the individual locate herself within a relationship and the family at large? Through a fictional rendering of the urban Indian middle class, particularly Hindu, Deshpande's novels confront such issues against the backdrop of family and culture in which the self is situated. Jasbir Jain's aforementioned book is undoubtedly an elaborate and well conceived analysis of Deshpande's fiction.

The works mentioned in the review of literature earlier have no doubt provided valuable insight into the fictional world of Shashi Deshpande. Feminist and postcolonial studies of her novels take into account her female protagonists in the main in their analyses. Significantly, Deshpande's critique of the urban middle class family in India appears to have received less appreciation considering its phenomenal importance. Therefore it is safe to say that the importance of the family in the fiction of Shashi Deshpande has, till date, received only scattered critical attention. These are mostly in the form of essays and there is a definite lack of a comprehensive critical study of the representation of the family in her works. The present thesis therefore attempts to fill this research space by engaging in areas ranging from Deshpande's use of myth to her study of identity, power and corporeality in so far as these offer new critical insights and understandings of the family in her novels. This will further our critical appreciation of Deshpande, whose commentators have largely written on issues of feminism and selfhood, but have not comprehensively and inclusively related these by-now-stereotypical readings to a larger canvas of familial relationships. The core argument of this study may therefore be formulated in the following way: the world of Deshpande's fiction is often the educated Indian urban middle-class. It is an exploration of the pressures of living in relationships, in

families, in urban societies. In her fiction the traditional version of the family is subtly reworked by her analyses of the institution as the primary site of myth, identity, conflict, power, corporeality and of cultural legitimation.

Taking a cue from Jain's study, this thesis attempts an in-depth reading of Shashi Deshpande's novels in the light of the family by employing theoretical concepts like myth, identity, body, gender and subjectivity within the framework of the Indian urban middle class family. As Jain has herself commented (though in a different light), there is a need to move beyond the given. The endeavour in this thesis to examine the role of the family in Deshpande's novels may be viewed as an attempt to seek further meaning beyond the given in an attempt to provide a new way of thinking about old questions, particularly questions concerning the construct called 'family'— the implications, roles, relationships, conventions that are woven into the larger fabric of the idea of family. Further, Shashi Deshpande presents the family in her narrative not merely as a construct illustrating the historical and conventional connotations but as a source of vital and new insights into an understanding of Indian culture and the forces that go into the operation of this culture. Engaging in subtle irony, Deshpande seeks to provide a re-reading of cultural practices in the family to reach "a meaningful and creative reinterpretation of them looking for a fresh knowledge of ourselves in them, trying to discover what is relevant to our lives today" (*Writing from the Margin* 100).

Though Shashi Deshpande's creative output includes a total of several novels, stories, children's fiction and a comparatively lesser volume of non-fiction as well, for the purpose of the present work eight novels have been chosen as primary texts. Two of her novels *Come Up and Be Dead* (1993) and *If I Die Today* (1982) have not been

included as they belong to the class of crime fiction and the latter is a novella. Similarly, her short stories have also been excluded from the purview of this work first because they may be considered for independent study and secondly, owing to the voluminous body of the stories. Children's fiction too may be studied as an exclusive category which would certainly open up other interesting areas for research and therefore is excluded from the present study. The chapters include a study of the eight novels namely, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1988), *The Binding Vine* (1993), *A Matter of Time* (1996), *Small Remedies* (2000), *Moving On* (2004) and *In the Country of Deceit* (2008). Three novels, namely, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983) and *That Long Silence* (1988) recur in all the chapters alongside other novels. Though this may appear repetitive it could not be avoided owing to the fact that these novels seem trilogical in theme and treatment, and when we consider Deshpande's contention with regard to these novels this is justified: "... these three novels – *Roots and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence* – belong together" (*Writing from the Margin* 20). *The Dark Holds No Terrors* provides us with a reading of family as visualised and understood by Sarita, the central female character who embarks upon an introspective journey to find solution to the crises she faces in her married life at present with which the novel opens up. *Roots and Shadows* has for its narrator the leading character Indu who returns to her family after a prolonged absence. The death of Akka, the grand matriarch of the family, becomes an occasion for every member to come together and share their crises which also provides an opportunity to Indu to understand the family which behaves like any other group and contains within it not only emotions such as loyalty but also schisms, betrayals and opportunistic behaviour. *That Long Silence* opens with a crisis in Jaya and Mohan's

marriage. The crisis is apparently external – Mohan facing charges of corruption at his workplace which consequently creates problems in his familial life. But it is the same crisis that allows Jaya the chance to contemplate on the larger truths of her relationship with Mohan, her husband and in the process to rediscover her self that was long buried in silence. *The Binding Vine* is narrated by Urmi, the central character whose daughter Anusha is dead and the family comes together in its moment of irreparable loss. Through several incidents that had occurred in the past in the life of Urmi's now dead mother-in-law Mira and in the present in the life of Kalpana, Urmi is able to visualise the family in a proper perspective realising the presence of power games that operate within the level of individual relationships and specifically within marriage. *Small Remedies* too opens with the mourning of the central character Madhu over the death of her only son. When she is entrusted with the task of writing the biography of Savitribai Indorekar, a doyen of classical music, she finds respite from her grief and sets out for Neemgaon, the place where Bai resides. In her attempt to compile Bai's biography, Madhu also recalls Leela, her rebel aunt. Both Bai and Leela were ahead of their times in their resilience to the normative givens of familial life and they had chosen to pursue their respective dreams and had opted out of the familial structure. *Moving On* also deals with the family, several families in fact, and relationships within them as presented through Manjari's narration and also through Baba's diary. Ruminating through various events of the past that come to her from Baba's diary, Manjari is able to comprehend familial relationships around her with a renewed understanding. Deshpande's recent novel *In the Country of Deceit* deals with the theme of love between Devyani and Ashok in the nondescript town of Rajnur. Deshpande foregrounds familial relationships to illustrate how in the lives of

individuals the family plays a decisive role in laying down ethical norms which appear subservient to individual needs and desires.

The novels of Shashi Deshpande will surely strike a chord of familiarity in some readers when it comes to characters, the themes and the manner in which families arrange themselves – it is a culture that is distinctly and firmly rooted in the regional milieu. Having been familiar to her native Kannada and been shifted to Mumbai and Bangalore later, she has explored the nuances of these linguistic worlds in her novels through English in a manner that bestow a sense of charm and warmth to her compassionate and astute observations with regard to the familial drama enacted in her novels. Commenting on her regional and bilingual consciousness, Deshpande observes:

> I may not have a strong sense of belonging to a particular region or to one language, since my parents belonged to two different regions, had two different languages; but my imagination as a writer was fertilized by my beginnings in Dharwad, by my life in Bombay, by my subsequent years in Bangalore. And in a sense, though I could never claim any of these as my very own . . . yet I possessed each of these places and laid my own claim to these territories. My writing inhabits these territories . . . when I write a novel in English, I am converting the life which is lived in different languages, a small part of it being in English as well, into a single language. (*Writing from the Margin* 36)

A qualifying note on the present work: all the selected novels in this thesis have a female protagonist in the lead and therefore, it may seem at times that this work appears feminist in its approach. Since the novels have well defined female

characters who play decisive roles in taking the narrative forward they are of necessity at the centre of discussion. What remains vital for us is to realise the importance of family in the lives of individual characters and more so in the lives of female characters given the patriarchal inclinations of the Indian family in general. While dealing predominantly with family in her novels, Deshpande delineates female characters elaborately and it is through their consciousness and point of views that we are acquainted with the narrative. This is not to suggest that the novelist is influenced by feminist interests solely, rather she visualises in her female character "an individual, a human being, a woman – I never saw a class called 'woman' (*Writing from the Margin* 10). It would also be pertinent to refer to what Deshpande had asserted in this context in an interview: ". . . when I write I don't write as a feminist . . . I do not write as a feminist novelist . . . [t]here are other things that do matter to me . . . I mean human relationships. . . there are many things said in my novels about women and their lives . . ." (228).

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Preface and Acknowledgments

Chapter I: Introduction: Family and the Novels of Shashi Deshpande

Chapter II: Myth, Archetypes and Cultural Legitimation

Chapter III: Identity in the Family

Chapter IV: The Family in Conflict

Chapter V: The Body in the Family Politic

Conclusion

Selected Bibliography

Chapter I makes an effort to arrive at an understanding of the family as a structure of cultural and sociological significance. It refers to some anthropological and sociological approaches available to the study of family as a structure. The chapter also includes a review of literature and concludes with a brief preview of the chapters to follow.

Chapter II entitled "Myth, Archetypes and Cultural Legitimation" elaborates the concept of myth and its application to Deshpande's narratives to show how within the family myth is interiorised and plays an influential role in shaping and bestowing meaning to the lived lives within it. Deshpande's treatment of myth goes beyond established conventional understandings while projecting a flexibility, one that is widely open to social and contemporary changes and allows the reader to grasp the family in various hues without assigning it to a set of given fixed meanings. The chapter sketches a review of some of the theoretical bases of myth before engaging critically with the representation of family in Hindu mythology emphasising particularly the location of its members in it. That mythical worldview provides scope to legitimise and permeate existing inequalities of a culture would be an important aspect of the study. Chapter III entitled "Identity in the Family" pursues the concept of family in Deshpande's novels further by focusing on multiple issues of identity, roles, relationships and subjectivity and their significance in the family and individual lives in particular. How is identity created within a family? What importance do roles, relationships and subjectivities have in defining one's identity within the family in the selected novels? How far do such identities circumscribe or restrain the position and mobility of the characters within the family? These define the area of study in the context of reading the family in Deshpande's novels. Chapter

IV entitled "The Family in Conflict" engages in multiple issues of power and space in its attempt to analyse the politics associated with the family. Dwelling upon a few theoretical assumptions regarding power and space, the chapter explores the associated politics whereby the family in the novels is rendered into a site of conflict. Where is the location of power within the family? Who ascribes space to whom and on what basis? Is there a viable alternative to the resultant conflict? In what situation does negotiation, according to Deshpande, become inevitable to sustain family relationships? Chapter V which is entitled "Body in the Family Politic" takes up the issue of the body by engaging in an understanding of the relevance of the body in the family politic with relevance to selected novels by Deshpande. An attempt is made to focus on Deshpande's deployment of individual body/ies going beyond biological essentialism towards a concrete and social understanding of the implications of the body in contemporary culture. While dealing with the body Deshpande brings into context other aspects such as sexuality, death, disease in an attempt to show how the body in many instances becomes a text of familial inscriptions which reflect and produce varied significations that reveal its constructedness within the society at large. The Conclusion makes an effort to incorporate the inferences derived from the study conducted in the previous chapters and attempts to make an assessment of Deshpande's novels in relation to the delineation of family therein. To engage in a reading of the family as projected in Deshpande's novels, the present work employs key ideas drawn from the field of literary criticism and cultural studies that would provide the broader theoretical framework for the proposed work. However, remaining within the standard methodology of research that is distinctive of the disciplines of literature and humanities, the present work follows the methodology of interpretive analysis of the selected primary texts. Issues such as myth, identity,

conflict and power, and corporeality in the larger context of family are analysed to aim at a more dense reading of the family in Deshpande's fiction. It makes an effort to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the significance of Deshpande's exposition of the Indian urban middle class family which appears to be caught between tradition and modernity.

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Chapter II

Myths, Archetypes and Cultural Legitimation

> *Myths, too, so much a part of our history . . . , part of the human psyche, part of our cultural histories. Myths condition our ideas so greatly that often it is difficult to disentangle the reality . . . our behaviour is often, and to a great extent, dictated to by them. In India, myths are perhaps even more powerful . . .*
>
> Shashi Deshpande

In the numerous critical studies that have been directed towards Shashi Deshpande's novels, critics have generally provided insights that comment on the mother-daughter relationships, portrayal of women, recurrent symbols and images, the feminist stance and postcolonial perspective (for instance, Joshi; Palkar**;** Sahi; Sebastian; Sree) as revealed in her novels. These themes are no doubt significant in providing an indepth understanding of her novels. However, one also needs to realise that the novelist invites the reader to an intense understanding of her work in terms of the milieu of the family within which they have been set; her plots and characters are shaped within this familial milieu which, in turn, point towards the various practices within the middle-class Hindu view and revealing the politics and cultural ideologies which act as hegemonic structures influencing the collective thought processes of an entire society. Understanding the cultural ideology of the society also necessitates an understanding of the myths, archetypes and other scriptures and legends which inform and reinforce the collective lives of the people, shaping and moulding their lived experiences while constantly providing them with a model framework to be simulated

in their lives. That myth, particularly religious mythology, still plays a vital role in the modern Indian imagination is reiterated by Ian MacDonald in his essay "Hindu Nationalism, Cultural Spaces and Bodily Practices in India" (2009). He refers to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's call for a temple dedicated to Shakti, the Goddess of Power to be built at Pokhran following the successful explosion of nuclear devices in the Rajasthan desert in 1993: "[t]his episode in contemporary Indian history exemplifies the postcolonial nationalistic fusing of modern technology, religious mythology, and masculinist anxiety within the framework of global modernity" (462). The Vishwa Hindu Parishad's call exemplifies the presence of a strong propensity even in a modern Indian to equate their contemporary experience of life to that of a mythical model which perhaps enables them to seek a justification for their actions and strengthen their belief in their actions performed in a specific time frame.

Therefore, it would do well to make an attempt to analyse the role and significance of myths which are interspersed in Deshpande's novels and examine their relevance in understanding the family, the characters' understanding of their individual situation and which eventually will point to the socio-cultural life lived by these characters. It is significant that the application of myths in Deshpande's novels does not merely remain within the confines of information and embellishment of the plots. She provides an examination of these familial and cultural myths with an aim of revealing the cultural politics at play which, very often through the family, intend to legitimise and justify the inherent imbalances and inequities that are perpetrated among members.

Myth constitutes one of the integral components of human life in every culture and, as Deshpande asserts, in India it becomes perhaps one of the most powerful

aspects in the lives of her people (see chapter epigraph). It embodies the central component of what one may call culture at large. In common parlance myths are stories pertaining to the divine as well as the human world. They may be understood as tools through which people validate the social order thereby bestowing meaning to the hereditary kinship and class structures and providing a set of values in their lived lives. That myths have always exerted considerable influence in shaping and delivering significant meanings to collective experience of reality is reiterated by Merlin Donald:

> [D]ay-to-day storytelling in a shared oral culture eventually produces collective, standardized narrative versions of reality, particularly of past events; and these become what we call the dominant "myths" of a society. It is interesting that all documented human societies, even the most technologically primitive, have elaborate systems of myth, which appears to reflect the earliest forms of integrative thought. These socially pervasive constructs continue to exert a major influence on the way oral societies – and indeed most modern societies – are run.

Considering the significance of myths in the social and cultural realm of human society it is only natural, therefore, to find myths attracting attention in various fields of research and study. For instance, myths have been the focus of much deliberation in cultural studies within which they are viewed as having interrelated meanings and significance which are delivered through the shared beliefs and values that appear as a definitive attribute of a particular cultural group. Different in the outlook from history or science, myths serve a great purpose and therefore have been handed down to modern times from the past:

> We may define it as a set of propositions, often stated in narrative form, that is accepted uncritically by a culture or speech community and that serves to found or affirm its self conception. 'Myth' in this sense includes the most traditional narratives as well as some modern literature, but also 'texts' such as performance wrestling, certain advertisements and so on. (Heehs 3)

It is interesting to note that these myths, though belonging to different cultures, display similarities and may be seen to operate within similar patterns. Notwithstanding the differences, myths may be generally seen as allegories, in the lines of ritual, defining social customs and behaviour while seeking to explicate various natural phenomena. They also have a psychological contour in that they reveal the collective unconscious through the archetypes that endow meaning within the familial milieu. It is through myths, in their commonest application, that man seeks to find solutions to his problems and provide meaning and significance to the predicaments in which he finds himself. And so a society possesses various myths ranging from creation myths, myths regarding life after death and the end of the world, foundational myths and so on to provide an answer to the various needs of time and situation within a given culture. As has been stated earlier, myths have a powerful role in the Indian socio-cultural life and give meaning to almost every aspect of the Hindu familial set-up. Within this set-up, various forms of myths still breathe life into almost every walk of life.

Commenting on this omnipresence of myths in everyday life, Shashi Deshpande remarks, "Myths continue to be a reference point for people in their daily lives and we have so internalised them that they are a part of our psyche, part of our personal, religious and Indian identity" (*Writing from the Margin* 88). The traditional

allegoric characters inhabiting the mythical world, events of that primordial world all continue to reinforce meaning into the present lived situation within an established framework. Thus characters like Sita, Draupadi, Rama and Krishna no longer remain mythical figures of the remote past but become alive among people who seek to emulate them in their daily lives and try to conform to the pattern of life that has been displayed in the myths.

In the present chapter four novels, namely, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1983), and *A Matter of Time* (1996) have been taken up with an aim to analyse Deshpande's treatment of myths which are from the world of tradition and contemporary culture and familial myths as well. An attempt is made to arrive at an understanding of how her unique approach paves the way for an intense and rich interpretation of society and culture that intends to seek a rational and logical lived experience for people within a given familial milieu.

Despite the knowledge that critical engagements with myth have come a long way from earlier endeavours, *The Golden Bough* (1890) may be considered amongst one of the earliest important works which provides an encyclopaedic study in which James Frazer employs anthropological techniques to his study of classical myths and rituals while finding therein a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity. Frazer considers myth as "a fiction devised to explain an old custom, of which the real meaning and origin had been forgotten" (153). His seminal work appeared to be the precedent for critics like Maud Bodkin, Northrop Frye, and Malinowski among others who professed different approaches and developed various theories to be employed in the study of myths that paved the way for the modern

exercise in myth. Maud Bodkin for instance, in *Archetypal Patterns of Poetry* (1934) analysed how archetypal patterns are informed by the primordial images that are visible in present and past poetic compositions. Bodkin took specific passages from particular poems and analytically commented on the images that recur and suggested probable comparisons between symbols which are common to both the poems in question and tribal and religious life. Archetypes for Bodkin implied images endowed with universal significance, images rooted deep in the human psyche and hence of relevance. Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) provides an extensive view of the scope, theory, principles and techniques of literary criticism and he offers the classically inspired theories of modes, symbols, myths and genres for the purpose of criticism. He articulates the role of archetypal symbols, myths and generic conventions in creating literary meaning. Frye challenges the conventional modes of criticism while putting forth the existence of four *mythoi*. Frye further analyses how these mythoi basically form four major genres each archetypally associated with one of the four seasons – comedy (spring), romance (summer), tragedy (fall), and satire (winter). Archetypes refer to recurrent images, characters, plots and patterns that owing to their repetitiveness in many works attain universal quality over time. The unconscious is inhabited by shared memories, desires, impulses, images – 'archetypes' which are distinct from personal unconscious which every individual acquires from personal experience. Frye is of the opinion that every poet unconsciously possesses his peculiar spectrum of symbols, a somewhat private store of mythology that is embedded in him. For instance, Frye observes that "a myth being a centripetal structure of meaning, it can be made to mean an indefinite number of things, and it is more fruitful to study what in fact myths have been made to mean" (341).

Archetypes according to Carl Jung are symbolic elements that hold the clue to self-realisation in myths. Jung views the archetype as contents of the collective unconscious. Thus for Jung archetypes are original models from which one may develop images, characters, types and story patterns that are universally shared by people across cultures:

> . . . archetypes are not disseminated only by tradition, language, and migration, but that they can rearise spontaneously, at any time, at any place, and without any outside influence . . . it means that there are present in every psyche forms which are unconscious but nonetheless active – living dispositions, ideas in the Platonic sense, that perform and continually influence our thoughts, feelings and actions. (*Aspects of the Feminine* 122)

The collective racial memories manifest themselves not only in the subconscious element of dreams but in the more persistently and consciously constructed narrative of myths and literature. Jung's study is informed by an acknowledgement of the function of myths in our psychic life and he considers myths and fairytales as popular expression of archetypes.

Anthropological studies regarding myth differ from the psychoanalytical approach. From the onset anthropology has been troubled with the problem of rationalising myth as it considers myth to be informed with irrational explanation, beliefs and practices of primitive folk. However, by the twentieth century a need was felt for the reappraisal of myth, and was no longer denounced as irrational and absurd. The study of myth in anthropology has been broadly categorised into two schools depending upon the difference of approach. The functionalist school of anthropology is strongly influenced by Durkheim owing to his observations upon the role of myth

in society. *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1965) undertakes an elaborate study of sociological processes including religion that exist in a society within a community. For Durkheim, the function of myth in a society is not the deliverance of metaphysical truth but a reinforcement and justification of the social order. Mythic narrations stand important in that while they remind a community of its individual identity they also serve to legitimise the social structure which the community conforms to. Myths come into play and gain special significance when a social or a moral code seeks a justification or sanctity. Thus for Durkheim myths are socially powerful in their potent use regarding matters of individual and collective life. Malinowski seems to echo Durkheim in his acknowledgement of the potent social role that myths play in the lives of people while working towards "the legitimation of the inequities of privilege and status" (Rapport and Overing 276).

Thomas A. Sebeok's significant edited volume *Myth* (1965) throws light on several perspectives on the critical study of myth which includes the semantic approach, the ritual view of myth and the structural study of myth. In all these approaches the central argument that finds expression is the contention that myths are literature and thus possess a narrative quality about them which very often borders on the fantastic. For instance, Philip Wheelwright incorporates the anthropological perspective while revealing that "in non-material culture . . . myths were based on rites" (95) which associates myths with ritual devised as a necessary answer to various natural and cultural occurrences. Myths were very often associated with ritual and moral interpretation and this view has been propounded in David Bidney's analysis where he speaks of the early attempts of the Sophists to interpret myths as "allegories revealing naturalistic and moral truths" (1). In the presence of such varied

understanding and interpretation related to myths, it is only but natural that oppositional ideas come to play which create a sense of difficulty in deriving and settling down to a uniform and homogenous definition of myth which would be universally acceptable to people across multiple cultures and societies.

Claude Levi-Strauss's study and analysis of myth has a structural orientation and therefore deviates from the functionalist perspective of Durkheim. Levi-Strauss denies a one-to-one relationship of myth to a specific social world and emphasises that the significance of myth lies in its cognitive value. He attempts to identify how at the root of the representational systems through which we organise our affairs, lies the deep grammar of unconscious structures. He also believes in a possibility of differing and implicating through general laws, the patterns of human behaviour in the context of language, kinship and even food. Levi-Strauss considers mythic narratives as ones that follow basic universal structures with universality of themes. Thus myths are considered coded in a systematic manner in accordance with human disposition while answering a collective human need. Myths serve to unify and manage the contradictions of social existence that are manifest in everyday life and they may be considered a system of organised knowledge that is at work in all societies. Thus Levi-Strauss observes, "[m]yths are still widely interpreted in conflicting ways: collective dreams, the outcome of a kind of aesthetic play, the foundation of ritual. . ." (*Structural Study* 50).

Myth attains ideological perspective in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1972), one of his earliest works that is of significance in the field of cultural studies. Barthes considers myth to be virtually synonymous with ideology and views it as having deep cultural connotations. He scrutinises several cultural phenomena reading them as

modern myths to arrive at the underlying ideology with which they are informed. Barthes is of the opinion that "myth is a language" which implies that it is "a system of communication, that it is a message". It is this perspective of myth that leads him to apply Saussurean semiology with an added ideological dimension, to his analysis of myth. Barthes argues:

> *myth is depoliticized speech*. One must naturally understand *political* . . . as describing the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world . . . its function is to talk about [things]; . . . it purifies them; it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification . . . it abolishes the complexity of human acts . . . (143)

In his attempts to strip myth of human complexities, he in actuality demythicises the embedded power relations operating in the society which shape and structure our daily lives.

In many early anthropological and psychological studies undertaken by critics and thinkers alike, myths have been commonly understood as narratives with sacred contents belonging to the distant past involving extra-human, supernatural and human characters. Jasbir Jain's observation is relevant in which she states:

> Myth is imagined and nebulous . . . [m]yth is an embodiment of understanding of a people, an understanding often intuitive and dependent on the miraculous and divine . . . myth[s] . . . hegemonic structures and have gender dimensions. Myth marginalises women . . . . [t]he structuring of most religious myths is dominated by the concepts of dharma and karma, concepts which govern the

> behaviour of gods as much as they do of men. And both karma and dharma subordinate women to men. (*Writing Women* 11-13)

Such an understanding of myth, though most of the time symbolic, is necessary as it helps man understand the socio-cultural significance of the worldview into which he is born. This approach to myth is cosmogonic which seeks to define the origin of universe that may also include the origin of a society and its culture. Myths are also frequently associated with religion that gives a sacred flavour to it and in a given society sacred and secular myth may coexist bestowing meaning to lived lives through an associated corpus of symbols and metaphors. Thus, there is a multiplicity of religious myths and images thriving in Indian socio-cultural life; for instance, as Lutgendorf analyses, though Hanuman is a minor or folk deity in scholarly writing on Hinduism, his popularity gains iconic manifestations in the popular imagination with groups of permanent patrons vying with one another to erect larger idols of the god in highly visible locations (133). His loyalty remains one of the most invoked analogies in the Hindu popular imagination. Myths are also seen as representing a particular epistemology through which one may attempt to make meaning of nature and organise one's thoughts within an associated faith and worldview. Therefore, it may be argued that myths are basically symbolic representations seeking to represent profound truth and that they may be seen as tools that impose significance on the apparently chaotic social order of modern times. Referring to the connection between myth and literature, Lawrence Coupe observes:

> . . . the body of inherited myths in any culture, is an important element of literature, and that literature is a means of extending mythology. That is, literary works may be regarded as 'mythopoeic', tending to create or re-create

certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world. (4)

The language of myth is not a rigid one in the sense that though "the mythic images may remain simple and stable . . . the interpretation of the stories shift from period to period and from writer to writer" (Miles 4). For instance, considering myths as gender specific narratives, women writers "focus on the ancient myths, taking the stories traditionally told by and about men, re-imagining and reinterpreting them from a female point of view, and allowing women characters of the myth to speak for the first time" (18). Shashi Deshpande's novels and stories are replete with such engagements through which the writer has made an attempt at a reinterpretation of the traditional myths and the images therein with an aim to arrive at an understanding which seems suitable in terms of the human situation in the Indian familial context. Deshpande's observations in this regard are noteworthy:

> In India, specially, myths have an extraordinary vitality, continuing to give people some truths about themselves and about the human condition. What women writers are doing today is not a rejection of myths, but a meaningful and creative reinterpretation of them. We are looking for a fresh knowledge of ourselves in them, trying to discover what is relevant to our lives today. (*Writing from the Margin* 100)

From Deshpande's observations above it becomes obvious that the engagement with myths in her novels does not merely serve to contribute to the richness of the narrative. More importantly, they aim at revealing a renewed understanding of the human situation while exposing the cultural politics at play which provide the shaping structure to these cultural narratives. Myths in such contexts come to signify not only

narratives that embody the supernatural and the divine but more significantly as society's cultural texts that aim at advancing a society's cohesiveness and unity while sustaining and justifying its traditional order.

Family is the bearer of the general life of the society and its culture and thereby becomes a fertile ground for the propagation of myths within the Hindu framework. Within this set-up patriarchy is the dominant ideology and myths are found to operate within this ideology whereby these get a distinctly gendered structure in which the female is placed in a less advantageous position. The meaning of the myths, given such a situation, would justify the interests of the dominant class enabling it to provide legitimacy to the existing disparity in the name of age-old tradition and culture. Deshpande seeks in her fiction to explore the significance of myths in the family and the lives of the characters while situating the narrative within the socio-cultural milieu. Displaying a unique flexibility in the treatment of myth in her fiction, she attempts to dislocate the reader's settled understanding about myths while engaging them in an analytical study of the deep structures of power and culture at large. Choosing the urban Indian middle class family as her two inches of ivory Deshpande shows how this class, with its blend of modernity and tradition in their daily lives, engages in a complex experience of culture, much of which comes in the form of beliefs, rituals, customs and myths at large. Therefore, in Deshpande's fictional rendering of the family, the reader encounters myth, not only in its traditional allegorical version but also urban beliefs that have come to acquire the state of myth in the contemporary urban context.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande studies family relationships – parent-child (especially mother-daughter) and husband-wife relationships –

understanding these through the traditional view while trying to critique the conventionality that shadows such relationships. Critical assessment of this widely read novel is usually directed towards feminist and postcolonial perspectives which primarily attempt to analyse the text in a manner that takes into account the female predicament (in King; Sandhu; Sebastian; Shivram;). While such readings offer significant insights into the narrative, they also tend to limit the critical horizon as they seldom take into consideration the rich fabric of myths that are subtly woven into the narrative. These bestow the story with a richness that contributes towards an enlightened perspective with regard to the familial milieu within which the characters and the novel is located.

Meenakshi Shivram's essay "Locating the Woman in Post-Colonial Discourse" (1999) applies the binaries of centre/margin, speech/silence to read the novel. Her interpretation provides a postcolonial framework to the novel as the critic opines that "[i]t presents, in an important way, a critique of the post-colonial assumptions that are embedded . . ." (181). The central concepts such as silence and speech, centre and margin are applied to develop a reading which enables the critic to reach an understanding of how Deshpande experiments with some of the structural aspects of the theory:

> *The Dark Holds No Terrors* presents, too, the ambivalent binaries of 'speech' and 'silence'. Between the narrator's voice and the protagonist's speech, the said and the unsaid continue to operate . . . . [t]his narratorial device, subtly deployed by Shashi Deshpande, upsets the 'speech vs silence' balance and debunks the confident demarcation that binary concepts closely linked with post-colonial studies rely on . . . . (182)

Shivram's reading however, remains confined to the study of the female character, Sarita, primarily and her position while remaining silent on how institutionalised discourse constitutes and propagates cultural practices via the family through which the woman within her specific subject position internalises the discriminatory habits which pass off as custom and tradition.

As has been acknowledged by the Deshpande, myths play a powerful role in giving shape to Indian lives and the world that she illustrates in the novel is no exception. Deshpande takes up the institutions of marriage and family to analyse the powerful role played by culture in structuring them, showing how individuals often create a sense of meaning in their lives from the traditional images and stereotypes; how myths and archetypes play a determining role in shaping an individual's understanding of the personal situation. Mary J. Meadow's essay "Archetypes and Patriarchy" (1992) seeks to provide an understanding in this direction:

> . . . archetypes give sacredness, or religious meaning, to physical objects and human acts. They are thus exemplary models, human acts through which one relives the myths that give meaning to religious life . . . [t]hus we may have myths that confer meaning on life . . . [w]e enact exemplary models in our archetypal acts . . . [t]he archetypes are like templates for organizing the universal themes that recur over and over again in human experience. (188)

However, one needs to keep in mind that Deshpande's forte lies not only in her ability to provide a critique of myths from conventional and traditional cultural givens but also from the contemporary cultural and social practices which exercise tremendous influence in shaping the lived lives of the people in the day-to-day context. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* opens by evoking the Krishna-Sudama myth,

the tattered Sudama at Krishna's doorsteps seeking help. Quite similar is the situation of the protagonist Sarita who has come to her father after a long chasm, though she does not literally equate herself with 'Sudama in rags' (15). Built on the larger framework of conflict in the marriage of Sarita and Manohar, the novel reveals the details of common conflict in the Indian life that has layers of mythical thoughts woven into it and perhaps even emerges *because* of this. Marriage does not emerge as the perfect refuge of two souls united in love but rather as a construct that has predefined roles and spaces within the given socio-cultural domain. It is for this reason perhaps that Sarita finds her marriage becoming difficult as she seeks to go beyond the given set-up in the context of the family. And so her gaining stature in terms of fame and success also has a reverse reaction in that because of it her husband was made "inches shorter" (42) making their marriage a terribly unbalanced and lopsided equation. Much later in the novel Sarita dwells upon the equation of marriage again and comments on the truth of the idea of happily married when she says, "A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband" (137). Deshpande sees inequality in the partnership between husband and wife while emphasising the fact that inequality is seen to be more importantly in favour of the husband since this is the generally acceptable way in the Indian family and Indian society. Drawing upon mythical figures of Sita, Draupadi and even Shakunatala, the novelist shows how society reduces these characters into stereotypes, "making them a kind of final statement rather than complex, questioning characters" (*Writing from the Margin* 99). It is this reduction of mythical characters and events into prescriptive templates and stereotypes that Deshpande objects to and she attempts a critical reading and a meaningful reinterpretation of them while probing deeper into the familial politics associated in their perpetuation.

The myth of the "happy family" emerges in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* when the protagonist Sarita talks about her family: "A family the right size. The right kind. Like the ads. A happy family. Healthy, happy, smiling and in colour" (20). This is one of the significant modern-day myths that have gained popularity owing to the now-dying joint family system and the rise of the consumer society. As Jensen argues in "Modern Myths and Mythologies" (2009):

> In a consumer society it is to be expected that the fictional, mythological representational realms of imagination are linked closely to consumption and consumerism . . . . [l]ooking to advertising, we easily notice how the text and images reflect sets of representations about 'the good life', 'the happy family', 'health', 'youth', 'beauty', and all the rest of the stereotypical images that circulate in consumer society." 431

But how far the idea of happiness seems feasible in the propagation of the idea of a small family is an area of debate. Changes in the structure of the family have led to changes in the outlook of the people who now adhere to modern and upper middle class ways of life – again an idea given mythical dimensions in capitalism and the reality behind the scene remains unexplored or rather unquestioned. The propensity to conform to the tide gives a sense of taken-for-grantedness and thus ideas and images about life, society and culture at large get established in the fabric of national life. Though there have been significant changes in the general fabric of life owing to the economic, educational and social change in the overall structure of the society, the Hindu family and marital relationships within it do not appear to have registered proportionate changes in their constitution and the demands that it makes upon women situated within it. This has been revealed through the lives of almost all the

female protagonists in Deshpande's novels who, despite their education, intellectual calibre, financial freedom in some cases and access to greater mobility, are compelled to undergo stressful situations in their private lives since they do not apparently conform to the predescribed injunctions of marriage within the familial milieu.

The performative aspect of myths is significantly brought out by Deshpande in her delineation of the family and the everyday lives of characters. Myths have a strong influence in shaping the lived lives of Indians and the upper middle class with their apparent show of a progressive mindset is not free from the stronghold of myth either. But within this web of complex living, deeper analyses reveal that "myths are gender circumscribed" (*Writing from the Margin* 94). Therefore, in India there are sharply defined roles of wife and mother within the family which adhere to the normative standards of the underlying myths and which remain latent in the collective unconscious constantly providing a model stereotype to which one would look up to for conformity. What society tends to overlook is that real life is no myth and real situational predicaments may not always conform to the mythical standards set. A realistic approach to life would be wiser which may provide rational and logical answers to life's problems. The commonly accepted myth of the male as the primary bread-winner in an Indian family is subverted when Manohar is shown in an inferior light with respect to his earnings for his family which eventually creates in him a sense of insecurity regarding his given patriarchal position within the familial framework. It is perhaps the lack of a rational approach in the part of Manohar that creates problems and he cannot come to terms with the fact that his wife Sarita is not only earning butter but bread as well for his family, that it is Sarita who is sought by the people in the society and that he is recognised as the lady doctor's husband. This

happens because Sarita, in her desire to grow and attain self-sufficiency, treads the public space which has been traditionally the male domain and has deviated from the socio-cultural standards set for women by the society. Amrita Bhalla's observations appear particularly relevant when she views the symbiotic man-woman relationship as "cast in strict stereotypical boundaries of dominance and subservience. Any change in the dynamics of power balance, a change both encouraged by the evolving economic, social framework of India and discouraged by tradition, myth and legend informing that framework, destroys the relationship" (31).

The significance of myth in the Indian consciousness is validated further by Sudhir Kakar's comments in *Intimate Relations* in which he states that the Indian tradition is an oral-based one and that the narrative design of these orally-transmitted stories provides central and collective meaning to life and culture. These cultural narratives have "been prominently used as a way of thinking, as a way of reasoning about complex situations, as an enquiry into the nature of reality" (1). Shashi Deshpande critiques through her novels the embeddedness of these traditional stereotypes and rituals, customs and myths, that endow a collective meaning to the Indian consciousness which she believes "have been built round the interests of men" (*Writing from the Margin* 95). Marriage provides one of the significant platforms on which the embedded collective meaning of the socio-cultural life of individuals and the family is enacted. It is through marriage that collective meaning is executed in the form of the demarcation of roles, position, space and power to the members of a family. The poignant disparity that marks these areas leads one to ponder the myth of the family as one that is the most sacred and perfect forms of association existing in human society. Deshpande does radically deny the importance and need of this

institution in the society but all the same she also believes ". . . that the family is not *a divine sacred, institution*, but one created by humans for the benefit of all society; and, therefore, it should be built, not on the *sacrifice of some*, but on the cooperation and compromises of all its members" (*Writing from the Margin* 84, emphases mine).

Sacrifice is one of the myths on which marriage and family are constructed, bringing with it silence and passive surrender to the hegemonic socio-cultural notions. Sacrifice endows plausibility to the images of ideal mother and wife, images that echo those of Sita, Savitri and many others from the Hindu mythical past. The Sita-Savitri myth appears particularly relevant in understanding the specificities of womanhood in the Hindu familial set-up. The Hindu worldview seems loaded with images of the idealised life led by these mythical women, the stereotypical *pativratas* who continue to be a reference point in the lived lives of women living in India, particularly the middle class even today. As observed in *Manushi* (1997) Madhu Kishwar would have us believe that "the image of Sita, as a pativrata, an ideal continues to be a role model for Indian women and this speaks for her unique popularity even in creative formulations where she remains as a forceful symbol of loyalty, dedication and sacrifice" (20). However, the necessity to re-examine and analyse these role models has been now realised and increasingly the urban middle class women in India today "clearly regard the *pativrata* ideal of the submissive and sacrificing wife as an outdated role model . . . the elements of her identity are being re-negotiated" (Poggendorf Kakar 136).

Given these changes in the familial and socio-cultural milieu, it becomes clear enough what motivates Sarita towards an independent life in terms of education and career and the resultant conflict that she has to undergo in her paternal family and in

her married life with Manohar as well. It is to be understood that the cultural role models do not exist only in discourses but are internalised by the community to the extent that they become real in the lived lives of the people. The patriarchal myths act towards the disadvantage of women wherein the stereotypes promoted by such myths become stifling as they straitjacket women into these, seldom providing an opportunity for personal freedom in their experience of living as individuals within the family and society in general. In many instances therefore, a deviation from these predetermined ways instills a sense of guilt in the mind of the woman who is compelled into thinking that her deviation must have adversely affected the familial framework while there is also a parallel realisation that she needs to depart from the normative givens so that she might nurture and take care of her individual needs as far as her education, career and life is concerned. It is this sense of guilt that surrounds Sarita as she gains success as an individual, in her professional as well as social life that does not allow her to disclose the problems that she had been facing with Manohar. She feels that in stepping beyond the traditionally allocated space she has hindered the growth of her husband. She realises that her growing "inches taller" had made him "inches shorter" so that ultimately her happy, smiling and healthy family faces trouble with the dead body of her husband grotesquely hid behind the façade of happiness. It is the mythical concept of the "Lakshman-rekha" that looms large behind individual consciousness, "the line dividing the private from the public, always the warning that the line should not be crossed" (*Writing from the Margin* 185). The Lakshman-rekha symbolises injunctions that are associated with the mythical incident of Sita's abduction. The myth of the Lakshman-rekha refers to an incident in the *Ramayana* and is believed to have happened when Ram, Lakshman and Sita were in the forest in exile for fourteen years. It is widely believed within the

Hindu socio-cultural realm that Sita could be abducted by the demon king Ravana because she transgressed the Lakshman-rekha, a line drawn on the ground by Lakshman, Ram's brother. According to the myth Sita had expressed her desire for a golden deer which was in reality a demon in disguise sent by Ravana. Ram could not refuse Sita and he went far away into the forest chasing the golden deer. After some time Sita and Lakshman who were left behind could hear a heart rending cry and Sita took it to be Ram's call for help and despite Lakhman's repeated consolations persuaded him to go to Ram's help. When Lakhsman finally agreed to go he drew a line around her saying that the line would protect her from all dangers and her trespassing of the line might bring her danger. When Lakshman was away Ravana came in the disguise of a mendicant and tried to cross the line and was unsuccessful. So he asked Sita to cross the line and come up to him to give the alms. Once Sita transgressed the line Ravan changed to hideous demonic demeanour and abducted her. This mythical incident has gained wide acceptance through the passage of time within the Hindu cultural set-up and the Lakshman-rekha has now come to signify familial, social and cultural injunctions which aim at restraining female mobility within the familial and social realm.

Roots and Shadows also attracts critical attention that is predominantly directed towards feminist (Daiya; Meitei; Swain) and postcolonialist interpretations (Joshi; Sebastian). It is the saga of a joint family narrated by the protagonist Indu, who returns to her paternal home after a gap of several years after her marriage with Jayant, much to the displeasure of the grand matriarch of the family Akka. On her return Indu meets Akka on her deathbed and is eventually made to know that Akka's fortune has been willed for her. The narrative focuses on the extended family, its

individual members who gather at Akka's funeral and later at Mini's marriage. These are some of the occasions during which the family seems a singular entity forgetting its animosities, conflicts and misgivings. In Parag M. Sarma's essay "The Self as Contestation in *Roots and Shadows*" (2005) there is an attempt to charter Indu's self and her predicament in terms of the familial milieu she is located in. The essayist opines that a study of the female self, Indu's in this instance, would be appropriate when it is perceived in relation to the family, culture and society. He observes, ". . . the narrative mooring of Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* also lies in the family, to be more precise, in the familial politics of inheritance and succession . . ." (119). It is important to note that his criticism of the novel intends to open up the scrutiny of the Indu's self taking into account the travails of her family including her paternal and conjugal families, while examining how her rootedness within the social and cultural milieu reveals a more deeper understanding of the ways in which families operate within the given larger reality of familial politics. It is during such a time at Mini's wedding when Indu feels "the concept of the family taking shape, living . . . . We had become an entity, a family, united by a strong bond, a common loyalty" (*Roots and Shadows* 4). This occasion provides Indu the platform to question her location within the family as well as her married life with Jayant. It is not only her personal life in relation to Jayant and the family that Indu seeks to explore but also the lives of other members of that large family, the women, especially in her attempt to understand the subtle politics that underlies the family to give it an acceptable form with conformity to the Indian worldview. In this novel as in the others, Deshpande questions the construct of marriage and social and emotional facets of relationships that it entails, here through Indu. The myth of the happy family with few members and all material wealth and prosperity is one that generally keeps the mind of the

middle class preoccupied. But this very idea of happiness is something that Deshpande dwells upon through Naren when he says, "you sound like those families in the advertisement slides. Happy, smiling, healthy and in colour" (25).

Given the gender specific nature of some myths and also not denying its extraordinary vitality in the lives of the people, Deshpande sets forth to re-examine them in search of "meaningful and creative re-interpretation . . . looking for a fresh knowledge of ourselves . . . trying to discover what is relevant to our lives today. We don't reject the ideals, but we know we can't approximate to these pictures of ideal womanhood" (*Writing from the Margin* 100). In *Roots and Shadows* it is through Indu's complex questioning and need to know the rationale behind the embedded myths that she comes to know through Old Uncle that for a woman "intelligence is always a burden – we like our women not to think" (33). Thinking women will speak and because the culture generally does not welcome such women it is preferable to discipline the mind with references to the mythical and cultural pasts replete with women's silence and passivity so that the family ends up living a happy life. And it is this 'gift of silence' that Indu's marriage has taught her and she has, in the process "learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear" (38). Following such a plan of action Indu seems to echo Draupadi's belief when the latter says, "Why not act in a way that will make him feel she really loves me? . . . [b]e silent about what you think" (*Writing from the Margin* 182). This silence no longer remains a technique of pleasing one's husband but also, more significantly, it becomes a strategy of survival, and once married the husband's flaws do not matter. There seems to be no reason left for which one may argue and so Indu understands Mini's silent acceptance of the husband chosen for her by her family

despite visible flaws in several directions including age difference as the 'Indian way' of life where the husband becomes "a definite article. Permanent. Not only for now, but forever. To be accepted" (126).

Roots and Shadows with all its questionings and critiquing of cultural politics also emphasises a pertinent change. The fact that Akka, the grand matriarch representing tradition in her personal and social outlook, finally decides to handover her legacy to Indu is in itself telling of the winds of change that are gradually blowing over this society. Property invites power and Akka's decision reflects the fact that Indu being educated, with a mind of her own compared to the other women in the family, is someone who would be fit to handle such responsibility and to do justice to the demands of time and family in general. That traditional thinking is gradually embracing change, and that a woman is given power in terms of property, is something that Deshpande asserts through this event in the narrative which one may say, will finally liberate the woman from her confining image of a figure of lack. The Indian socio-cultural life within the patriarchal set-up reflects continuity between myth and reality and does not readily admit change in the structure. Vrinda Nabar comments on the ritualization of tradition by quoting the Marathi poet Hira Bansode's poem 'The Slave' where the images of women from the mythical past continue to reinforce collective meanings of her socio-cultural existence in the present. Bansode's poem goes thus:

In that country

Where doors are adorned

With flowers and mango-leaves,

the houses decorated

with lighted lamps,

in that country

the woman is still a slave.

Where Sita had to pass

the ordeal by fire

to prove she was a pativrata,

Ahilya to sacrifice herself

to Indra's sexual desire

and Draupadi was divided up

among five men,

the woman of that country

still remains a slave . . . (in Nabar 119)

That Long Silence is a novel of self revelation that is achieved through the protagonist Jaya. Deshpande's observations regarding this work are worth mentioning. She states:

> Today I see it as an important novel, because in writing it, I was breaking the bonds not only of Jaya herself, but of Jaya the writer . . . It is also a novel that,

> using the small domestic spaces allowed, both for a woman and a writer, explores a whole world. There are a number of ideas examined in it . . . the man-woman relationship, marriage, family relationships, motherhood. And though the metaphor of silence is predominant, the novel is also about words and their meanings, the meanings they have acquired in our society and their unacceptability to women who have not been part of the process of word making. (*Writing from the Margin* 187)

As in other novels of Deshpande, this novel too presents a woman's point of view and has Jaya, the leading female character for the narrator. Critical studies on this novel include a study of the wife/victim figure (Dharkar), of woman visualised as struggling against a more strongly established patriarchal tradition (Behera), postcolonial perspective which analyses the novel as an attempt to erase the silence of the dominated (Joshi). Rajeswari S. Rajan's essay "The Heroine's Progress" (2004) is a feminist approach which considers memory and catharsis important to the novel through which the novelist attempts to reveal an autobiographical sketch of Jaya's life that lay open "constructions of feminist individualism within marriage and family . . . [and] is a protest against the limitations of bourgeois women's lives" (83). Rajan's analysis reveals how in the novel Jaya's exercise in writing is directed towards a breaking of the silence imposed upon her life through familial, social and cultural injunctions.

Family as in other novels of Deshpande becomes the object of study and once again the reader comes across the myth of the happy family when Jaya comments, "Those cosy, smiling, happy families in their gleaming homes . . . . were the fairy tales in which people 'live happily ever after'" (3). Associating the 'smiling and

gleaming' families with fairy tales the writer foregrounds the traditional assumptions regarding the family with a realisation that such happiness is only mythical and ephemeral as it does not take into account the real lived experience of individuals within the family. Like any other group in the society the family too has its schisms, "the rot behind . . . envy and bitterness . . . greed and anger" (*Roots and Shadows* 59). And thus happiness becomes an illusion and for Jaya, despite all material affluence, her situation within the relationship with her husband and the family, she feels, is like that of "a pair of bullocks yoked together" (*That Long Silence* 7). The crisis in Jaya's married life begins overtly, the day her husband Mohan's integrity and reputation are at stake. And to find temporary respite from the situation Mohan decides on behalf of his wife and himself to shift to their flat at Dadar. Jaya feels that this decision of Mohan is actually a reflection of the patriarchal set up that has its hegemonising tendencies wherein the woman as an individual has very few options to choose from. She reminiscences, "I remember now that he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails" (11). Such cultural injunctions that thrive in the form of these images are significant in as much they provide an ideal upon which the family in Indian context is based. As Kakar remarks, "the way we arrange our families practically shows what our culture is like . . . beliefs and norms . . . in marriage gain a wider significance for the understanding of culture" (21).

As Jaya and Mohan settle in the Dadar flat, she finds herself time to ponder over the present state of affairs and her contributions, if any, to Mohan's predicament. She feels that located within a cultural domain that admits silent acceptance to be the

norm of wifehood, she had very little scope to question Mohan's hankering after material assets to the extent that it had compelled him to tread the illegal path. Thus, she had accepted her wifehood silently following Mohan with his clear ideas of what he wanted. The mythical figures of Maitreyee and Yajnavalkya come to her mind – Maitreyee rejecting Yajnavalkya's offer of half his property as that would not provide her immortality. But Jaya does not have a clear idea of her wants and so she is destined to suffer. Deshpande's evocation of these mythical figures is perhaps to provide knowledge of the relevance of myths in the lives of individuals and also to show the continuity of myths in reality at present. The husband is a permanent definite article and women pray for the long lives of their husbands by worshiping the tulsi plant. Women are trained to live with self-obliteration, negating their individual traits so as to fulfill the demands of the husband and the family in general, believing that her existence in itself is a gift from the husband who acts like a sheltering tree. And Jaya understands that without this sheltering tree a wife is in a precarious situation, "dangerously unprotected and vulnerable" (32). The apparent logic is clear – one will have taken care that the tree flourishes and the society has several embedded concepts that justify the nurturing of the sheltering silence, submission and passive endurance that keep this relation subtly manured. These ideas are hegemonic in their content and context and are born out of the society's needs to provide justification to the disparity that it propagates in the name of family and patriarchy.

Indian socio-cultural life promotes a male-oriented worldview through the myths and, as Deshpande remarks, "all the women in myths have been created by men for fulfill their various needs" (*Writing from the Margin* 90). Jaya's evocation of the image of Gandhari from the *Mahabharata* enables her to achieve parity with the

mythical past in her attempt to attain ideal wifehood: "If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband, could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly" (*That Long Silence* 61). Despite her attempts to satisfy her husband by her silent acceptance of the conjugal life that he decides for them, she is left with no sense of fulfillment – rather a sense of failure sweeps her mind. The fact that Jaya's mind takes recourse to the story of Gandhari at this phase of her life seems to have an affinity with the collective Hindu belief that

> stories, recorded in the culture's epics and scriptures or transmitted orally in their more local versions reflect the answers . . . to the dilemmas of existence . . . . For most orthodox Hindus, tales are a perfectly adequate guide to the causal structure of reality. *The myth*, in its basic sense as an explanation for natural and cultural phenomena, as an organizer of experience, *is verily at the heart of the matter*. (Kakar 2, emphases added)

Deshpande dwells upon archetypes and mythical parallels regarding the family – individuals and relationships within it to deliberate upon the continuity between the past and the present. Her narration also includes ideas of the present that have made their way into the psyche of the Hindu middle class family which may be seen as rather identical to myths owing to its collective presence in the socio-cultural life of people. In her delineation of the families through the novels she attempts to foreground the Jungian belief that the myths are ideas that are Platonic while acknowledging their performative aspect in the lived lives of the people. And it is perhaps for this reason that after going through all introspection about her life in its varied roles, after all re-reading of various 'given' ideas that possess mythical contours, Jaya once again takes recourse to myth to make sense of her predicament.

Jaya emerges a rational individual in the sense that she is now able to find an answer to her present problem concerning herself, her husband Mohan and the peculiar phase of their marital relationship in a telling statement from the *Bhagwadgita*: "*Yathecchasi tatha kuru* . . . final words of Krishna's long sermon to Arjuna. 'Do as you desire' . . . . And if there is anything I now know it is this: life has always to be made possible" (192-93). In her final acceptance of her fate Jaya seems to reiterate Deshpande's belief in the necessity and importance of myths in our lives. But more importantly what is more relevant to the reader is an understanding that the ideals propagated in them cannot be approximated, that human intelligence, logical thinking and an inner urge to unveil the truth is what is significant and possible for us as human beings and it is this realisation that would liberate one from the confines of cultural injunctions delivered to us in the form of myths and idealised narrations for generations together.

A Matter of Time may be considered a significant novel owing to the fact that it provides for the first time in Deshpande's oeuvre, a male narrator through Gopal, one of the central characters who, along with Sumi and Aru, contributes substantially towards the progress of the narrative. In several critical studies the novel has been read primarily as a postcolonial text (Guttal), as a novel that resists patriarchal constructs which operate within the society (Bande). There have been attempts to read into the novels representations of human relationships (Pathak) which however, is confined to the task of identifying the levels of relationships within their existential context. An attempt to read the novel within the cognitive narratological framework (Das and Baruah) provides a perspective that shows how the text emerges as a product "involving cognitive blending from different mental spaces" including myth and

archetypes (180). The significance of such critical knowledge is undeniable. Notwithstanding the import of such criticism that has enriched the readings of the text, one also needs to locate Deshpande's novel within the familial landscape so as to understand how these factors animate her narrative and functions within it to reach an enriched interpretation of the characters' positional and locational predicament.

The novel which has been structured into three sections namely 'The House', 'The Family' and 'The River' opens with verses from the Upanishads and the lines quoted provide the underlying theme of the plot that follows thereafter. Like the other novels discussed above, *A Matter of Time* too, has at its heart the family and relationships, especially husband-wife relationships which appear fractured. The epigraph to the first section alludes to the Maitreyi-Yajnavalkya episode from the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad which speaks of Yajnavalkya's renunciation of the grihastra ashrama, one of the four ashramas that a man has to undergo in life. The renunciation is followed by the vanaprastha, the fourth and the final ashrama, which is also a movement towards a quest for a deeper and real meaning of life with the ultimate aim of moksha from the painful cycle of birth and rebirth. The epigraph gains relevance in the context of the novel when as readers we are made aware of the fact that Gopal had walked out on his family that apparently was a happy one, leaving his wife and daughters clueless with regard to the cause of his action. It is this moment of crisis that ushers the novel and thereafter begins a journey into the past history of the family that encompasses its three generations. Quite surprisingly, history repeats itself – Sumi is abandoned by Gopal for reasons best known to him and Kalyani, Sumi's mother had been living the life of an abandoned wife despite living with her husband Shripati who has severed all ties with his wife since along

time. This act of desertion or abandon is an example of the exercise of "the male prerogative of desertion (in the manner of Gautam Buddha)" (*Gendered Realities* 64) which vindicates the assumption that Indian consciousness continues to be shaped and informed by its mythical past revealed through numerous familial, social and cultural practices which privileges the male over the female and the former is not held accountable for the consequences thereafter.

It may be noted that Gopal who exercises his prerogative of desertion is, however, not certain as to why he has acted thus and when he faces the members of his family who wish to know the reason behind his action, he is reminded of the mythical incident of Yudhisthira's predicament when the latter had faced a volley of questions from the learned Yaksha. Gopal feels that his daughter Aru's questions are similar to Yaksha's as he contemplates how "[h]er questions are like the Yaksha's questions" (*A Matter of Time* 50). In the self analysis that Gopal undertakes it is revealed that he suffers from the fear of barrenness surrounding his life and so has to move away like Yajnavalkya, perhaps in search of an ultimate truth which would eventually bestow a sense of meaning to his existence. Gopal feels that he is unlike Sanjaya in the *Mahabharata* who, owing to his absolute faith in Lord Krishna, was able to visualise Krishna as a living soul. "I have faith and therefore, I know who Krishna is, Sanjaya told Dhritarashtra . . ." (68). Perhaps it is the lack of faith in himself and commitments to familial relationships that Gopal is urged to leave and move out of his marriage. He feels "[m]arriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes – a lifetime of commitment – is not possible for us" (69). The demands that marriage makes on the individual are indeed immense but it is significant that Deshpande allows a man to voice the pressures within marriage for the first time

through Gopal and in doing so even Gopal employs myths and legends to reason out a solution for his present dilemma.

The second section once again quotes the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad in the epigraph which embodies the Indian cultural practice that privileges a male child within the familial set-up. Institutionalised cultural discourses such as the *Upanishads*, *Manu Smriti*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and other available scriptures emphasise the role played by a son in the family for it is believed that it is through the son that his parents are redeemed from their existential predicament and the family continues to live. That the expectation from a son in continuing his family lineage is paramount, is revealed when at the very opening of the novel Deshpande speaks of the big house 'Vishwas' named after an ancestor, built long back "by a man not just for himself, but for his sons and son's sons" (*A Matter of Time* 3). But in the families of Kalyani and Shripati and also of Gopal and Sumi, there is a conspicuous absence of a male offspring. While Gopal and Sumi who are educated and belong to modern times appear happy and content in their conjugal life with their three daughters, Shripati leads a life of estrangement from his wife because he holds Kalyani responsible for the loss of their only son. And despite staying under the same roof, Shripati and Kalyani live like strangers for the former had severed all forms of communication with his wife for a long period of thirty-five years. Usha Bande feels that Shripati's act of total separation from his wife is a reflection of his uncaring attitude towards his wife. Both Gopal and Shripati's act of desertion reflect, according to Bande, the streak of escapism that the two men inherently possess.

> Both leave the domestic sphere because they cannot cope with life's commitments. Gopal has an existential drive and he leaves everything behind,

> including a happy family . . . Shripati locks himself up against all communication because of frustration, anger and despair. For him nursing his suffering self is far more significant than caring for his wife. He forgets . . . that the grief of having lost his son is not his alone; it is Kalyani's as well . . . by running away from the field, the two men try to escape their duty and responsibility towards their families. (195-96)

Thus the second section may be seen developing out of the epigraph which states the prime import of a son in the life of the father and the familial, social and cultural milieu. Shripati's estrangement from his wife then gains significance from this perspective. As Amrita Bhalla observes "[t]he significance of a son in the religious, cultural, social context of India has endured from ancient times to the present. Throughout the novel . . . the statements of Aru, the modern educated heroine of the novel . . . Deshpande makes central the import of a son" (66).

The novel culminates rather unexpectedly in the death of Sumi, Gopal's wife and Shripati, her father. Sumi's death comes as a surprise since throughout the text she has been seldom shown as a depressed soul. On the contrary, she surprises us by her tenacity to move on with life even after Gopal's desertion to fend for herself and her daughters. The enigma associated with death is however, explicated through the quotation from Katha Upanishad which serves as the epigraph to this final section titled 'The River': "Whatever desires are hard to attain in this world of mortals, / ask for all those desires at thy will. / O Nachiketas, (pray) ask not about death" (181). With these words Deshpande seems to answer all doubts regarding Sumi's death and also reiterates the fact that for every human situation there appears to be a mythical parallel which justify and bestow meaning to whatever happens in the lived lives of

the people. Gopal's contemplations on life imbued with knowledge derived from myths, legends and scriptures are his attempt to seek meaning of life and self within his existential situation. He makes an analytical study of the myths of wifehood and motherhood through an evocation of the images of Parvati, the legend of Shakuntala and Dushyanta among others in various permutations not to deny the necessity of such knowledge in the lives of the people and in Gopal's words:

> People have a right to their own history; they need their myths as much as the facts, perhaps even more. That Meerabai drank poison and lived, that Purandaradasa was converted by God in the guise of a mendicant, that Tukaram's poems emerged intact from the river after thirteen days – these beliefs are a part of people's lives; to do away with them is to make a rent in the fabric of their lives. (*A Matter of Time* 99)

Through Gopal, Deshpande appears to echo her faith in the richness of mythical repositories which emphasise the familial, social and cultural milieu. What needs to be noted is the fact that while the novelist does not deny the importance of the rich traditions and myths in the collective lives of the people, she also urges for a more rational approach stating that "myths are both necessary and relevant to human lives, they come out of a human need. The problem arises out of reduction of characters in myths to stereotypes, in making them a kind of final statement, rather than complex, questioning characters" (*Writing from the Margin* 99).

The purpose of the myth perspective in Deshpande's novels significantly goes beyond and attains the status of a tool at the hands of the novelist and allows her to scrutinise the institution of family and marriage. As Jasbir Jain has rightly remarked ". . . it is the institution of marriage that is under scrutiny and the concepts of 'sati', the

pure woman, and of 'pativrata', the ideal faithful wife . . . ." (*Gendered Realities* 255) and these are the frequently traversed terrains in Deshpande's novels. The novels deconstruct the socio-cultural concepts and ideas attached to matters of marriage which prevents the society from accepting it as a cultural construct. Marriage is of central priority in Hindu social life and the scriptures and traditional texts available in the society's culture generally define the framework of this very important entity. The problem, however, arises the moment society employs, as Vrinda Nabar states, "the texts/scriptures to rationalize a social condition without examining whether, the conditions are in themselves justified". Nabar objects to such a consciousness in the people which is moulded by the society's canonical texts as it may "create patterns of thought as well as attitudes which are irretrievably rooted in a hypothesis whose fallibility is never questioned or seen as faulty" (*Caste as Woman* 106). Deshpande too objects to this kind of unquestioning popular acceptance of the cultural givens particularly in marriage as it justifies a grossly unequal relationship between man and woman through the disguised politics of control and imposition which works through the notion of honour that "is the natural outcome of a social code that frames the institution of marriage in India in the way it does" (*Gendered Realities* 256).

In their treatment of myths the novels of Deshpande therefore provide a fresh perspective, in transcending their application from a mere pedagogic sense to a much wider and complex understanding enabling the readers in the process, to engage upon an exploration of culture and its signifying practices. Through her craft of storytelling Deshpande attempts to project the continuity that exists between the present and a mythical past, the images and stereotypes that inhabit the past in terms of individual figures and relationships as well permeate the lived lives of the society at present.

The mother archetype makes one of the most pervading presences says in her novels in which she explores the numerous associations intricately linked with it in terms of the roles and relationships the archetypical mother needs to enact when in the family. Dwelling upon the various cultural injunctions that contribute to the formation of this image Deshpande seeks to dislodge popular acceptance of this stereotype through deconstruction(s) which impresses the reader. She enables one to visualise the unrealistic approach associated with such reduction of human lives to stereotypes which are the result of the culture's need to establish and justify its ideology, in this instance, patriarchy. As Katharina P. Kakar observes:

> Culturally transmitted images and stories are a part of the collective memory of a society and organize their experiences. Thus, values of a social group or class become *meaningful* by constructing coherent images and role models . . . the young generation of India's urban middle class finds itself in a situation in which old myths and models are being restructured in order to adapt to a modern lifestyle. (137 italics in original)

Perhaps it would not be wrong to say that through her women characters Deshpande embarks upon the task of revaluation and re-reading of myths and cultural images to reveal how they had been created out of a collective necessity to justify the human situation and to provide sanctity to various cultural practices. Therefore, the apparent finality of signification associated with these cultural givens may be debated to emerge at a more rational and logical interpretation relevant to the contemporary lives lived in the family and society in general. Deshpande's application of myths, archetypes and other cultural images both traditional and contemporary in her novels illustrate how modernist thinking makes an effort to incorporate myth which had been

generally associated with the primordial into its culture so as to look at it with a renewed vision while embracing "myth's multiplicity" (Steven 267). This, in turn, enriches our recognition of the otherwise taken-for-granted understanding of the politics of the family in the given social and cultural context. As Deshpande asserts, there is a need to realise that times have changed and that change is a continuous process and with the changing times society and culture too, needs to alter its meanings while making way for the incorporation of meanings that would appear plausible and acceptable to the people in their lived lives. This holds good in the case of myths too, for they have been responsible, as said earlier, in structuring our lives and perhaps this prompts Deshpande to deconstruct the myths given to us by our tradition and culture. Perhaps Deshpande's comments in an interview with Prasanna Sree testify best her approach to the meanings created and provided to the people to direct their lived lives and search for a meaningful experience of life in the given context:

> I am just deconstructing these myths. Now you take the myth of Sita, as a perfect woman. When I see Sita, I ask myself, when your husband ditches you, abandons you . . . how do you feel? I am going to be angry and upset . . . you know this is what I mean by saying deconstruction . . . I am just telling you that let us see Sita as a human being . . . [a]ll I am telling you is that, times are different. All these myths were created by men, and not by women. So we are in the process of discovery now . . . [a]ll of us are trying to adapt ourselves to the society as it is, and in that process we are discovering ourselves, new ways of living and new ways of functioning . . . . (Sree 158)

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Chapter III

Identity in the Family

> *"...we are not born with an identity, but it emerges in a number of different forms through a series of identifications which combine and emerge in an infinite number of forms so that there is never one fixed, coherent identity but several in play."*
>
> Kath Woodward

Identity constitutes one of the core issues in the repertoire of modern cultural studies which vindicates the significance of identity as necessary in an understanding of the concept of personhood in the individual as well as the social context. Several theorists and philosophers have displayed their sustained engagements with this very complex issue since the past and their studies chart a shift from the earlier conformist essentialist stance to a non-conformist stance which considers identity as social and cultural construct. Essentialism considers identity as a fixed attribute which exists as a stable, uniform, universal and natural element of a person through which an individual's exclusive underlying essence is determinable. On the contrary, recent studies in identity in the aftermath of ethnic, racial, political, linguistic cultural changes adopt an anti-essentialist approach which leads one to consider the issue of identity as crucial to an understanding of the human situation, a non-conformist assumption which acknowledges the presence of politics in identity construction which appear to be culture specific. One may notice a significant shift from the earlier concept of essential self to a social self which is the product of the individual's

response to the demands of the society and it's lived culture. In the wake of a universal acknowledgement in the recent times of the multiple possibilities that influence the formation of individual identity, the idea of social constructionism in relation to identity studies have gained an increased impetus which has also revealed vitally the workings of society and culture that contribute powerfully towards the formation of an individual's idea of self.

E. Goffman in *Stigma* (1968) dwells upon the distinct marks that provides the individual with a unique identity while stating that "By personal identity, I have in mind . . . positive marks or identity pegs, and the unique combination of life history items that comes to be attached to the individual with the help of these pegs for his identity" (74). Woodward echoes Goffman in conceptualising identity as having an important social dimension to it which is also significantly related to the roles we play that reflect "social aspects and social exchanges between people" and that "there are links between the society in which we live and the limitations offered by the roles or parts we play in that society . . ." (Woodward 15). Given the complexity involved, any understanding of identity would necessitate a contingent understanding of subjectivity which taken together presents a comprehensive idea of personhood. Considering identity as a social and cultural construct, modern studies on identity postulates the significance of discursive practices in its construction while understanding it as "not a thing but a description in language. Identities are discursive constructions that change their meanings according to time, place and usage" (Barker 220). Theorists view identity as a narrative about the self (Giddens), as an entity to which the ideas of sameness and difference may be attributed (Weeks) and also in terms of a sociological subject (Hall, Stuart 1992) where identity is seen as a formation in relation to others

who incorporated a whole gamut of meanings in context of the world inhabited. Hall's observations in this regard seem particularly enlightening:

> The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. . . . . [t]he fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy . . . . [w]e are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities . . . (277)

The self seen as a construct then rests on the internalisation of the notions held by others: "the inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to 'significant' others, who mediated to the subject the values, meanings and symbols – the culture – of the worlds he/she inhabited" (275). Thus it becomes important to gauge the role others play in the construction of identity; the manner in which an individual is expected to conduct his/her given role thereby creating a distinct subject of the individual with his/her constructed subjectivity in the context of the family, requires probing eye to see through the familial politics at play. It is also interesting to note that in such a situation the individual very often internalises the roles and subjectivity within which the others situate him/her and continues to act within the confines of others' expectation which consequently add a performative side to identity construction. While analysing the social construction of self, Simon Clarke in "Culture and Identity" (2008) views the self as playing a performative part "in particular the way in which we construct the self and convince other people that we are who we appear to be" (510). However, one needs to bear in mind that performance enacted by the self while facilitating its apparently stable

structure, is patterned along the societal norms laid down in the society within which it is situated.

Culture plays a critical part in the construction of the self within a given familial set-up situated in a specific socio cultural environment. The concept of identity does appear in vacuum. It is important to keep in mind the social and collective inputs that significantly influence an individual's understanding of self. One may take note of Schick's idea of identity which would also throw substantial light in interpreting Deshpande's approach to and treatment of the issue of identity through the lives of her female protagonists. Schick remarks:

> Identity is the socially constructed, socially sanctioned (or at least recognized) complex of self significations deriving from an individual's membership in such collectivities as class, race, gender, sexuality . . . [i]t plays a decisive role in human behaviour: one acts from a certain positionality and in accordance with a certain worldview or set of values deeply rooted in identity. At the same time, identity is never 'complete'; rather, it is always under construction. To put it more explicitly, identity is not an object but a *process*. . . . *identity is (a) representation, and the representation of identity, whether to oneself or to others, is in fact its very construction*. (19 original italics)

The individual and the social faces of the self contribute towards the formation of a person with a well defined identity which is the result of interaction between the inner world and the outside world. In understanding the significance of the society and culture in the formation of the self, one may refer to Woodward's *Questioning Identity* (2004) wherein it is observed that

> identities are necessarily the product of the society in which we live and our relationship with others. Identity provides a link between individuals and a world in which they live . . . Identity involves the internal and the subjective, and the external. It is a socially recognized position, recognized by others, not just by me. (7)

Given the complexities involved in developing the concept of identity, one may assume that an attempt to settle down with a uniform singular definition of identity would be rather difficult. Considering that identity is internal as well as external, a notion that is not essentially fixed and is understood in its relation to significant others, identity then may be considered as an essence which may be articulated through various forms of representation. Personal identity may allude to a person's biography which endows him a sense of uniqueness and enables him to emerge as an individual within the social. In *Cultural Studies* (2000), Chris Barker defines identity along these lines when he states, "Identity is best understood not as a fixed entity but as an emotionally charged discursive description of ourselves that is subject to change" (220). The notion of a fluid identity is also voiced by Woodward in the opinion that "we are not born with an identity, but it emerges in a number of different forms through a series of identifications which combine and emerge in an infinite number of forms so there is never one fixed, coherent identity but several in play" (16). Self identity can be visualised as the individual's endeavour to assemble a consistent identity narrative by which "the self forms a trajectory of development from the past to an anticipated future" (Giddens 75). Thus self identity, defines Giddens is "the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography" (53).

This chapter aims to examine through the novels of Shashi Deshpande the contexts within which and through which individuals positioned in the family construct, negotiate and defend their identity. The chapter takes into account *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1988), *The Binding Vine* (1993) and *Small Remedies* (2000) to study aspects related to identity within the familial set-up through a study of the family as narrativised in Shashi Deshpande's novels which is interrelated with ideas related to roles, relationships and subjectivity within the familial context. The concept of identity as projected in the novels of Shashi Deshpande provides a locus on the basis of which an understanding of self and family is made possible. Moreover, Deshpande's portrayal of identity also throws light on the cultural and social politics behind the formation of identities while she attempts to show how "the need to characterise an individual in one particular way rather than another is rooted in the prevailing interests, perceived problems and anticipated solutions. An entire structure of values, norms and standards is constructed to guard those interests" (Kelkar and Gangavene 21). In this context it would do good to keep in mind that the significant collective meanings which shape and mould Indian socio cultural life emanate from the culture's epics and scriptures. These texts make available the basic structure or template along the lines of which every individual, according to the relationship he or she shares within a family, is allotted a particular role and thereby the subject position which reinforces his or her identity. Barker provides us with an understanding of subjectivity while stating that it is "the condition of being a person and the processes by which we become a person; that is, how we are constituted as subjects (biologically and culturally) and how we experience ourselves (including that which is indescribable)" (219). Through her characteristic realism Deshpande delineates her characters and

their culture specific position portrayed in terms of subjectivity, role and identity within the family. As a novelist she is acutely aware of the existing disparity in the identities of her characters going by which "men are considered to be heads of households, breadwinners, owners and managers of property, and active in politics, religion, business and the professions. Women, on the other hand are expected and trained to bear and look after children . . ." (Bhasin 7).

The novels of Shashi Deshpande portray the urban Indian middle class family which usually has a nuclear structure and is well educated and financially sound with occasional glimpses into the now declining joint family and the extended families as well to provide a comprehensive understanding of the familial drama that "places the individual face to face with existential problems of identity and belonging" (Jain 34). However, the most common approaches that critics tend to adopt towards Deshpande's novels are that of feminism and postcolonialism through which her novels are analysed and examined (for instance in Indra and Shivram Pandey; Sandhu; Sebastian). In most of the studies which adopt a feminist approach, the characters in the novels, predominantly the female characters are studied to reach at an understanding of the pain and suffering they experience while located within a patriarchal set-up and their attempts to liberate themselves. While doing so the critics tend to overlook the deeper import of the novelist's art which she employs so as to conduct a probing examination of the ideas related to femininity within the familial context. For instance, K. M. Pandey's essay titled "Tearing the Veil" (1998) adopts a feminist stance in interpreting the novel while analysing the plot, characters and situations of the novel. The essayist takes into consideration the character of Saru in the main and relates his reading to review several relationships to understand how

exploitation and subjugation infects Saru and her life within them in a dominantly patriarchal society. Even in her relationship between herself and her mother, Saru feels suffocated due to the utterly conventional mindset which her mother professes towards life for which Saru faces hurdles while trying to pursue her dreams. Pandey observes:

> In fact, male-oriented societies structure females in such a way that they work against even those of their own gender . . . Shashi Deshpande conveys an important message that suppression, subjugation and exploitation are not confined to the male-female relationship but exist between a female-female relationship as well. (52)

Similar threads of criticism are also apparent in Sarabjit Sandhu's study where the critic limits himself primarily to a study of the image of woman as revealed in the novels of Deshpande. Sandhu's work addresses the issue of the femininity as an image that he feels, is reflected in the manner in which Deshpande delineates her female characters. One needs to consider the importance of family, society and culture which have a determining say in giving shape to these images.

The postcolonial critiques of Deshpande's novels also appear to remain confined within the theoretical frame of postcoloniality viewing the novels as reflection of women's suffering and silence. One may refer once again to Meenakshi Shivram's essay "Locating the Woman in Post-Colonial Discourse" in which the critic makes an attempt, to read this novel from the post-colonial stance while applying various theoretical assumptions relevant to the post-colonial approach. Shivram's observations in this context addresses several fundamental assumptions regarding the woman question while locating the protagonist Saru within the

framework of power relations, the binaries of silence and speech, centre and margin raising questions "primarily from the woman's point of view which attempt to show how post-colonialism continues to be, largely a male vision of human destiny" (181). Shivram contends that the novel presents the binaries of speech and silence through the character of Saru showing how within a male oriented socio-cultural existence the woman is often relegated to an inferior position in which speech is silenced and she is visibly marginalised. "By problematizing the speech-silence divide, Shashi Deshpande is appealing for a redefinition and a recontexualization of 'silences'" (183). Notwithstanding the relevance of such critical studies, one needs to consider the significance of family and familial relationships which keep Deshpande preoccupied novel after novel. The family provides the base for her novels through which she deals with the other issues related to it. Thus in studying the construction of identity within the family, one needs to consider the vital ways in which familial roles, relationships and subjectivities lend their colour in developing ones personal sense of identity.

Nevertheless, the significance of reading her novels in the familial perspective cannot be undermined since she locates her character and events in the familial and social context which are predominantly cultural constructs. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* employs the stream-of-consciousness technique to embark upon a study of the self of its central protagonist who, as the narration unfolds, is seen in a quagmire of problems in her marital life, problems which she feels are related to her desire to assert her identity as an individual with a positive self capable of enacting a decisive role in the general well being of her family. In this context one may refer to Arindam Chatterjee's interpretation of the novel which is developed along the lines of

psychoanalytic framework. Chatterjee observes that the novel focuses on the manner in which Saru imposes upon her being a False Self in an attempt to conform to various demands made on her person by her family and in the process eventually, her True Self is lost. He feels that the journey Saru undertakes to her father's place is purgatory since it allows her time and space to rediscover her Self and thereby come to terms with life and its share of responsibilities. "We can say here that Sarita is perhaps on the verge of recovering her True Self because her False Self, her prompter and ventriloquist, seems to have suddenly left her" (104). As Saru undertakes the psychological journey to understand why she had been unsuccessful in attaining marital bliss despite being a successful career woman, the reader is made aware of the fact that an individual's identity is explained

> . . . by a wide variety of authority figures and institutions . . . led to believe that we have the freedom and ability to create and re-create our "selves" at will, . . . but at the same time are presented with a suspiciously narrow range of options that will allow us to fit comfortably into society . . .. (Hall, Donald 1)

The authority figures and institutions that wield an overriding sway on the popular imagination comes from the society's canonical texts which are replete with images and stereotypes which provide the role model for individuals to emulate. It is needless to say that as the Indian culture is predominantly patriarchal such wisdom functions, in most instances, towards the inconvenience of the woman granting her very little breathing room as a human being. This happens because, as Deshpande observes "the meanings of words have been built round the interests of men. Women, we need to remember, have not participated in the process of word-making" (*Writing*

from the Margin 95) and thus embedded images and stereotypes remain in a kind of absolute statement in the collective consciousness and seems to be prejudiced against the woman. As a woman Saru suffers at various stages of her life in the respective roles of daughter, wife and mother since she attempts to search for alternatives against those provided by the culture.

When Saru rebels against her parents to pursue a career in medicine and eventually marries Manu, a man of her choice who happens to be from a lower caste, one is almost led to believe that she represents today's woman who lives in an age of choice and free will. But the fact that she has to undergo tremendous suffering, both mental and physical, in her life directs our attention to the fact that "choice is often an illusion. People are firm believers in free will. But they choose their politics, their dress, their manners, *their very identity*, from a menu they had no hand in writing. They are constrained by forces . . ." (Hall, Donald 2, emphases mine). Located within the Indian familial scene with its intense patriarchal leanings, the institution of marriage also exerts its influence in defining, rather demarcating, specific roles to Saru as a wife and a mother which is a culture specific construct. Thus, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* when Saru at a later time in her life meditates upon the possible reasons behind the fissure in their marriage, she comes to the following conclusion :

> A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an MA, you should be a BA . . . [i]f he's earning five hundred rupees. You should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. (137)

One needs to probe deeper into the reasons behind such cultural norms inflicted upon the individual in the context of marriage. Vrinda Nabar's *Cast(e) as Woman* argues that "In India, mainstream Hinduism as well as the other religious ideologies have worked in tandem to produce a social order wherein individualism has had no role to play" (32). It is interesting to note that Deshpande too seems to echo Nabar when she makes Saru say, "There was no 'I' then, not as yet, craving for recognition, satisfaction. The craving, which when it came, was always to be accompanied by a feeling of guilt if the 'I' dared to overreach a male, as if I was doing something that took away shreds of my feminity" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 53). The major repositories the Hindu cultural tradition in the form of various texts including the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* flood with, as Sudhir Kakar states in his *Intimate Relations*, a "sanctimonious cultural definition of the woman's role in Hindu society" (15). Further he observes that "the stamp of traditional culture is clearest in shaping their ideals of the "good" woman, especially in relationship to a man. They share with women of the higher classes the feelings of being loved and approved by a watchful inner sentinel when conforming to this ideal, and stabbings of guilt when they deviate . . ."(66). Vrinda Nabar too appears to think along similar lines when she states that ". . . notions of the supremacy of the male partner in any male-female relationship are universal and deeply embedded in human consciousness" (82). Seen in this light Saru's sense of guilt in indulging her individual desire to excel and create a socially visible 'I' can be gauged. Her sense of guilt is so intense that she is almost led into believing that she has been solely responsible in dwarfing her husband in the society, in leading him to an enforced death. She is tormented by the fear "that they would all know . . . what she herself did . . . that it was she who was the murderer" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 44). The sense of guilt needs to be got rid of and this

can happen only when a woman liberates herself from the shackles of idealised cultural images.

Saru, therefore, is the nonconformist who has to struggle her way through to give shape to a distinct identity of her own while at the same time is faced with introspective interrogations exploring her own subjectivity within the given socio-cultural life. There are of course other characters in the novel that adhere to the strict cultural roles demarcated for them and through whom Deshpande tends to develop a subtle platform for questioning such injunctions inflicted upon the individual. "From beggar to bai to housewife, the one common denominator linking these women together is their more or less unquestioned acceptance of their role as male/husband/father-defined" (Nabar 34). In a mock appreciation of various nuances of the 'wifely' and 'motherly' roles that these characters enact *The Dark Holds No Terrors* interrogates culture's biased authority that rests on the deprivation of one sex for the advantage of the other. In the very beginning of the novel therefore, we hear Saru speaking about the 'tulsi' having served its purpose; the tulsi being a sacred plant which is revered by the Hindu wives who pray for the longevity of their husbands. Saru says of her mother, "She had died before her husband. Wasn't that what all women prayed to the *tulsi* for?" (15). It is not only Saru's mother who provides a stark contrast to what Saru stands for but there are other women as well who silently succumb under the burden of ideal roles marked for them. Thus as a doctor we see Saru's suppressed anger at these women who come to her with

> . . . all the indignities of a woman's life, borne silently and as long as possible . . . Everything kept a secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame. Stupid, silly martyrs . . . idiotic heroines . . . Their unconscious, unmeaning

> heroism, born out of the myth of self sacrificing martyred woman . . . they had schooled themselves to silence. (107)

The underlying philosophy behind such martyrdom is perhaps the image of the ideal "in a society which equates the virtuous women with sacrifice and martyrdom, and in which self-effacement is seen as a primary female attribute" (Nabar 57). This ideal pertains not only to the image of the woman in general but intensely informs the specific roles of a mother and a wife too. The meaning embedded in these images belong to the Hindu culture and "the meaning of words have been built around the interests of men" (Jain 95) and thus they are gender circumscribed. Having realised this one needs to look, as Deshpande would have us believe, "for a fresh knowledge of ourselves in them, trying to discover what is relevant to our lives today . . ." (*Writing from the Margin* 100). It is perhaps through a character like Saru that Deshpande presents a critique of the ". . . unquestioning acceptance of the collective consciousness and the blind submission to generations of conditioning" (Nabar 60).

While reading the novels of Shashi Deshpande one cannot deny the centrality of women characters in her work but would also realise that in the backdrop of numerous other characters both male and female, the protagonist emerges out as a thinking, questioning and rational being. As a novelist she believes that "we are all human, that what we share as humans is far greater than what divides us as being men and women" (*Writing from the Margin* 100). Deshpande's artistic vision posits an analytical exploration of the cultural givens documenting the personal experience of her protagonists in a preordained socio-cultural framework. "Concerned with quest for an authentic selfhood and an understanding of the existential problems of life, Deshpande's heroines are all agog to retain their individuality in the teeth of

disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten their identity" (Swain 86). It needs to be remembered that the 'quest for an authentic selfhood' is employed by the novelist to provide a critique of the culture wherein it is located. Amrita Bhalla observes that in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Deshpande narrates the

> story of Sarita (Saru) – the movement backwards and inwards is towards her engagement with her self, an attempt to clear the 'picture', to erase the conception of a self image as well as to re-examine an image constructed by 'others'. The self is central to the venture; the purpose is to know her self not in isolation but in relation to her family and society. (24)

Bhalla comments that the novel uses the symbol of home to facilitate a deep analysis of Saru's predicament by counterpointing the past and the present "another device of Deshpande, as her women protagonists contend with the examination of their identity, then and now. The house however is never depicted as a cocoon, a nurturing haven or a peaceful retreat. It is not a 'room of one's own' for creativity or mental space" (26). The significant role that culture plays in the construction of self and identity cannot be undermined and any examination of identity in isolation would provide a partial view only as it should be remembered that the meaning of an individual's existence may be derived only in relation to the society and its cultural practices. The manner in which Saru conducts her life, the relationships she shares with others and the eventual analysis of the dilemma she is in, would deliver a seemingly better comprehension only when the reader adopts a critical stance towards the socio-cultural operations that garb the life of the individual as well the family. Therefore:

> the return to her ancestral home gives Saru a sense of perspective, allowing her to see the constitution of a self conditioned by the voices of the other –

mother and father verbalizing the weight of centuries of tradition . . . . The consciousness of the 'I', the construction of an identity, is always seen in the social context. (Bhalla 28)

Roots and Shadows like other novels of Deshpande has a female character Indu in the lead and the narrative focuses on her homecoming which allows her to ponder on her life – the life in the midst of her immediate family which she had rejected and defied to settle with a life of her own choice with her husband Jayant – and finally the realisation the romantic illusion of a happy marriage and life thereafter in reality imposes numerous restrictions on the self. Indu's homecoming on the occasion of the death of Akka, the grand matriarch of the family with whom her relationship had been severed owing to her marriage with Jayant, the man of her choice and for the marriage of her cousin Mini, provides her ample opportunities to see through the amorphous entity called family, the people within it, the relationships therein and the toll it takes upon the individual self. There is a renewed understanding now as she could see "the concept of the family taking shape, living, in front of [her] eyes" (*Roots and Shadows* 4). However, there are also memories of the past which are bitter and which remind Indu of "the intrigues, the groups, the schisms in a family. The jealousies, the rivalries, the barbed tongues and malicious words . . . [n]ow I was learning it all afresh" (37). Family occupies a place of central significance in the novel in that it is through the family the Deshpande allows her protagonist to realise the importance of the family in the life of an individual despite the animosities, hatred and bickering that animate it.

Feminist and postcolonialist approaches (in Bhatnagar; Joshi; Meitei; Sebastian) to the novel are numerous and in many instances the critics remain content

to highlight the feminist elements in the text including a feminist study in character, image of the central protagonist and the issue of marriage and womanhood which despite their relevance appear to limit the horizon of critical enquiry. Similarly visualising Deshpande's protagonist as a woman who inhabits the margin and a study of her predicament therein in terms of her silence and passivity provides a limited critique of Deshpande's craft. The significance of such critical versions cannot be denied nevertheless, one also needs to recognise that Deshpande's female protagonists are situated within the larger structure of the family and familial relationships. It is through these that her individual persona takes shape and in the process Deshpande provides the reader with an idea of how individual identity formation occurs within the familial milieu. Given the propensity towards patriarchal ideology the Hindu family seems to be a fertile ground for gendered existence where the women and their lives are often "controlled and manipulated by men, mostly husbands" (Hiremath 115). Thus a scrutiny of the family and marriage and familial relationships marriage entails, needs to be carefully examined which would reveal the social and cultural strictures imposed upon a woman situated within it. Deshpande's heroine in this novel also traverses similar space – the novel may be seen as Indu's explorations of her existential predicament which allows her to understand the mechanics of the family at the end of which renewed knowledge emerge which equip her to face life and its responsibilities in a more confident fashion.

The issue of identity in this novel appears somewhat similar to that of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in that here too the central protagonist Indu rejects the confines of her paternal home which in her opinion imposed restrictions on her that hindered her growth. She moves out of this home in search of a better home, a home

of her dreams with the man of her choice Jayant believing that this time her home would be her safe haven in which her individuality shall flourish. However like Saru, Indu too, experiences disenchantment since her dreams of an all satisfying partnership in the form of marriage does not allow her to pursue her dreams. Marriage becomes the core familial site visualised and scrutinised against the backdrop of the extended familial set-up which comes together for Mini's marriage. The present situation enables Indu to engage in a self exploration, remembering events from the past while enriching her experience of the present, creating, in the process, fresh knowledge of life and people around her and more significantly, it also allows Indu to know her self – it marks a sense of growth in terms of maturity and her identity.

Indu's sense of identity crisis as presented in the novel may be traced since her life at her paternal home where she had to regulate her life in conformity to Akka's diktats which eventually led her to reject this home. "I had left home full of hatred for the family, for Akka specially. I had sworn I would never go back" (*Roots and Shadows* 18). Thus a defiant Indu leaves the comfort of home and family in search of fulfillment through marriage with Jayant, which was also against the wishes of Akka. But it is in her marriage and her life within it that she realises the toll it takes upon the woman to remain within it and conform to it within the familial and societal framework. The man-woman relationship conceived in marriage seem to restrict a woman's growth in terms of her individuality and she is very often enclosed within it. For a woman then, her marginal existence as a wife appears meaningful when seen in relation to her husband who occupies the place of central importance within the relationship and larger structure of the family. Deshpande projects Indu's self analysis of her wifely identity in an ironical light:

> I had found in myself an immense capacity for deception. I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage . . . . [w]hen I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant . . . Always what he wants. What he would like. What would please him . . . [a]nd one day I had thought . . . isn't there anything I want at all? Have I become fluid, with no shape, no from of my own? At that moment a savage truth had stared me in the face . . . Without wants there is no 'I'.
>
> And a still more frightful, a comically frightful thought had occurred. Am I on my way to becoming an ideal woman? A woman who sheds her 'I', who loses her identity in her husband's? (*Roots and Shadows* 38-49; last two ellipsis in the original)

Indu's contemplation on the life she leads as a wife reveals the larger predicament of the Hindu wife who "is often a martyr to not merely her husband's needs but those of his family as well . . ." (Nabar 172). Indu contemplates how women in her family had no independent identity of their own. Whatever identity they possessed was in relation to the men they were connected to. Perhaps this makes Indu think of them –

> [t]hese women . . . they are called Kaku and Kaki, Atya and Vahini, Ajji and Mami. As if they have to be recognised by a relationship, because they have no independent identity of their own at all. And in the process, their own names are forgotten. How does it feel not even to have a name of your own? There are women who are proud of having their names changed by their

husbands during their wedding ceremonies. To surrender your name so lightly . . . . (*Roots and Shadows* 117, ellipsis in original)

The novel eventually traces Indu's resistance to the idealised identity she was required to enact, of that of Jayant's wife as she takes steps to utilise Akka's legacy in accomplishing tasks which she understood to be most essential including her decision to invest a portion of it in her writing to provide a satisfying end to her inner and personal wish. Indu's life represents in a unique way the changes that had ushered into the fabric of family and how women who traditionally lived lives in the periphery were beginning to be noticed and in the process charted a progress towards the centre. Deshpande also posits questions to the familial code that prescribes a confined life to the woman in conformity with the cultural injunctions which intend to enclose the woman within specific subjectivities.

That Long Silence (1988) is another novel that works with families, in fact many of them and a web of relationships which projects how "family structures and moralities define roles by seniority and gender . . . gender roles are defined and adopted for reasons of utility . . . individuals, in order to fit in, were compelled to chip off their egos, dreams, and aspirations" (Jain 43). Like other novels of Deshpande with the central protagonist being a woman, this novel too has received critical attention which seemingly focus on the woman question which seem to overlook the underlying issues and tensions in the familial set-up.

Family, marriage and social norms bind her completely . . . [t]he ideal man-woman relationship in the Indian context (as the dominant man and the submissive woman) is so prominent that even the most brilliant and so-called forward male is incapable of looking at woman in terms of equality. That is

> exactly what Deshpande has tried to show: the women, even after resisting the social taboos want to submit themselves to their conventional roles. (Sandhu 14)

Comments such as this highlight primarily the predicament of Jaya as a silent and suffering woman in the various roles she dons from being a daughter to a wife and eventually a mother in her given familial experience.

In this context it may be appropriate to note that family relationships are hierarchical and at its core lay the concept of power struggle and it emerges every time there arises a claim for space and authority within its confines. In this novel Jaya the narrator undergoes a trying situation in that her husband Mohan's career is at trouble, his integrity questioned by the authority and their familiar existence in contentment is interrupted. It is in this situation that she makes an introspective journey into her self, something she never had time to do for herself always suppressing and sacrificing her needs to conform to the requirements of Mohan and her family. Given such a socio-cultural perspective one may agree to what Toril Moi observes in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985)

> . . . throughout history, women have been reduced to objects for men: 'woman' has been constructed as man's Other, denied the right to her own subjectivity and to responsibility for her own actions. Or in more existentialist terms: patriarchal ideology presents woman as immanence, man as transcendence . . . these fundamental assumptions dominate all aspects of social, political and cultural life and, equally important, how women themselves internalize this objectified vision, thus living in a constant state of

> 'inauthenticity'. . . The fact that women often enact the roles patriarchy has prescribed for them does not prove that patriarchal analysis is right . . . (92)

The novel opens with Jaya's married life already in a crisis which however, provides her the platform to delve deep into herself to understand how she had been living a silenced life like many other women around her despite her potential for writing. Given the socio-cultural location in which Jaya in, her role as a wife and mother required of her certain pre assigned responsibility and specific subject position. In the Indian context, a woman is relegated to an inferior position owing to the practice of gender discrimination. "Gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles" (Bhasin 1). And so Jaya now remembers how she ". . . had scrubbed and cleaned and taken an inordinate pride in her achievements, even in a toilet free from stains and smells" (*That Long Silence* 13). She had been named Suhasini after marriage and Jaya realises that she had been two selves; Jaya buried under the burden of Suhasini and so she says "And I was Jaya. But I had been Suhasini as well. I can see her now, the Suhasini who was distinct from Jaya, a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped" (16). Such characteristic detail reflects Deshpande's eye for minute observations regarding the Indian societal ideology within the familial context. Jaya's change of name into Suhasini after marriage, a name by which her husband prefers to call her and her silent acceptance of it reflect how the cultural injunctions that permeate the family and society in general sanctify the inequities in the garb of culture.

> In some sections of Indian society, however, it is fairly usual even now for the husband to change his wife's *first* name . . . with marriage, the woman's entire

> past becomes separate and unconnected with her married life. *Moreover, since a name may be seen as conferring a form of identity, a distinctiveness, such a practice implies that it is the husband's prerogative to obliterate his wife's identity* . . . (Nabar 121, emphasis mine)

In this scheme of things Jaya ends up being a passive, docile and silent woman. She also notes that, "The other women in his household accept their roles with acquiescence too" (Sharma 108). Shaping herself into the conventional mould Jaya meditates on the position of the other women in Mohan's family ". . . I discovered how sharply defined a woman's role was. They had been a revelation to me, the women in his family, so definite about their roles, so well trained in their duties, so skilful in their right areas . . . " (*That Long Silence* 83).

The process of subjection is materialised through socio-cultural belief systems which operate through multiple social apparatuses that are seamlessly connected to each other. "Indeed, Althusser offered a new vocabulary for understanding both direct and indirect means by which human thought and activity are brought into general social definitions and norms. The most direct means are those of "Repressive State Apparatuses" and these include government and state administrative bodies which operates predominantly through restrictive forces by repression. Althusser however, distinguishes the Repressive State Apparatuses from that of the "Ideological State Apparatuses" which operate "covertly to nurture and cajole a submission to the rules of established order (Hall, Donald 85). In his *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1971), Althusser speaks about the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) which include "the religious ISA(the system of different churches), the educational ISA(the system of different public and private "Schools"), *the family ISA* … the cultural…"

(143 emphases mine). The family too has its own ISA within which individuals are continually conditioned into acknowledging and conforming to the norms laid down.

The Hindu family has its own forces that condition the individual into accepting the rules that inform and reinforce it. The cultural ISA contributes rather forcefully towards providing a strong basis on which the ideological apparatuses are designed. The cultural texts persistently provides the Indian mind with images and stereotypes which become the role model on the basis of which the real lived lives of the people are regulated. Thus, Jaya examines how her silent acceptance of the allocated space and consequent silence had been considered so natural that when Mohan feels the need to go away temporarily from his place at the wake of his official problem, he expects Jaya to accompany him even without bothering to wait for her consent. Jaya feels that Mohan must be reminded of the mythical women, the ideal wives, "Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails . . ." (*That Long Silence* 11). The perpetuation of mythical stereotypes continually reinforces the essential patriarchal mould of the Hindu family. "To be as pure as Sita, as loyal as Draupadi . . . as dogged in devotion as Savitri . . . these have become the ultimate role models for women" (*Writing from the Margin* 89) and these models are so internalised that the ultimate conditioning of the woman is achieved and she moulds herself to another being who echoes and reflects the diktats of the operating ideology. In this process of internalisation silence plays an important role which is responsible in confining the woman to an inferior subject position within the limitation of "little space of domestic life . . . . *Be silent* . . . This injunction of silence weighs down the entire history of women . . ." (*Writing from the Margin* 182, italics in original). Perhaps it is this

injunction of silence that was imbibed by Jaya while she tried her best to successfully conduct her wifely role relegating her creative self to the background. But sadly enough she realises after her long years of relationship with Mohan that she had attained nothing substantial in her life though she had the potential. "I had shaped myself so resolutely to his desires all these years, yet what was I left with now? Nothing. Just emptiness and silence" (*That Long Silence* 144). Jaya had accepted her self obliteration and ended up being "a person who is without an identity or individuality in the eyes of the external world" (Nabar 134). The final word however, belongs to Jaya as she attempts to break away from the cultural ideological structure of the family to awake to a renewed self which presents to her a new vision. *That Long Silence* is considered an important novel by the novelist in that here she attempts to transgress the silence that has been a given cultural norm for the woman in the Indian society and through this novel "Deshpande places the consciousness of a woman's identity within her specific social and cultural context, in the 'conflicting culture web' of an ever evolving nation" (Bhalla 48). In breaking the age-old silence inflicted upon women through various manipulations practiced in the form of culture the novel finally succeeds in breaking the image of a silent woman typical of Indian culture. In her review of *That Long Silence* Adele King observes:

> [i]s is an exceptionally accomplished portrait of a passive woman . . . With her normal routine disrupted, Jaya can for the first time, look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is. She rejects the various fixed images into which she wanted to fit: the model bride; the "soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman"; part of the modern Indian ideal family . . . Deshpande's novel seems less pessimistic . . . [p]erhaps this is because . . . Jaya not burdened with

romantic questions about whether she loves her husband, is able to see her relationship to him in realistic terms. This view of family and society is the major way in which the Indian experience of being a woman differs from the Western one. (727)

The Binding Vine is a novel with an overpowering portrayal of women characters while largely contemplating on the role of woman as a wife and a mother and takes up for exploration man-woman relationships and marriage located within the dominantly patriarchal familial milieu. Deshpande's preoccupation with such issues is proved as she contemplates in novel after novel her unease about these issues with relevance to the woman's life in the Indian familial context. Feminist readings of this novel consider it as representing the woman's point of view and man-woman relationship which are nevertheless almost general and seemingly obvious interpretation of the text. Deshpande uses such apparently common categories in her novelistic rendition of the female world as a vehicle which allows her to transcend the superficial meanings and to reach at a much deeper understanding of culture and society in relation to the familial terrain. Much of such criticism takes into account the individual lives of the major character of the novel and makes an effort to examine how the female character echo her situational predicament in an essentially patriarchal society. Deshpande's women though educated and being so-called liberated woman of the contemporary times are even today not free from their traditional roles of mother and wife which seem to add to her problems regarding adjustments and functioning in a proper manner. For instance Ashok Mahashabde's essay "*The Binding Vine*: Woman's Vision of Life" (1998) alludes to the instances of Urmila, Mira, Shakutai and her sister while commenting that marriage is loaded with biased

connotations for the female sex and it seems to sanction physical violence and gender discrimination within the family limiting his critical concern to the predicament of Deshpande's female characters taking into consideration the pain and agony they suffer at the hands of a male oriented society. It seems very naïve of the critic to have stated that in this novel although the women "suffer from discontent, they do not rebel against the system probably because they have a feeling that things are gradually improving . . . [t]hey do feel alienated from their husbands . . ." (143) and he seems to overlook the greater cultural politics at play which are embedded in the collective lives of the people and which, also act as a support structure to the inequities prevalent the socio-cultural scene.

The novel opens in a moment of crisis – the death of Anusha, the daughter of the central character Urmila. Urmila's sorrow and grief leads her to a journey of self discovery, of the life of her now dead mother-in-law through which she reaches an understanding of the institution of family and marriage and the cultural injunctions that underlie these structures. In a telling manner the novel opens with Urmi contemplating on how "We all of us grow up with an idea of ourselves, an image rather, and spend the rest of our lives trying to live up to it" and her sudden realisation that her life had "been a constant struggle against an image of myself imposed upon me . . ." (*The Binding Vine* 7). The novel presents to us several views through its women characters – Urmi, Vanaa, Urmi's sister-in-law and childhood friend, Mira, her mother-in-law, now dead but comes to Urmi through her writings and other male characters as well. But it is essentially through Urmi that Deshpande attempts to provide a platform for her observations regarding the implications of marriage and family relationships upon women and how these structures operate consistently and

subtly towards a construction of self which is culturally acceptable. The socio-cultural acceptability of an individual is dependent on the degree of conformity the individual has with the ideal image that has been created and nurtured by conventions and social norms. And considering that Indian cultural temper has been predominantly patriarchal, the location of woman within this set-up is imbued with traits of inferiority and in the process of acculturation such biased perspectives have been internalised by the people and society at large. Deshpande critiques such cultural prejudices when she observes that, "I believe that women are neither inferior nor subordinate human beings . . . I believe that women (and men as well) should not be straitjacketed into roles that warp their personalities, but should have options available to them" (*Writing from the Margin* 83).

Marriage is one of the important social and cultural structures culturally inscribed and specificities in terms of roles, identities and subjectivities are differently spelled for the man and the woman situated within it. Hindu scriptures emphasise the dialectics of marriage which form the foundational template on which the structure of the family rests. Traditionally, it is believed that

> God has assigned the duties of subservience and devotion to women, and those who fall in line are 'good' women . . . Understandably, therefore, the primary male-female relationship which in all traditional societies constitutes marriage, has been seen as a justifiably unequal one. (Nabar 107)

Situated within such an unequal relationship the woman then becomes the locus of control, her very existence and identity takes shape according to the requirements and injunctions prescribed by the canonical texts which serve a powerful role in moulding popular consciousness. Urmi in the novel dwells upon this aspect of constructedness

of the self when she observes "Perhaps the fact is that we all of us create our own truths, shaping them to our needs . . ." (*The Binding Vine* 55). For a woman then the ideal prescribed is that of a dutiful daughter, a dutiful wife and a loving mother. Mira, Urmi's dead mother-in-law had creative talent in her and she expressed her self through her poetry which of course was never published. While reading Mira's diaries she comes to know of Venu, a poet who becomes famous later who had reacted to Mira's writing saying, "Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men" (127).

Jasbir Jain contends that *The Binding Vine* reflects an essentially female world with characters like Urmi, the leading woman, Vanaa, Inni, Mira, Shakutai, Kalpana while the men registers a peripheral presence, either as dead members of the family or located afar from the hub of action. She believes that through this novel Deshpande attempts to address man-woman relationships and marriage. However, Jain's analysis goes beyond the superficial examination of man-woman relationship and marriage to discover in them the underlying cultural politics of subjection resulting in silence and passivity of woman which continues to be accepted as cultural givens in the collective experience of lived lives of the women. In understanding the importance of roles, relationships and subjectivities adopted by woman within family and marriage it would be of relevance to refer to Jasbir Jain's contention:

> The question that is addressed in every generation is the rights that marriage bestows or the space it takes away . . . In the first part of the novel, rape is a dominant image. It is the imposition of male will upon an unwilling female body which is the violent act that disrupts relationships . . . (54)

The image of rape which Deshpande has infused her novel with would provide a better understanding when considered against the predominant cultural milieu.

The woman is very often constructed as a subject incapable of an absolute essential identity forever understood and viewed in relation to the absolute Other. "Women are thus acculturated into their roles in ways that are very difficult to challenge or change" (Hall, Donald 98). For a woman wifehood and motherhood remain the ideal roles which however, are culturally governed – subjective positions that very often tend to deny the woman the very right to personhood and individual familial roles tend to assume to the garb of societal roles. Deshpande objects to this kind of straitjacketing of the woman into a singular all absorbing identity of a mother or a wife as she feels that there is a need to question

> the place of Indian womanhood in the Dharma of the land . . . . Even today, our ideas about motherhood are so set in images of loving and cooing mothers . . . that we find any variation to be lacking in 'motherly' feelings. It seems to me that we need to get rid of these images to release ourselves from guilt . . . . We are looking for a fresh knowledge of ourselves . . . . we know we can't approximate to these pictures of ideal womanhood. (*Writing from the Margin* 100)

Therefore, what emerges as crucial to the understanding of identity in relation to roles, relationship and subjectivity as portrayed in Deshpande's narrative is an understanding of what traditional version of identity prescribes for the individual and how there has been a growing tendency towards a variation of the socially and culturally prescribed strictures:

> The change in the concept of motherhood is not entirely a matter of individual personality or insecurity, or of the kind of relationship with the husband, or culturally governed through socialisation and myths, but it also responds to social change and space for women in other roles. As they move out of enclosures and experience a wider world, they grow in stature and move outside the limited confining categories of oppression and aggression. (Jain 60)

Deshpande evokes the concept of motherhood besides the issue of an independent female identity in *Small Remedies* which posits the contested issue of identity through the characters of Savitribai and Leela recounted through Madhu's vision, women belonging to diverse fields in terms of personal careers while confronting the common issue of identity within their culture specific roles and relationships. Here again to reveal how it creates diverse meaning for the man and the woman in that although "fatherhood is difficult in societies where gender segregation is accepted . . . it sits easier than motherhood on the individual because *a man does not have to struggle for an independent identity*" (Jain 60 emphases mine). The novel works substantially through the personal memory of Madhu who is engaged to the task of writing a biography on the life of Savitribai, a doyen of classical music. There is a parallel construction of the image of Leela which is revealed once again, through Madhu's eyes while she is still in the process of writing the biography. It would be noteworthy to keep in mind that these two women belonged to different time, nevertheless both had to experience similar ordeal in their attempt to defy the traditionally prescribed roles confined within particular relationships while

responding to their inner urge to find meaning in their lives through the pursuit of careers of their contentment.

Small Remedies is also preoccupied with familial relationships through which Deshpande examines the cultural operations that inform and reinforce the process of construction of an individual's identity with specific focus on the woman within the family and society in general. Leela and Savitribai may be viewed as women who make an attempt to move out of the confining enclosure of the family, resisting the circle of oppression and exploitation within the family and society. The women here however, opt for rather unconventional careers in a manner that is quite unlike other women of Deshpande's novels in that while Savitribai chooses music as her career, Leela goes for social activism and devotes herself to the service for the underprivileged. Savitribai rejects the traditional notion of wifehood and motherhood as well in the single-minded pursuit of her musical career.

> Savitribai's obsession with her profession is an all-absorbing one and leaves no space for emotions . . . . Savitribaai's case illustrates with great realism the truth of what Virginia Woolf has expressed in *A Room of One's Own*. There are not so many female artists primarily because women have never had the same social space or opportunity. In India, performing arts . . . at least a couple of decades ago . . . seem to subtract from the ideal of *pativrata*. (Jain 118)

Saviribai's ruthless pursuit of her career putting at stake her role of a wife and more importantly that of a mother seem to raise question about her feminity conventionally displayed through these familial roles. In an Interview with Vanamala Viswanath, Deshpande had observed that

> It's necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing. What I don't agree with is the idealisation of motherhood . . . (236)

Given this outlook professed by Deshpande it becomes rather visible why women like Savitribai and Leela aspire to transcend the confines of narrow domesticity. However, it is not only Bai and Leela who defy the codified conduct of motherhood, there are other women in the novel who do not appear to conform to the ideal image of motherhood, one that has been so preciously upheld by Indian culture. Through Madhu's recollection of other mothers whom she had met at some point of time in her life the image of the ideal mother is refuted by Deshpande. While deliberating upon the bitterness that tainted Bai's relationship with her daughter Munni, Madhu observes

> I get some images of motherhood in the movies I see myself, through the songs that speak of '*maa ka pyar*'. But real life shows me something entirely different. Munni's mother who ignored her daughter; Ketaki's mother, stern, dictatorial and so partial to her sons; Sunanda, sweetly devious and manipulating; Som's mother, so demanding – none of them conform to the white-clad, sacrificing, sobbing mother of the movies. (183)

Small Remedies attempt to project women outside of their conventional identity in allowing the women to opt for roles beyond socio-cultural impositions while they make an effort to restructure an identity which do not apparently conform to the culture specific codes.

> Bai and Leela step out of straitjacketed roles, exercise their options as individuals, pursue their dreams and achieve their potential by utilizing the gifts conferred on them by nature: 'women who reached beyond their grasp'. The novel is about women artists and creativity . . . and the conflicts which arose when the artist happened to be a woman – women are always conditioned to subdue and repress their *Aham*, their sense of self. (Bhalla 76)

The societal approval of a female musician is hard to achieve as may be evinced from the character of Bai. In the process of composing Bai's biography Madhu in the novel, realises the challenge Bai had to confront because ". . . there was a clear line of demarcation between between what females could do and what they couldn't. Associating with musicians definitely lay outside outside the Lakshman Rekha" (*Small Remedies* 218). The evocation of the image of the Laksham Rekha, a central image in the Indian socio-cultural perspective enable Deshpande to deliberate on the issue of women perceived as inferior beings and their apparent need to constantly define themselves in relation to a superior Other which endows meaning to their personal existence and experience. In Leela too, the reader is made familiar with a woman who dared to overreach the absolutist demarcations of feminine roles and subjectivity while going for a career that necessitated her transcendence from the conventional identity of a wife or a mother. She is projected as a woman capable of selfless love and compassion and in doing so she does not need to limit herself to roles made available to her within marriage and family. Leela emerges as a woman who "always supported herself . . . takes on the stature of a heroine" (94-95) by virtue of her tenacity to stand by her belief in herself and resisting the confining subjective position of a woman forever in need of a man in her search for fulfillment in life.

Shirley Chew addresses *Small Remedies* from the perspective of memory while attempting to discover in it the role of 'cultural memory' made available to the readers through Madhu's vision and applied as a narrative device in developing the characters of Savitribai and Leela. In the essay titled "Cutting Across Time" (2005) Chew analyses "the dynamics of the acts of recall in Shashi Deshpande's novel *Small Remedies*, the ways in which they enable the narrator's sturdy examination of the problems . . . her endeavour to "remake a self from the scattered shards of disrupted memory" (72). Thus Madhu states in the novel "I can take over Bai's life and make what I want of it through my words. I can trap her into an image I create, seal her into an identity I create for her . . . I can make Bai the rebel who rejected the conventions of her times. The feminist who lived life on her terms . . ." (*Small Remedies* 166) Chew's critical analysis works through an examination of the use of memory as a narrative device which empowers Madhu the attempt a construction of Bai's identity and to a lesser extent, Leela's identity as well. Stating that "[s]elf-fashioning and the shaping power of memory" is the prevailing theme in *Small Remedies* Chew observes how "[a]t each visit to Bai, Madhu is given another piece of the celebrity's history. Yet these revelations, often snatched from memory and with little regard for chronological order, serve to add to Madhu's doubts regarding the 'truth' of Bai's construction of her life and career" (75). The interweaving of silences that figure Bai's narration of her personal life to Madhu may be understood as the consequence of "Bai's desire to reinvent herself as both eminent artist and respectable woman, making up for all those years when she was not seldom an object of scorn, derided as "that Bai", one of "those women". . ." (76).

It is through Madhu's memory that Leela comes alive to the readers. However, hers is an intimate recollection which brings to the fore certain personal associations and pleasant memories that Madhu has of her. Coming to Bhavanipur so as to compose Bai's biography, Madhu comes upon information related to Leela's life through Hari, a distant relation that she embarks upon the reinvention of Leela at the present time. Leela is now clearly visible to Madhu not only as a person who stood by her during her moments of personal grief but also as a person who had the tenacity to stand by her conviction even at the cost of facing wrath from her family and society. Chew is of the opinion that in *Small Remedies* is embedded

> a political and cultural identity that is not constructed upon alternatives but is fostered by a deep belief in the human interconnections that make us who we are, a belief which fuels the activities and affiliations of women like Leela and Bai, which forms part of Madhu's learning process . . .(88)

Chew's analysis is focused on the politics of memory in the structuring of identity and it appears to overlook the socio-cultural foundation of such memory the function of which cannot be comprehended in isolation to the familial milieu largely shaped by the society and its collective life.

In reading the lives of Bai and Leela one would do good to remember that these women created meaning or rather invented themselves through a realignment of their roles and subjectivities in an effort to move beyond the predescribed state of existence. Madhu's narrative which is partly informed by her memory of both Bai and Leela, Bai's personal memory and Hari's memory of Leela's life serve to provide the plot with a homogenous structure while reconciling

> . . . the many selves and link Bai to Leela . . . Bai moving out of her class in search of her destiny as a singer, Leela breaking out of the conventions of widowhood . . . *Small Remedies* is the first of Deshpande's novels to present women, Bai and Leela who break through the stereotypical mould to chart a different course in their lives. (Bhalla 85)

Deshpande's woman characters reveal their unease at the dominant ideologies which tend to codify the life of a woman into strict roles conforming to the socio-cultural norms. Through the voyage of self discovery that these women undertake they emerge with a renewed vision of life and its predicaments while voicing their doubts with regard to the age-old institution of marriage and family visualising them as constructs that satisfy culture's need to provide social sanction to the embedded inequalities and discrimination. As seen in all the novels discussed in this chapter, Shashi Deshpande's female protagonist is a subject, socially constructed through discursive practices but as Weedon argues:

> she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is also a subject able to reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and society in which she lives, and able to choose from the options available. (125)

Seen thus, Deshpande not only succeeds in poignantly rendering the concept of identity in the context of family while illustrating the larger issue of socio-cultural politics at play making "human truths emerge and artificial constructs fall . . ." (in Naik 26) reasserting her belief in the individual as a human being and not mere gendered entities who become cultural templates to be inscribed upon. Such an

understanding and approach towards the issue of identity problematises it further and necessitates an intense exploration and analysis of the hegemonic familial practices as well as of social and cultural systems that provide an authoritative perspective to this very crucial issue. Going back to Schick's interpretation once again may perhaps facilitate an easier understanding of identity by letting one see how it is construct first, and that there are the specificities of culture including the set of beliefs and values within that worldview which act as invisible inscriptions for the individual. Situated within such a context the individual develops his or her sense of subjectivity and an understanding of the roles and relationships in relation to the individual self as well as that of the collective experience in a particular family and the society at large. It then becomes quite clear that an attempt to define identity as a stable, uniform and complete constituent in an individual would deny the influential role played by cultural and social markers within which the individual is situated and therefore, such an approach would only provide a seemingly partial understanding. Deshpande's treatment of this very crucial issue reveals her pragmatism in acknowledging that

> identity is never autonomous completely: it is only definable according to what it is not [and]. . . is always a construction . . . whether one believes one chooses one's identity for oneself, or whether this is constituted for one by one's family dynamic, philosophical considerations of identity in relation to the question of being, or by a broader socio-cultural dynamic. (Wolfreys 98)

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Chapter IV

The Family in Conflict

> *The self is constructed by a multitude of forces. Of these the first is the family which may or may not be conducive to the growth of the individual, especially if the child is a girl child whose initiation into adulthood may work differently than that of the male. The family is a place of relationships, hostilities, estrangements, refuge and rejection. It is, in itself, a puzzle, its pieces fall apart before our very eyes.*
>
> Jasbir Jain

The family understood as a socio-cultural structure involving human relationships needs to admit not only the presence of cooperation but conflict as well within it. As a construct it is moulded by the social and cultural norms within which it is located and therefore an attempt to interpret the implications of conflict within the family would also necessitate an indepth knowledge and understanding of the lived lives of people and the ongoing dominant cultural politics at play and which, to a great extent, determine and shape the course of individual lives. Kamla Bhasin in *Understanding Gender* would have us believe that the family is

> a place of bargaining and contestation, where power is negotiated . . . family is a complex matrix of relationships in which there is ongoing negotiation, subject to constraints set by gender, age, type of relationship and 'undisputed traditions'. Gender interactions within the family . . . contain elements of co-operation and conflict. (29)

The family is often regulated and disciplined through a continuous and all pervading sense of power the source of which may be attributed to various factors such as gender, age, type of relationship and so on.

Power has manifold implications and an attempt to contain power within a uniform singular definition would be rather difficult. In a naïve sense, power implies the exercise of force or control over individuals or groups in the society by other individuals or groups within it. When exercised within the restrictions of law, power is considered to be legal and just. Contemporary cultural theory derives its most influential theorisations on power from the writings of one of the most prominent anti-essentialist and poststructuralist thinkers, Michel Foucault. In his works such as *The History of Sexuality* (1979) and *Power/Knowledge* (1980) Foucault argues that power is not associated with straightforward domination but operates through discourses which are institutionalised and in the process constituting and controlling subjects. The institutionalised discourses are associated with a common belief system which is disseminated through various practices and often display a hegemonising tendency. It is interesting to note how the "capillary microtechniques" (Foucault, "What is an Author?" 1618) of any given social order diffuses power and distributes it throughout social relations. As Chris Barker observes, "bodies are 'subject to' the regulatory power of discourse by which they become 'subjects for' themselves and others" (104).

The family generally refers to domestic space inhabited by both male and female members where the positioning of the individual members rely on the cultural pattern and social structure that is practised in general. Therefore, though the family as a domestic space often gives us the picture of a feminine terrain and construes

images of female communities at ease with their experience of domesticity, in reality however, a probe into the familial space reveals quite an unlikely picture. Family may be a refuge for its members but at the same time it may also be a site of resistance and contestation, "a place of gender retreat or struggle, a paradoxical symbol of safety and threat, inclusion and exclusion, peace and violence" (Childs 176). An examination of the negative associations in relation to the family would reveal that such scope for threat, violence, exclusion are covertly contained within the family which may be attributed to the peculiar workings of the familial ideologies generally manipulated by the larger cultural discourses that shape and provide a structural frame to the family within a particular society. Coming to familial ideology, it may be argued that society and culture and therefore, the family, viewed as a social and cultural construct, often assumes the voice of the stronger class of the society in chalking out its area of functioning. The voice of patriarchy that usually determines the nature of the family, demarcates a diminishing space for the female co-habitants, for institutional discourses permeate cultural and social meanings that are associated with the notion of the female as the weaker sex, figure of lack, inferior in comparison to the superior male Other and thus, in need of confinement in terms of space not only domestic but also social. As such cultural and social injunctions justify the male exercise of authority and consequently, power becomes an exclusively male attribute. Foucault's assertion that power is not possessed but exercised becomes pertinent in this context and analyses of the operations of power and the consequent effect on the spatial positioning of all the members within a family becomes relevant.

The Indian family provides an important case study in the sense that it appears to be a construct which heavily relies on the traditionally institutionalised discourses for its socio-cultural acceptability. Within the family, it is the overall effect of the strategic positions occupied by the dominant class or gender which has an effect that is manifested by the position of those who are dominated. Power works through relationships and interdependences and through a hegemonising mechanism very often leads to a crisis of space within familial relations resulting in dissidence and conflict. It would be pertinent to keep in mind, after Foucault, that "[s]pace is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (Rabinow 252). The Indian family largely follows a traditional structure which has been predominantly patriarchal in its underlying philosophy which privileges the male over the female and the former occupies the position of the dominant category in most cases. Jasbir Jain in *Writing Women Across Cultures* remarks, "[w]omen as dependents constituted the 'family' and had no direct interaction with power and authority" (12) and it may be thus assumed that there is spatial restriction imposed upon women as a class and that they have comparatively lesser mobility and accessibility to all other accompanying opportunities in their experience of living. As Barker states, "[s]pace is a construction and material manifestation of social relations that reveals cultural assumptions and practices" (353). He understands social space as a dynamic, multitudinous and ever changing social construction constituted in and through social relations of power. Social space may imply any spatial terrain that has a potential to provide a platform to the individual for micro as well as macro interaction. "(Social) space is a (social) product . . . the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of

domination, of power . . .” (Lefebvre 26). Understood thus, home may be considered as one of most significant social spaces bestowing meaning to individual action and interaction in relation to the power proportions that are inherent within it. Silverstone in *Television and Everyday Life* (1994) remarks: “Home . . . is a manifestation of an investment of meaning in space . . . It is constructed through social relations which are both internal and external and constantly shifting in their power relations” (28).

In her novels Shashi Deshpande articulates the familial politics which operates within the institution to show that like any other social institution the family too, has its sites of power structure. And therefore, the exploration of the fictional rendition of family in the novels of Deshpande as a site of power politics and conflict is desirable. This chapter continues to study the family as a social and cultural construct which is again the template on which the dominant ideology in the form of patriarchal norms is inscribed. Seen as a site for the complex interplay of social relations and power, family as a socio-cultural space generates different meanings for individuals who inhabit it in terms of gender, age and the hierarchical status one belongs to. Conflict arises when an individual proposes to transcend the determined spatial locus that has been demarcated by the prevalent normative socio-cultural values and “[t]he lack of space, both physical space and emotional space, takes a heavy toll on those who have to live in such oppressive confinements” (Prasad 45). Deshpande raises such issues in her novels pertaining to the family which more often than not perpetrates and sustains inequalities. She remarks in *Writing From the Margin* “. . . the family is not a divine, sacred institution, but one created by humans for the benefit of all society; and, therefore, it should be built, not on the sacrifice of some, but on the co-operation and compromises of all its members” (84). This chapter includes a study of *The Dark*

Holds No Terrors (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1988) and *Small Remedies* (2000) examine conflict within familial relations, marriage in particular, which would reveal the inequities that exist between the members in relation to power exercised and spatial positioning within the family in general. In all these novels patriarchy is examined as the center of social and familial power structure and the impact of such structures on the emotional and intellectual health and to a lesser extent, the physical health of the female protagonists. Thus, as a novelist Deshpande needs to be liberated from the confining limits of feminism, and as Jasbir Jain observes, critical focus needs to directed to an analysis of

> the psychological inputs, the poetics of loss, her use of myth, the narrative strategies she employs . . . her relationship with the traditions . . . . [t]owards this end, the categories that need to be explored are the institutions of family and marriage as patriarchy has constructed them and how, under stress, they are beginning to crack. (*Gendered Realities* 32)

The Dark Holds No Terrors focuses on marriage as a social institution and also as an important constituent of the family which is at the same time culturally inscribed. The central character in this novel Sarita (Saru), a successful doctor by profession is married to Manohar, a college lecturer who comparatively appears not as much successful as his wife. Saru's profession and its accompanying responsibilities provide her mobility in a manner that appears to defy the traditional codes of domesticity and private life demarcated for woman. While frequenting the public path, Saru is caught in a quagmire of marital conflict which is created as Manohar, her husband seems rather uncomfortable and disturbed by the fact that his "wife earns not only the butter but the bread as well" (35). The narrative engages the stream of

consciousness technique in narrating the predicament of Saru and it gives us vital insight into the Hindu worldview, as Bhalla states:

> [t]he writer examines, for the first time in literary history of Indian women's writing in English, the issue of marital rape . . . . The symbiotic relation of man-woman is cast in strict stereotypical boundaries of dominance and subservience. Any change in the dynamics of power balance, a change encouraged by the evolving economic, social framework of modern India and discouraged by tradition, myth and legend informing that framework, destroys the relationship. (31)

Critical reflections on the novels of Deshpande with specific emphasis on the concept of power and space as presented in it will provide new insight to family as a social and cultural unit. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* portrays a disturbed marriage with conflict in husband-wife relationship besides other familial relations which provide vital insight into an understanding of the mechanics of familial relationships. However, most of the time focus is on the disturbed marriage and the suffering that Sarita has to endure within her marriage which in fact is only the tip of the iceberg. Critics are often inclined to read this novel with a feminist stance concentrating primarily on Sarita's character while analysing the crevice that appears in her marriage relating it usually to her egoist nature. Premila Paul (1998) for instance contends in her essay on *The Dark Holds No Terrors* that the conflict which Saru faces in the novel, within her marriage as well her within her paternal family, may be attributed to the fact that "Saru is highly self-willed . . . . because of her outsized ego and innate love of power over others" (31) and that:

> the life that they begin eventually becomes a power race of two egoistic people in which she overtakes him effortlessly . . . her respect for him wanes when she recognizes him to be a failure. The career becomes an indispensable crutch for Saru as it gives her so much importance and power over others. (32)

In a deeper analysis it would be revealed that the existential dilemma, in which Sarita finds herself, is largely due to the patriarchal temper of the society which provides an encoded structure to a woman's life and which is essentially domestic in character. Seen thus, the conflict in the Saru-Manohar relationship maybe taken to emerge from the conflict between two persons – a conflict arising out of disparity in spatial proportions that does not seem to conform to the social and cultural givens of familial experience. Sarita's desire to transgress the marginal space and enter into the central space of familial terrain by virtue of her independent career appears to disturb the rather delicate balance of the husband-wife relationship. Problems in her life owing to her action arise only because the family does not provide an equitable distribution of space and thus any deviation from the given codes emerge as potential grounds for conflict. Deshpande's incorporation of these issues in her narrative provides her with the superstructure through which she can reach at the base of culture and social practices which define them.

Saru had a rather troubled relationship with her mother. The reader is of the impression that the mother-daughter relationship as presented in the novel is one of bitterness and mutual hatred. Right from the start, Saru is wary of everything which reflect even a trace of her mother and out of desperation she says, "To get married, and end up doing just what your mother did, seemed to me not only terrible but

damnable" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 140). "Saru's love for power can be identified with her relationship with every character in the novel. With the natural love for power (inherited from her mother perhaps), she views her mother as a rival in the game of power. The mother had always appeared an authority figure and posed a threat to her individuality and self-will. The power that the mother exudes repels her" (Paul 35). Further, examining Saru's relationship to her now dead brother Dhruva, Paul remarks that even this relation too, was coloured by her love for power and she states "Her love for power can be identified in her relationship with the brother too. It is said that being older to him by three years gave her advantages of dictatorship. Because of the mother's favouritism Saru hates Dhruva and the struggle for importance goes on" (Paul 35) One may refer to Sudhir and Katharina Kakar's observations in *The Indians* which appears to be relevant to the understanding of the complex relationship Saru had with her mother:

> The inner experience of being a girl, to sense that perhaps with your birth you have brought less joy to those you love, to feel that sinking of the heart when adult eyes glow at the sight of your baby brother while they dim as they regard you, can easily become a fundamental crisis at the beginning of a little girl's identity development . . . [t]he preference for sons is as old as Indian society itself. (43-44)

Having agreed upon Kakar's version of Indian cultural imagination, one may then understand the workings of Saru's mind as she grows into maturity in a family in which the mother displayed overt preference for her son and Saru grew up feeling that her mother ". . . never really cared. Not after Dhruva's death. I just didn't exist for her. I died long before I left home" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 32). An analysis of

the power relations in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, will lead the reader to discover the presence of issues related to power and space and the corresponding ensuing conflict these give rise to within particular relationships and the family at large. However, the issue of conflict needs to be analysed in the deeper perspective of the Indian family and the acknowledged power structures that work within it which also convey a notion of space intricately woven into it. It may be safely assumed that conflicts in Saru's life at various phases arise owing to her recognition of the disparity that exists between the relationships as far as power and space are concerned. Saru may be viewed as a person who refuses to allow such disparity take the benefit of her within a particular relationship and she works toward attaining a sense of individuality which she feels is necessary in order to emerge as a dignified self. But the shackles of conventional culture are strong and Saru has a difficult time in giving shape to her life in a manner which she deems dignified.

In an interview with Shashi Deshpande, Lakshmi Holmstrom comments on the brilliant illustration of power politics as revealed through the relationship "*between the successful woman and not so successful man who then asserts his power over her*" (244 italics in original) which the novelist admitted while stating that "the woman has tried not to use her power because she saw her mother using her power in what seems to her the wrong way. To me it is very important, the power that women wield as well as the power that men possess . . ." (244). It is significant that power changes its implication and scope when there is a change in agency and the exercise of power varies with the male and the female in the constitution of the subject within a given power structure. For Saru domination and exercise of power is a unique proposition with respect to the male and the female:

[p]erhaps there is something in the male, she now thought, that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination. It is not so with a female. She can be dominated, she can submit, and yet hold something of herself in reserve . . . . Does the sword of domination become lethal only when a woman holds it over a man? . . . . When she got married she had sworn . . . . I will never dominate. I will never make my husband nothing as she (Saru's mother) did. And yet it happened to them . . . . Can one never control one's lives? Do we walk on chalked lines drawn by others? (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 86)

In an essay on "Conflict and Resolution in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*" (2006) S. Ambika undertakes a study of Indian womanhood as revealed through primarily through the character of Sarita and she observes:

To speak from within a woman's world is not a destructive or disintegrating attitude. Deshpande uses this point of view to present social reality as woman experience it. To present the world of mothers, daughters and wives is also to present indirectly fathers, sons and husbands. The relationships between men and women themselves, thus become important from the perspective of social interaction . . . . It has to be noted here that it is only the class of educated Indian women that has begun to show signs of change. There are still generations of women who follow the patriarchal tradition quite complacently. In the absence of a complete annihilation of the unilaterally male-oriented traditional values, the modern Indian woman finds herself in conflict with the age-old traditional values and customs that are outdated and meaningless compared to the modernity that infuses her sensibility. (138)

The conflictual position in which Saru finds herself then, may be attributed to this peculiar situation which locates her in a tradition-bound family and her modern sensibility which reflect signs of logical rationality. A close reading of the novel suggests how such an external conflict between tradition and modernity in relation to the individual character may also contain in itself the scope for an inner conflict. Seen thus, conflict no longer remains confined to an external domain; it may have an equal internal existence which puts the individual in an impasse given the strenuous external conventions which the individual struggles to resist and the internal introspection that the individual has to go through owing to the so-called act of resistance. A study of marriage as portrayed in the novel may reveal how the novelist juxtaposes the romantic ideal of marriage as fulfillment of love and desire with the stark reality of marriage as another social and cultural construct which has been founded on the patriarchal ideology that the conservative Hindu family usually adheres to. Deshpande's female protagonists generally belong to the educated urban middle class and their personal lives record their need to question, debate and resist the age-old structures that influence marriage and family life in general. And the Saru-Manohar relationship that has been delineated in the novel is yet another realistic display of the conflict related to spatiality and exercise of power that almost every other family belonging to this class experiences in contemporary times; a conflict that may be attributed to "the break-up in the cultural modes of modern India . . . [and] the husband-wife relationship has undergone drastic changes like all other changes in the Indian milieu of today" (Ambika 143).

The Dark Holds No Terrors may also been seen as a novel that raises issues related to home and family relationships while focusing on the "deconstruction as

well as reconstruction of gender roles as the female protagonist of the novel is constantly, . . . in search of an 'inner space' which is instrumental . . ." (Tripathi 43). Deshpande's attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct the socially conformed gender roles is accomplished through Saru and her constant resistance to the patriarchal power structure which seems to be represented by Ai, her mother and Manohar, her husband. Significantly, Ai is shown as an agent of patriarchy through whom the doctrines of patriarchal ideology are put forward. The mother-daughter relationship that emerges out of such a structure is one in which the mother becomes "the arch rival in the filial power structure" (Tripathi 43) and the chasm between the mother and daughter increases to the point of no return with the death of the mother and the daughter away from her paternal home and family. Saru's act of leaving home to pursue higher studies is seen as an act of "public defiance of the patriarchal power system" (44). The domestic space of home that Saru inhabits prior to her moving out for higher studies and eventual marriage with Manohar, is a site of disquiet and unease, anxieties and unsettled emotions leading one to ponder over the image of the family and home as a refuge. Within the confines of the family what Saru experienced was, a lack of space which eventually resulted in her resistance to the system and as "[t]he lack of space, both physical space and emotional space, takes a heavy toll on those who have to live in such oppressive confinement" (Prasad 45), Saru's defiant response to such an atmosphere may be understood as the inevitable consequence of what she had been experiencing. Saru regards herself a woman different from her mother and other women in the society: she is educated, has an independent career of a doctor which is indeed a matter of pride and is economically empowered. Ironically enough it is her sense of empowerment that gives way to a conflictual position within her marriage and she is led to introspection. She realises

that her education and empowerment prevent her from accepting what the traditional socio-cultural value system had designed for her, she needs to resist such patriarchal restrictions imposed on her being in her attempt to break free from such imbalanced structures and attain development and a sense of individuality. It is a unique predicament in which Saru finds herself – it is rather painful to see her husband suffering and yet she could not succumb unquestioningly to the system that privileged male domination. Caught in this strange dilemma Saru feels that the latter option of unquestioning surrender to male domination would have been possible "If only she had belonged to another time, where a woman had no choice but to go on!" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 70). At the same time she is also aware of the fact that since civilization has come a long way the need to revise the traditions of the past is an imperative in the contemporary times which would allow culture and society to function in a manner which would be essentially rational and more equal. In her deliberate attempt to debate and understand the mechanics of culture Saru observes,

> Human nature may not change, but isn't there such a thing as frame of mind, a way of thinking, which is shaped by the age you live in? It was so much easier for women in those days to accept, not to struggle, because they believed, they knew, there was nothing else for them. And they called that Fate . . . . If only I could say that. My luck. My fate…Will that help me to accept, to passively endure? (70)

Accompanying such contemplation is also the realisation that assigning socio-cultural injustice experienced by women to fatality was a veneer beneath which the politics of culture legitimised the existing inequalities in a more traditional set-up. Being educated and having an independent career of her own, it becomes quite difficult for

Saru now to meekly accept all the do's and dont's imposed upon her by the society, to go on living with the ideal of a dedicated wife despite the harrowing experience of rape that she has to bear every night being subject to Manohar's sadism. Caught between the conventional norms of familial relations and an urbane desire to tread the path of modernity, Saru's existential predicament within her home and family echoes similar problems faced by numerous urban, educated middle class women in India.

In *Roots and Shadows* Deshpande chronicles the tale of a joint family through the leading female character Indu who had been away from the family for quite some time after her marriage with Jayant, the man of her choice. Her act of asserting her personal freedom in choosing her mate appears enough to rouse disapproval of her actions in the family that had been under the supervision of the grand old matriarch, Akka. An interesting phenomenon that may be noticed in Deshpande's novels is that the central female character experiences conflict within the family not only owing to the male exercise of power but often from the female characters who act as agencies in the process of perpetration of patriarchal values within the family. Like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu in this novel shares a very disturbed relationship with Akka who represents the conventional value system and to whom all other members of the family pay obeisance. Indu expresses her refusal to be a silent ally to Akka's scheme of things and feels that her education would provide her a better understanding of life and other matters related to the family. The novel traces Indu's sense of surprise and confusion at Akka's decision to confer on her the responsibility of managing the old lady's fortune. She does not seem to understand what made Akka do so because both of them had never shared a close rapport after Indu's marriage with Jayant. And when she comes back to the family after her long absence

to attend Mini, her cousin's marriage, she engages in an introspective journey into the space called home, into the familial relationships and compulsions within it including a scrutiny of marriage as an institution, to reach at an understanding of the complex mechanics of home and family and the intricacies that influence, shape and reshape individual lives while creating personal meanings that carry the possibility of alteration during the different phases of an individual's life.

Roots and Shadows does not stop at bringing to the fore issues related to marriage and family in relation to Indu and Jayant only but more significantly it projects Indu as the mouthpiece through whom the conflicts faced by women within marriage and family is brought to light; the novel provides an analysis of marriage as a social institution which is pervaded by gender inequities. Several critics have read the novel as a delineation of women's predicament, the attempt to assert individual freedom and the need to break free from the shackles of conventional value system while trying to read as a postcolonial text and as a resistance to phallogocentrism and patriarchal authority which operate within the family and familial relationships (in Meitei; Sebastian). It is true that *Roots and Shadows* comments on the disparities that exist in the family but one needs to probe deeper into the narrative so as to arrive at the essence. The novel needs to be interpreted as Deshpande's attempt to critique the dominant cultural values which provide a structural frame to marriage and family which usually contains multiple layers of oppression, mental and physical, within it. The female characters barring Indu, are seen as submissive to the system which has been successful in indoctrinating them with the codes of patriarchy. It is through Indu that the voice of the emerging new women in the Indian social and cultural scene is visualised. In her novel Deshpande projects home as a contested site with potential

for doubt and despair, disquiet and unease so as to reveal the mechanics of power and space which affect every individual member inhabiting that space. It has to be kept in mind that owing to the patriarchal nature of the Indian family, it is usually the man who enjoys comparatively greater spatial freedom and has an easy access to power and resources.

As in her other novels, *Roots and Shadows* too has Indu, a female narrator through whom the reader is acquainted with the plot. Through Indu the narrative unfolds for us and as Indu finds herself amidst the family members who had congregated for Mini's wedding she feels "the concept of the family taking shape, living, in front of my eyes. It had struck me how suddenly, if only momentarily, we had become an entity, a family, united by a strong bond, a common loyalty. It was 'we' now, and not 'they' and 'us' (4). Throughout the novel Indu experiences moments of solemn truths which make her understand the reality behind all relationships, including her marriage placed within the larger context of the family and Indian tradition. Every now and then she finds her Kakis and Atya and the other women in the family defining themselves in relation to the powerful male counterparts and the age-old tradition that had designed a territory for them within their relationships and the home. With her educated and empowered sense of individuality Indu tries to reveal how tradition played a vital role in delimiting woman's space while carving out gendered spaces within home and familial relations. She remarks,

> They, they, they . . . That's just to frighten women. To keep them in their places. And poor fools we do just that. What connection can there be

between a man's longevity and his wife's calling him by name? It is as bad as praying to the tulsi to increase his life span. (32)

As mentioned earlier Indu emerges as the new Indian woman, educated and hence empowered to make her own decisions which she does by deciding to marry Jayant against the larger disapproval of her family members. At the same time Indu herself is caught in this conflict between tradition and modernity in context of her relationship with Jayant for she finds similarity between herself and her traditional Atya in wishing a long life for Jayant, "[t]hat Jayant should be with me. Always, all the time, forever. So how am I different from you, Atya? From you and Kaki and Sunanda-atya and all the rest of you women to whom the greatest calamity is life without a husband?" (33) and then she realises that marriage has made a different being out of her – she now needs to define herself in relation to the Other, in her case it is Jayant who remains as the anchor constantly defining her role, limiting her self to a silent existence as she learns

> [M]y marriage had taught me this too. I had found in myself an immense capacity for deception. I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage. (38)

Eventually she contends that marriage is a trap which "is not a joke, but a tragedy" (61) for it necessitates the delimiting of one of the partners in terms of spatial position within the relationship and since Indian family is inclined towards patriarchy, the woman located in it needs to confine her mobility both physical and intellectual, within the spatial limit provided to her. And as we read the novel we come across a vital observation which comments on the real picture of marriage shorn off its

romantic allusions for the novelist feels that marriage entails prolonged "years of blindfolding [that] can obscure your vision so that you see no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out of your cage of no-choices" (125).

Power then may be considered a male prerogative, for the man in Indian family remains as a constant against which the woman and her lived life is measured. *Roots and Shadows* may then be considered as a text that "questions the aesthetics of traditional theoretical assumptions . . . in order to resist the criteria of phallogocentrism…and the patriarchal authority at the cultural level" (Meitei 85). Power in the novel also emanates from another character – Akka who despite being a woman exudes enormous power over all the other members of the family except Indu who defies her and moves out of the family circle. A close reading of the text would reveal that Akka had a bad marriage being married to a man older to herself and not able to mother a child, she had to bear the agony of pain and injury done to her being owing to her fractured womanhood. But after her husband's death she is left a rich widow and her womanhood now all the more incomplete without her husband appears to be overlooked as she is left with considerable fortune. For Akka therefore, her position as the matriarch of the family is secured because she is in possession of wealth which enables her to exercise power and authority over others around her. "Since the day Akka had comeback, a rich childless widow, to her brother's house, she had maintained an absolute control over her brother's children. Kaka, even after becoming a grandfather, could be reduced to a red-faced stuttering schoolboy by Akka's venomous tongue" (*Roots and Shadows* 22). Empowerment comes through wealth and with empowerment an individual can have a greater share in the decision

making process and Akka's life proves this. It is she who takes almost all vital decisions on behalf of the family. It is significant to note that Indu who had had her personal share of conflict and unease regarding her relationships at various levels within the family becomes confident of herself after she is aware that Akka's will had named her the heiress. With a substantial amount of fortune to support her, she now knows the secret of Akka's source of power. Indu's experience now reveals to her the rules of the game and she judiciously remarks "See, Akka, I can play your game as well. Domination . . . it comes easy once you know the way" (90). However, there is a difference this time in that unlike Akka, the conventional woman, Indu is doubly empowered with her education and one may expect rationality in her decisions. Thus Indu observes, "I would dominate, as much as Akka had, but more discriminately, more judiciously. It would not be my likes and dislikes, but merit that would count. And by doing this, I would (maybe, why not?) free myself of all doubts, all pressures" (144). With such a shift in the power structure within the novel Deshpande attempts to suggest the shifting paradigms of space which now enables the foregrounding of otherwise marginal figures while also illustrating how educated and urban women are capable of defying silence and submissiveness inflicted upon them through the dominant ideology that shapes familial ethics.

That Long Silence traces the lived experience of its central protagonist Jaya in her endeavour to transcend the socio-cultural imposition of the confining spatiality attributed to womanhood and motherhood while embarks upon a journey to liberate herself from such repressive confines of the traditional family. In it the reader encounters conflict and power equations at several layers. While male domination and exercise of power is executed within the familial construct there are also equal

exercise of power and domination that operates through the agency of the female who enjoy a higher and powerful status owing to their attainment of age and motherhood. The traditional views upheld by the older generation of women do not appear rational to Jaya's educated mind and therefore, she does not readily subscribe to the conventional views regarding the family and familial relationships that they believe in. In critical approaches to *That Long Silence* critics usually focus on the private life of the heroine who is torn between her traditional role of an ideal wife and her very individual desire to give space to her breaking away from the silence (Behera; Misra; Pal; Sharma) inflicted on her being through the social and cultural imperatives of the Indian familial system need to break away from it. It is necessary to place Deshpande's female protagonists in the context of the changing milieu of urban Indian middle class families which display a constant preoccupation to move forwards with a more rational attitude to life and curiously enough, there is a similar pull towards the interiors of tradition and convention cultivated within a patriarchal set-up. Consequently, her heroines are seen to experience conflict both inter-personal as well as intra-personal in their attempt to understand the rules of life that had been laid down for them, as women within the family and society at large, and every time such an attempt is made they realise that within the discursive space of the family and society, they are indoctrinated to lead a gendered life. Adesh Pal invites the reader to interpret the novel keeping in mind "The consciousness of a changed time on the one hand, and the socio-cultural modes and values that have given them a defined role towards themselves on the other, have led to the fragmentation of the very psyche of these women" (119). Though such critical readings provide important perspectives relevant to the novel, the need to place the character concerned in the context of specific familial and socio-cultural light cannot be denied. It is only then that as

readers we shall be able to reach at an understanding how "[t]he ultimate horizon of her fiction reveals the rise of new consciousness with all its appeal and freshness to fuse the aspirations of an independent and free entity with the pleasures of an aesthetically vibrant and radiant self" (Misra 81).

The novel foregrounds the crisis and conflict centering Jaya and Mohan's marital relationship and their lives in the larger context of the family and provides a retrospective exploration of their relationship within marriage. It is however, through Jaya that we are acquainted with their world and the power and space equation which culturally inscribe their relationship. That the woman's life within marriage and family is one of spatial limitation which often remains veiled under the illusion of happiness is revealed as Jaya says, "I had to admit the truth to myself – that I had often found family life unendurable. Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony . . ." (*That Long Silence* 4). Family life appears to be the most desired of structures authenticated by the cultural and social requirements of the people's lives. However, it remains an important area of study as far as the play of power dynamics is concerned with relevance to the essentially patriarchal nature of Indian socio-cultural existence. The study of the character of Jaya may be deemed complete only when we take into consideration her culture specific location within the family and marriage. Deshpande provides substantial insight into the politics of culture experienced in the lived lives of her characters and it is through them that she proposes to critique such dominant structures of inequality vouching for a structure which would not be gender circumscribed and be developed along the lines of equality with, as Deshpande puts it in *Writing from the Margin*, a recognition that ". . . above all we are human, that what

we share as humans is far greater than what divides us as being men and women" (100).

While commenting on the novel Jasbir Jain opines that "Despite hierarchy, duty drills and role models, family relationships also embody a power struggle, when multiple claims for space and authority jostle with each other …" (*Gendered Realities* 44) and given this perspective, Jaya's vision of her marriage to Mohan as 'two bullocks yoked together' appears justified. In the jostling for space and authority the woman has to concede larger space and control to the male counterpart in conformity with the cultural pattern laid down for her. Within her marital space as Mohan's wife she had remained for most of the time, at the periphery, her participation in the decision making process almost absent. Recalling her situation, Jaya recalls how Mohan had never given her any scope to voice herself while exercising control and dominance which culture and tradition had marked out for him. Jaya says "I remember now that he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans . . . Sita following her husband into exile . . ." (*That Long Silence* 11) and her compliance to such an exercise was because she felt that "it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful . . ." (12). Reading *That Long Silence* gives the feeling that within the discursive space of the family resides an immense potential to push out and pull in the individuals situated within it while simultaneously creating intricate webs of togetherness and also fuelling the winds of disagreement and unease. Families come alive in the moments of togetherness which is there for everyone to see and relish and beneath the veneer of such perfect happy moments lie hidden the not-so-happy moments of life during which a woman suffers silently the predicament of

being a woman, resigning herself to a life of submission while constantly seeking to shape herself in accordance with the ideal image imposed upon her by the dominant patriarchal inscription. Deshpande's novel problematises the suffering of a woman's life through the character of Jaya showing how she had lived a silent and submissive life while trying to live up to the image of an ideal wife while at the same time she had been troubled by an inner urge to possess an individual self of her own. Thus, conflict for Jaya becomes twofold – her attempt to pursue the image of the ideal wife and her need to break away from the mould to become a person with her distinct individuality. The Jaya-Mohan relationship viewed from this perspective reveals the mechanics of power and space underlying the familial relationships and in this case, the husband-wife relationship. The obvious crisis that emerges between Jaya and Mohan may be then be attributed to ". . . the outcome of the positions of the husband and wife in the Hindu family. The husband, who is generally in a dominating position . . . does not merely rule out the question of his differing from him, but also demands that her primary function be to manage the affairs of the home . . . to the husband's entire satisfaction" (Patel 196).

Motherhood is a cultural construct unique in itself as this appears to be the only position in terms of spatiality and power, which privileges the woman within the family and society at large. Though Indian society and its culture continues to retain its patriarchal legacy since the past, mothers quite surprisingly, inhabit a realm that is empowered owing to the fact that the image of the 'mother-goddess' plays a very potent role in the Indian cultural imagination which enables her to attain and exercise power over her sons and daughters. In *The Indians*, Sudhir and Katharina Kakar elaborate on "the powerful role played by mother-goddesses in the Indian cultural

imagination – and by mothers in the inner worlds of their sons – [that] imbues male dominance with emotional colours of fear, awe, longing, surrender and so on" (41). The dynamics of power equation within the family and the possible subversions of the generally accepted structure, is revealed through the mothers in the novel. The power that women exudes as mothers, the unique tactics they adhere to so as to assert themselves are reflected in the novel as they unfold to the readers through the eyes of Jaya. She remembers how both her grandmothers exercised tremendous control over their children, sons particularly:

> Hadn't I seen that phenomenon, the power of women, in my own family? My two *ajjis*, two entirely different women, had been alike in the power they had wielded over their families. Looking back, it seems to me that their children lived their lives reacting against them . . . Appa, who had wanted to join Gandhi's *ashram*, had had to give up on *ajji*'s pressure . . . And there's Chandumama, Ai's brother, who had been turned by his mother, my other *ajji*, from a lively ambitious young man who wanted do his F.R.C.S., into a dull, small-town doctor, married to a woman he had no feelings for . . . (83)

While reading *Small Remedies*, the reader deals with the central character Madhu who is a mother of a teenaged son unfortunately dead and it is the against the backdrop of this irrepairable loss and the sense of familial crisis Madhu experiences, that the narrative of *Small Remedies* is woven. Though the novel appears to portray Madhu's predicament with an emphasis to her immediate crisis, it may however, be seen as a text which attempts to juxtapose the past with the present in unveiling the lives of Savitribai Indorekar and Leela and the personal tribulations they had to face with their nonconformist attitude towards the society and its prevalent culture.

Applying the framework of narratology to a study of the novel Bijay Danta makes an interesting analysis which reveals how Deshpande has successfully woven strands of multiple perspectives into the body of the narrative. His essay "Something Happened" (2005) discovers "four narrative frames of the novel. First of all there is the narrative frame involving Madhu's proposed biography of Savitribai Indorekar, *grande dame* of Gwalior gharana . . . The completion of this book would give a new start in her unhappy life . . ." (206) while for the essayist "The second strand of the narrative is Munni's story . . . It is Munni who figuratively and literally presides over the intersection of Madhu's past life at Neemgaon…and her immediate present as a doctor's wife and Adit's mother in Bombay" (207). Danta identifies that third and the fourth strands as "those of Savitribai Indorekar and Leela. Both are reiterative strands. Each is a figural repetition of Madhu's own attempts to justify the series of exclusions . . ." (208). Danta's essay theorises on narratology and presents to us an interpretation which focuses essentially on the narrative strategies employed in the novel that enables the storyline to progress.

Notwithstanding the significance of narrative strategy in interpreting Deshapande's novels, one also needs to admit that Deshpande's novels also provide a platform on which the novelist attempts to contest the cultural politics of the society revealing how, within the framework of the familial unit, power and space as conditions of existence are played out. In the wake of recent emphasis on cultural studies while engaging in the reading of literature visualised primarily as a cultural practice, it would be a matter of import for the reader to attempt an analysis of texts as cultural products which may be seen as literary manifestation of the workings of any given cultural situation. In her novels Deshpande illustrates how modern Indian

women with their urbanised outlook are consistently plagued by problems within familial set-up owing to the generally patriarchal nature of the Indian family and their resistance to and non-conformity to such a power structure. In this context, mention may be made of Usha Bande's "Resistance and Reconciliation" in which the critic opines that Deshpande allows her "protagonists to step out of the patriarchal control . . . . evolve a balance between traditional demands and modern compulsions and renegotiate the power relations . . . probe the individual consciousness and help deconstruct the hegemonic notions" (191). *Small Remedies* presents, as mentioned earlier, a persuading blend of the past with the present which acts a vantage point to debate and contest the given hegemonic socio-cultural milieu. Though Madhu's sense of loss and her attempt to recover from it by writing Savitribai's biography remains as a convincing focus, it is more importantly, the novelist's endeavour to reveal the hegemonic power structures which had been transgressed by the two women of the past – Savitribai and Leela in their respective fields in their courageous defiance.

In *Small Remedies* it is through Madhu that the lives of Savitribai and Leela are unfolded. She perceives Leela as a woman ahead of her generation, modern in outlook in that she had the courage and tenacity to firmly hold on to what she believed and achieve what she wanted in her life defying the narrow strictures imposed upon her as a woman. Madhu contemplates:

> But there was Leela, part of a generation even before mine. She always supported herself. When her first husband, Vasant died, she took up a job and educated her brothers-in-law. Even after marrying Joe, a doctor with a fairly good income, she continued to live on her money. And after Joe died, she moved back into her Maruti Chawl home the very next day . . . But Leela was

> an unusual woman, ahead not only of her generation, but next one as well . . . (94)

It was her modern attitude towards life which pressed her to move ahead of her times in her defiance of the conventional tradition to create her individual space while bargaining and negotiating through the strategic positions occupied by the dominant class, the male members of the society in her case. Leela is a widow who remarries, a Christian man for her husband and she emerges a strong character treading the path of unconventionality while inhabiting the new territory of politics and activism which is a predominantly male terrain. Thus Leela appeared to her family and the society as

> the rebel in a wholly conventional, tradition-bound family . . . . disowned by the family . . . The black sheep of the family. A widow who remarried. And, what was worse, infinitely worse, married a *Christian* man. These were the things the family spoke of. Leela's other activities did not matter to them, none of her achievements registered. Her years of teaching, her role in the trade unions, her work among the factory workers – these were blanked out, they did not exist. (44-46)

One needs to be aware of the fact that Leela's breaking away from the shackles of established institutional regulation was not an easy affair. At every step she had to confront discrimination which made her path complicated. Madhu recalls Leela saying how, it was quite difficult for her to attain superior position within the party for which she worked since Indian socio-cultural system privileges the man and one's gender rather than talent and ability, and this becomes the yardstick against which the measure of success is made. As Usha Bande remarks, "Leela was a victim of gender politics . . . Leela resisted gender prejudices in the party she was working for. She

never reached the hierarchical top because of her gender. Leela's invective against male chauvinism . . . is meaningful" (201).

Savitribai, on the other hand inhabits an altogether different terrain. Bai rejects her family and the relationships it endorses in order to achieve her dream – that of a career in classical music which in itself was a precarious choice. Given the cultural and social ideological constructs with regard to women, Bai's life is narrated in a manner that amply illustrates the conflictual position in which she had been located and had to negotiate her way out while inflicting challeges to such a structure. In her search for authentic inputs to write Bai's biography, Madhu is in fact, in a process of rediscovering Bai's life as this realisation dawns upon her that Bai was "the rebel who rejected the conventions of her times. The feminist who lived her life on her terms . . . The woman who gave up everything – a comfortable home, a husband and a family . . ." (166). Savitribai's rebellious act of rejecting the dominant conventions of her times may be read as her resistance to the oppressive regulatory regimen structured for the woman within which the only space available to the woman was that of the private walls of domesticity where wifehood and motherhood as careers reigned supreme. The demarcation between the private and the public spaces were internalised in the lived lives of the people to such an extent that womens' lives were visualised only in terms made available by institutionalised discourses and the undisputed cultural traditions. And therefore, Bai's tenacious adherence to her musical inclinations was considered rather indecent on the part of a married woman, especially because ". . . there was a clear line of demarcation between what females could do and what they couldn't. Associating with musicians definitely lay outside the Lakshman Rekha" (218). It would be of significance to note

what Deshpande herself has to say in relation to woman's spatial location and the cultural evocation of the image of the Lakshman Rekha in this context. In *Writing From the Margin* Deshpande observes, ". . . the way men and women are looked at in the world, the way their actions are judged, are very different . . . . [o]nly the ideal daughter, the loving sister, the suffering woman and writer is retained. Always the Lakshman rekha, always the line dividing the private from the public, always the warning that the line should not be crossed" (184).

The straitjacketing of a woman's life into the oppressive structures within the family and society in general, in compliance to socio-cultural politics, reduces her space in an inequitable share of power. It is indeed necessary to examine the power hierarchy here which entails absolute power to the man. However, comparatively better options are also probably available to the woman who is a daughter or a mother. The question of accountability does not lie with the man since society and its dominant practices privilege the man above everything. Given this perspective, rules of all nature were mostly meant to be followed by the woman who is socially and culturally constituted and controlled as a passive subject in the exercise of power. In the novel Madhu thus remarks:

> As the head of the family, a position that was indisputable then, he was not accountable to anyone . . . For a man, a wealthy man and the head of the family, to indulge in his love of music, even to have a singer as a mistress, was all right. But for a daughter-in-law to be learning music, and that seriously, as if she was going to be a professional! Surely there was outrage, surely there was anger in the family. Rules could be modified for the daughters, . . . but

> daughters-in-law carry the weight of the honour of the family, its reputation, its *izzat*. (*Small Remedies* 220)

It would be pertinent here to refer to *Cast(e) as Woman* in which Vrinda Nabar observes, ". . . *izzat* seems to be a female-linked commodity. Its preservation is incumbent upon the woman's behaviour alone, and it appears to be the male prerogative to ensure that she does not jeopardize its delicate balance at any cost" (115). An unjust and inequitable burden of izzat which the woman always had to bear left for her very little scope for freedom leaving her to inhabit the traditionally circumscribed space of the private and the domestic. There were however, very few instances of defiance for which the women had to compensate with a heavy price; "To be set apart from your own kind, not be able to conform, to flout the rules laid down, is to lay yourself open to cruelty" (*Small Remedies* 220). Madhu reflects on the lives of Savitribai and Leela and their courageous defiance of socio-cultural ideals viewing them as women who did not succumb to the temptations of a normal life of comfort and acceptability. She realises how

> [t]hey, unlike the men in the same families, were outside the circle of respectable society, their futures marked out for them, the ordinary life of ordinary women denied to them . . . If they had the freedom . . . they were denied the right to live the life most women do, the life Bai herself opted out of . . . Freedom is always elsewhere . . . . Women can never be free . . . . Both these women got for themselves the measure of freedom they needed, they worked for it. And they both knew the price they had to pay for it. (221-224)

Leela and Bai move out of the traditional structures which are reminiscent largely, of the private space into public in their determined efforts to survive within such

oppressive confinements and also seek out new support structures. Social activism and association with the underprivileged provides Leela her preferred support structure in her rebellious defiance of the spatial limitations society and culture had etched out for her. Bai may be viewed in a similar perspective. For Bai too, music remains the most powerful support structure she had carved out for herself which could compensate her personal losses that were the consequence of her daring act of rejecting the family and associated relationships. It is worth mentioning that through characters such as Leela and Bai, Shashi Deshpande attempts to debate and contest issues pertaining to the politics of power and space which every family inculcates and culture as well, that does the act of legitimising such inequalities making them appear as natural givens rather than cultural and social constructs founded on the exploitation of the female sex. As Bande remarks:

> [v]ery subtly, Shashi Deshpande questions the adequacy of the accepted social norms, conceptual construction of 'woman' in terms of recognisable images, models and markers; she critiques the politics of control and the socio-cultural determinants against women that require complete erasure . . . Savitribai and Leela were the rebels of their time; both dared to dream and to achieve freedom. Transgressing the societal limits was not an easy proposition, but they surmounted the hurdles and achieved what they wanted – the freedom to 'be' . . . Shashi Deshpande does not resist women dreaming, but she resists the structure that does not allow them to dream. Her protagonists…are strong women struggling to find their own way and own voice. (201)

Commenting in a similar vein Amrita Bhalla in her work *Shashi Deshpande* feels that "Bai and Leela step out of straitjacketed roles, exercise their options as individuals,

pursue their dreams and achieve their potential by utilizing the gifts conferred on them by nature . . .” (75). The novel thus presents to us women who attempted to transcend the Lakshman Rekhas of their times – Bai in her intense pursuit of music had to sacrifice her familial ties since the fiercely private domain of the family would not permit such an exercise that tilted towards the public being a woman while Leela on the other hand, attempted to break free from the confining shackles of widowhood doing what she liked doing the most, helping people in need and living a life of simplicity – two women leading life in their own terms, at ease with themselves, resisting the patriarchal control of their respective families while opting for life of greater mobility in the generally male space of the public.

In the novels discussed above, issues related to power and space within relationships, marriage and the family in general emerge as one of the strong underlying strand which the novelist focuses on. Deshpande deliberately employs such issues at the core of her narratives which allow her literary imagination to prosper and to visualise, in the main, the predicament of her female characters. Commenting on Deshpande’s narrative strategy Jasbir Jain writes, “the experimental reality she focuses on and the traditional structures she opens out all lead in two directions – one inwards towards the *antahpura,* the interior world of female space and female vision, and the one outward, engaged in moving into public space looking for means of survival and new support structures” (*Gendered Realities* 264). In ‘looking for means of survival and new support structures’ on the part of her characters lies the attempt to negotiate their way through the oppressive regime of cultural injunctions which, for most part circumscribe their lives. In these novels while the tradition bound women are shown to act in accordance with the normative

injunctions of socio-cultural practices, women with education and other support structures, music in Savitribai's instance, display firm resolve to break through the restrictive confines of the family in a gesture of protest against centuries of exploitation that had been carried out in the name of an undying tradition.

Deshpande objects to this kind of limitation inflicted upon the woman since she believes

> [T]he female of the species has the same right to be born and survive, to fulfil herself and shape her life according to her needs and the potential that lies within her, as the male has . . . women are neither inferior nor subordinate human beings . . . should not be straitjacketed . . . but should have options available to them . . . womanhood as a positive thing not as a lack. (*Writing from the Margin* 83)

It is indeed this belief in women not as subordinate beings, as individuals capable of achieving their own space with their innate potentiality that Deshapnde creates characters like Saru, Jaya, Indu, Savitribai and Leela all of who emerge as strong personalities carving their own way out in a dignified struggle. Deshpande provides them other options in life apart from a career in wifehood and motherhood which has enabled them to live their lives in their own terms. Saru finally learns to face her crisis with a brave heart waiting for a resolution with her husband. The feeling of fear and guilt that had engulfed Saru earlier gradually disappears as the realisation dawns on her that every individual has the right to choose and pursue the desired goal. She is ultimately enriched with the understanding her act of transcending the narrow walls of ideal wifehood and motherhood had nothing to do with her femininity and that to

internalise this version of femininity would be fall prey to the politics of cultural practices prevalent within the family.

Jaya too emerges empowered with the knowledge that her life with Mohan is not, definitely not like two bullocks yoked together but that of harmony and understanding that she is an equal partner within marriage and has choices that are accessible. Jaya reflects towards the close of the novel,

> Two bullocks yoked together – that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It's wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves. I've always thought – there's only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices . . . But we can always hope . . . life has always to be made possible. (*That Long Silence* 192-193)

The note of optimism with which the novel closes reiterated Deshpande's faith in human relationships and family which are necessary for the very survival of the individual. What Deshpande seeks to critique is the "image of the family as a safe haven . . . the unwelcome facts of the practice of the internal and the everyday life of the family . . . that genderises it as an institution . . . a whole arena that had remained muted for long" (Patel 32).

Roots and Shadows speaks of Indu's understanding of womanhood with respect to marriage and family and, as Daiya puts it, "Indu loathes womanhood . . . recognises her displacement and marginalization as a woman" (44). However the novel does not retain Indu's sense of loathing at the close since Deshpande ends it

with a sense of affirmation. Indu realises that her bond with Jayant which she felt was restricting her personality was in fact, her making as she contemplates,

> But what of my love for Jayant, that had been a restricting bond . . . [w]as it not I who had made it so? . . . [n]ow I would go back . . . the two of and our life together . . . there were other things I had to tell him. That I was resigning from my job. That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing . . . (*Roots and Shadows* 187)

However, it is significant to observe that though Deshpande raises issues relating to woman's restrictive spatiality within the family and her sphere of action as constructed subjects, she does not exhibit any radical defiance of the social system. On the other hand, one may conform to what Daiya states while referring to the novel. The critic is of the view that "[t]he novel ends with a note of affirmation. Indu asserts her individuality as a woman and also as a partaker in the endless cycle of life. There is the negation of the very idea of non-existence . . ." (44) and thus Indu contemplates on the whole experience of living with all its trials and tribulations which she understands as ". . . the miracle of life itself. If not this stump, there is another. If not this tree, there will be others. Other trees will grow, other flowers will bloom, other fragrances will pervade other airs" (*Roots and Shadows* 184).

A similar vein of thought may be traced in *Small Remedies* when Madhu accomplishes her task of putting into words the life of Bai and simultaneously provides a glimpse of Leela's life both ahead of their generation. Interspersed with the narratives of these two lives was the storyline of Madhu's account of her personal life, recounting the sorrow of her son's untimely death, an irrepairable loss and subsequent misunderstanding between herself and Som, her husband. The act of

writing the biography had a cathartic influence on her and she is finally able to reconcile to the fact of the loss of her son and also attains the understanding that every conflict has a way out. The novel has a peaceful resolution and Madhu is urged to be back home by Som her husband; Madhu realises that

> We need to be together, we need to mourn him together, we need to face the fact of his death and our continuing life together. Only in this is healing possible . . . And then, maybe, we can have our own ceremony…we can wash away the darkness and ugliness . . . . Some kind of an understanding came to me then, an understanding that came to me from the glory of the sea and the clouds . . . (323-24)

Shashi Deshpande's novels attempt an analytical exploration of the lived lives of everyday life so as to enable the reader to grasp the reality of existence. In a deeper perspective such an approach indeed enriches her work which do not remain at the level of mere illustration and elaboration of reality; rather and more significantly, it is through her novels that she provides an indepth study of Indian socio-cultural paradigms, enabling the readers to develop a critical eye towards the institutionalised 'capillary microtechniques'. Her trajectory of concerns as reflected in her novels are intensely realistic in her perception of women's emancipation for they are deeply entrenched in the situatedness of the woman within the economic, social and cultural paradigms of family and the familial relationships. While in all her novels the family remains a potential site of conflict in terms of the individual self and its relation to others and society at large, Deshpande fictionalises the interplay of power and space dynamics in the process of revelation of familial politics. An inclusive appreciation of Deshpande's novels would be attainable only when the reader and the critic alike,

would engage in an understanding of how the individual, given his/her situatedness within the framework of socio-cultural space in the family, attempts a renegotiation of the established power equations in the face of a crisis which also, at a deeper analysis emerge as a journey towards renewed knowledge of life and the system. As Deshpande admits in her essay "Writing and Activism" (2005), "Society is the background; it is the individual's response to the society; it is what society does to the individual that the writer is really concerned with" (25). And it would not be fallacious to state that Deshpande's novels illustrate best the cultural assumptions of the urban Indian middle class family, rooted in tradition through a critique of the cultural signs that belong to the dominant patriarchal practices and the need to revise such signs so as to allow a more equitable distribution of space and power within the family.

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Chapter V

The Body in the Family Politic

> *Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.*
>
> Judith Butler

The body has become the focus of a wide range of debates and discourses ranging from philosophy to psychology and cultural studies, wherein due recognition has been awarded to the changing significance of the body in the wake of the twentieth century. Consequently there has been a radical rethinking, restructuring and reconstitution of the body and the traditional claim for superiority of the mind over body has come to be challenged with a recognition and acknowledgement of corporeality as fundamental to our experience and knowledge of the world. The corporeal body has acquired a new dimension in that it has come to be explored and analysed not only as a natural reality but also as a cultural concept through which society's cultural values and codes of signification are encoded. As Dani Cavallaro in his *Critical and Cultural Theory* (2001) notes: "societies create images of the ideal body to define themselves: social identities have a lot to do with how we perceive our own and other people's bodies . . . framing the body is a vital means of establishing structures of power, knowledge, meaning and desire" (98). Similar observations have been made by Edgar and Sedgwick in *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory* (2004) where the critics are of the opinion that

> the understanding of the body develops in cultural studies through the recognition of the body as a site of meaning . . . The body is not simply there, as a brute fact of nature, but is incorporated into nature. The body is indeed a key site at which culture and cultural identity is expressed and articulated . . . It is through the body that individuals can conform to or resist the cultural expectations imposed upon them . . . Analysis of the body can therefore increasingly see it as a product of social constraint and construction . . . or of the languages and discourses . . . (47)

Notwithstanding the complexities and multi-layered understanding associated with the body, it has come to play a crucial role in our interpretation of physical experiences in this world, the construction of individual and social identities, and our acquisition of knowledge. The body therefore becomes a social subject, variable in nature and very often represented through codes that are culture specific.

The family represents in miniature the macrocosmic spectrum of socio-cultural values and acts as one of the predominating foundations in society which institutionalises the process of producing docile bodies through the various disciplining regimens that it nurtures. Within the gendered space of the family the body becomes the site of regulation, manipulation and organisation which is done with an aim of maintaining order and homogeneity of the family. *Discipline and Punish* (1975), one of Michel Foucault's most influential works, comments on the interrelatedness of power and the socio-cultural construction of the body. This has initiated an entire series of new kinds of study in which he appears to be concerned with the "mechanics of power" which "defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as

one wishes . . .” (Rabinow 182). The notions of power and self regulation become the dynamics of control over the body in a disciplinary society. The disciplined, subjected, constructed body may be viewed “as a terrain on which discourses of moral and social control seek to establish themselves, on the level of both individual and populations” (Morrison 45). Foucault’s approach to the body may be seen as characterised by a substantive preoccupation with those institutions that govern the body and by an epistemological view of the body as produced by and existing in discourse; body in the Foucauldian sense is situated at the core of the multifarious processes through which human beings are constructed by culture and ideology. Discourse expansively refers to language and is inclusive of all other forms of representation, and as Tony Davies in *Humanism* (1997) opines, is “the capillary structure of social cohesion and conformity. It situates us as individuals, and silently legislates the boundaries of what is possible for us to think and say. Above all, it is normative. . .” (70). The body may be understood as a subject constructed through discursive practices and it also it becomes a text of culture on whose surface the essential cultural norms, hierarchies and even metaphysical obligations are symbolically inscribed. It becomes the very medium through which social and cultural meanings are produced.

In the non-essentialist perspective the body becomes “a variable rather than a constant, no longer able to ground claims about the male/female distinction across large sweeps of history but still there is always a potentially important element in how the male/female distinction gets played out in any specific society” (Nicholson 43). Thus concepts such as masculinity and femininity need to be viewed as malleable social constructs which are constantly subjected to cultural forces and are modeled

and remodeled according to the specific requirements at any given point of time. Viewing the body and sexuality as the major themes of Foucault's theorisation, sexuality appears to be the focal point for the exercise of power and the production of subjectivity. In *The History of Sexuality* he maintains that "mechanisms of power are addressed to the body . . . through the themes of health . . . the vitality of the social body, power spoke of sexuality and to sexuality; the latter was not a mark or a symbol, it was an object or target (147). And operating within the patriarchal society the discourses of sexuality intended at producing feminine bodies which were largely seen "as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality . . . it was placed in organic communication with the social body (whose regulatory fecundity it was supposed to ensure), the family space (of which it had to be a substantial and functional element)." (104).

The present chapter intends to focus upon issues related to sexuality, death and disease which are relevant to an understanding of the constructedness of the body situated within the family. It includes a study of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *The Binding Vine* (1993), *That Long Silence* 1988), *Moving On* (2004) and her recent *In The Country of Deceit* (2008) to arrive at an understanding how within the familial enclosure and societal structure, bodies are constructed through discourse that rest on the dominant patriarchal notions which are broadly representative of Indian culture. Considering the family as a hegemonic site of resisting power relations, an analysis of the socio-cultural processes of structuring the body within it becomes all the more significant. As argued earlier, Shashi Deshpande's fictional world primarily represents the urban Indian middle class family which for the most part projects a Hindu worldview through which the reader is made

aware of the cultural maneuvers which emanate from various discourses which seek to establish social, cultural and moral control over the body, both at personal and social domains. The patriarchal nature of Indian socio-cultural existence is also reflected in the family as it is one of the basic social institutions. The Indian family may be considered as "a platform from which most of the structural principles of sexuality and relations of reciprocity, hierarchy and exchange are enacted, regulated and reproduced" (Patel 21). The nucleus of power and authority therefore, remains an exclusively male domain which is exercised on the female body to produce disciplined, regulated and docile bodies. As Susan Bordo argues in her essay "Unbearable Weight" (2001) "The body is not only a *text* of culture. It is also . . . a *practical*, direct locus of social control . . . through seemingly trivial routines, rules and practices, culture is '*made* body' . . ." (emphases in original 2362). It is this constructedness of the body that is of interest to the novelist and through her novels she analyses how an undercurrent of cultural politics makes the constructed bodies appear normal, real bodies with all their boundaries determined. Deshpande's narratives interrogate a "woman's relationship with her body, a relationship which is controlled by factors such as marriage, widowhood, procreativity and barrenness" (Jain and Agarwal 184). Thus, one may safely assume that through her novels Deshpande embarks upon an exploration of the cultural dimensions of various nomenclatures with which bodies are designated as well are hierarchised within the familial terrain. It would be significant to observe that though Deshpande's primary concern remains with the female body, issues such as disease, sexuality and death remain essential to a wholesome understanding of the status of the individual body within the family.

The Dark Holds No Terrors presents to the reader two diverse kinds of families – the first being the paternal family of the central character Sarita (Saru) and second, that of Sarita herself which also provides a socio-cultural reading of the institution of family. The issue of the body has been introduced in the novel at the very onset as one finds the prologue depicting a more powerful body making "a monstrous invasion" (12) of the narrator's body. This devastating act painfully silences the strangulated woman and finally takes her to ultimate subjugation. The novel has at its core the subject of marital rape as one of its significant themes and focuses on how within marriage and family in general, the politics of a patriarchal culture often work towards disciplining and regulating the female body to suit the needs of the given system. There is also an intense exploration of the socio cultural connotations attached to female sexuality which relegates the female body to a subordinate position under the domination of patriarchy. Sexuality has been widely deliberated upon in various writings of philosophers, theorists and literary practitioners and its bearing on the psyche of the individual and its importance in the body's self expression can hardly be denied. Though female sexuality is a covert issue in Indian society it is nonetheless a matter of ample importance as has been reflected in the novel. The reader encounters frequent references to Saru's feeling of strange awkwardness, fear, shame due to the changes in her body. As Vrinda Nabar puts it:

> The innumerable emphases on a woman's honour as well as the methods and strictures laid down to preserve it mean that as a girl grows up, the burden of shame that accompanies femaleness makes it difficult for her to regard her

> body as something to be proud of . . . we have a traditional horror against the concept of the body as worthy of admiration. (87)

Saru thus in the novel says, "And it became something shameful, this growing up, so that you had to be ashamed of yourself . . . a kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage . . ." (62) which eventually gives way to a sense of pleasure as the realisation dawns upon her that this is the natural course the female body takes. The cultural meanings produced through the body, in this instance the female body, articulate the politics of culture which envisages the body as a cultural text and blends the "biological fact of womanhood with its ideological or cultural dimension" (Niranjana 120).

The Dark Holds No Terrors employs the body as a central metaphor to deliberate on the experiences of pleasure, love, pain and death, exploring these experiences through the eyes of Saru for whom the body becomes "the ultimate reality" (155, 208). That the body is central to our varied experience and knowledge of this world is asserted by Deshpande through Saru as the latter contemplates on a "world [that] consisted of bodies from which I drew blood, bodies into which I transfused blood, bodies on which I did venesections, bodies to be dressed, bodies in agony, bodies blessedly, quietly dead" (41). Apart from the cultural meanings that are mapped on the female body which foreground ideas of lack and sexuality as essential to the female body, the feeling of pain, disease and death are also other types of experiences which the body encounters and creates its own meaning that may transcend the conventional cultural ideology practised in the society. Dwelling centrally on the body as a core theme, K.C. Baral in his essay entitled "The Body in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*" (2005) rightly maintains that the body remains the prime

medium through which the experience of the external world and eventually the internal situation is recorded. For this one needs to examine the primacy of the body and Baral argues that in this novel Deshpande focuses:

> "on concepts of 'bonding' and 'bondage' (that) are considered vital to the understanding of women's situation not only in India, but worldwide. Any understanding of bonding or bondage cannot be explained without a reference to the 'body' since as 'subjects' we are all bodies. The misprision of woman in the social sphere amounts to total possession of her body by men" (83).

The novel articulates the body as a text of culture which becomes the very medium through which a woman's experience of her socio-cultural situation may be decoded. It is indeed through the body that Saru's understanding of the varied experiences pertaining to her lived life as a woman in a given cultural domain emerges and Baral further observes in this context:

> . . . bodies, which are sick and have to undergo recuperation or, would finally terminate in death are one type of experience of bodies by Sarita. The other experiences of the body such as the thrill and disgust of menstruation, the changing anatomy and its attraction are important, for these changes make a woman what she is and prepare her for her awareness of other bodies, in particular, of male bodies . . . The awareness of one's own body as an object speaks for itself when others take note of it . . . This awareness is the beginning of an understanding of the emotion of love and the recognition of the demands of sexuality within the social institution of marriage. (86)

Confined within the socio-cultural codes and norms the body cannot transgress the spatial locale predesigned for it by the prevailing given system. The constant disciplining of the body in accordance with the dominant Brahminical-patriarchal worldview deprives women of an independent existence within marriage and family at large. Since the body becomes the subject of control and restraint through social and cultural impositions, Luce Irigary's observations in this context appears quite relevant as she observes in her essay "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother" (2003):

> It is important for us to guard and keep our bodies and at the same time make them emerge from the silence and subjugation. Historically, we are the guardians of the flesh; we do not have to abandon that guardianship, but to identify it as ours by inviting men not to make us 'their bodies', . . . It is also necessary, . . . for us to assert that there is a genealogy of women. There is a genealogy of women within our family . . . Let us try to situate ourselves within this female genealogy so as to conquer and keep our identity. (Lodge and Wood 421)

Viewed from Irigary's perspective, Saru's contempt of women who had succumbed to the silence imposed upon them by society and culture alike appears justified. Saru contemplates on how women had been collectively rendered into an existence of silence which

> [I]f put together would provide a world of data for a treatise on the condition of women . . . all the indignities of a woman's life, borne silently and as long as possible . . . Everything kept secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them. Stupid, silly martyrs, she thought; idiotic heroines. Going on with their tasks, and destroying themselves in the bargain, for nothing but a

meaningless modesty. Their unconscious, unmeaning heroism, born out of the myth of the self sacrificing martyred woman, did not arouse either her pity or her admiration. It made her angry . . . But they had schooled themselves to silence. (107)

Given such critical perspectives, it becomes significant to locate the female body within the context of the family so as to arrive at a more comprehensive assessment of the performative role culture plays within the family as a structure. The novel traces the cultural inscriptions which intend to codify the female body within specific significations and it appears interesting to note that such inscriptions also reflect the manner in which any given culture works on individual lives that comprise an awareness of one's own body including sexuality, disease and death. Sudhir Kakar in *Intimate Relations* refers to Winnicott while asserting the importance of cultural injunctions in assigning a specific place to the woman within the family which very often takes into consideration the female body and its sexuality rather than considering the woman as an individual capable of a dignified existence. "Cultural injunctions become significant for the family . . . the way we arrange our families practically shows what our culture is like, just as a picture of the face portrays the individual, then beliefs around sexuality in marriage gain a wider significance for the understanding of culture" (21).

If sexuality is generally understood as referring to "a person's sexual proclivities, and the practices in which s/he accordingly engages" (Cavallaro 108) then Saru's experience of being a woman within her family, first with her parents and secondly, with her husband and the consequent understanding she arrives at regarding her own body provides ample interpretation of the patriarchal culture within which

she finds herself situated. Her experience of being a girl and growing into womanhood with the natural biological changes and thereafter being a wife – all these shape her understanding of what it is to be a woman in the given socio-cultural milieu. Having harboured a sense of shame and indignity against the female body Saru was unhappy with the whole process of growing up: "A kind of shame engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother . . . If you are a woman, I don't want to be one, I thought resentfully, watching her body" (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 62). This resentfulness gives way to a sense of triumph in her body as Saru realises that it is the natural course her body is taking to grow into womanhood and there is a sense of exultation in her as she comes into terms with her sexuality. She realises how she "was suddenly released from a prison of fears and shames. Things fell, with a miraculous exactness, into place. I was a female. I was born that way . . . . I learnt . . . To take in male stares, and admiration with outward equanimity and secret pride" (63). However, the same body which acts as an agency of pleasure to Saru also becomes the source of pain and humility when she finds herself as a wife. Marriage becomes a crucial pointer to the element of inequality which underlies its structure and the female body which inhabits the terrain of the dominated becomes the template on which the painful experiences are imprinted. As Baral notes

> marriage, instead of leading Sarita to the avenue of all enjoyments, gets fractured where bodily gratification becomes an illusion and remains a brute force. To her, marriage is not an idealisation but a relationship that is sexually governed . . . . To be a woman, thus, is to embrace forced sickness, both physical and mental. (91)

Saru's understanding of the experiences of her life is delivered to her through her body. She deliberates upon the ultimate truth of life – the human body which may be viewed as essential to all experiences and accumulation of knowledge through which an individual is able to produce meaning of her situatedness in the context of her personal life and in relation to others. Saru's initial sense of perfect happiness within her relationship with Manohar and their marriage eventually gives way to a feeling of repulsion which she experiences through her body as she realises that Manohar had been indulging in sadism afflicting her with immense pain and discomfiture both physical and mental. Manohar's attitude may be attributed to the fact that he could not accept Saru's transgressing of her conventional marginality and in her successful career of a doctor she tends to shift towards the centre positioning Manohar's in a supposedly precarious situation which produces negative emotions in him. Deshpande's purpose in delineating the Saru-Manohar relationship in such a light may be understood not only as necessary to the progress of the narrative but also to assert her belief that with a change of time and situation in the collective experience of living, there ought to be a wholesome change of perspective and attitude towards culture and society. She observes in *Writing from the Margin*:

> That a great number of people now live in nuclear families, that many women have to go out and work, that stresses are making relationships more vulnerable . . . It is the context of this reality that changes are required in man-woman relationship. And therefore, the issue of gender equality, which embraces everything from female foeticide . . . and rape, has to be faced. (85)

In *Roots and Shadows* the novelist presents as in the earlier novel, the issues of womanhood, identity and self rooted within the familial milieu including marriage.

The novel delineates Indu, the central protagonist's sense of personal crisis which she experiences within marriage. Like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu also returns home after a prolonged self-imposed absence and in this occasion she realises what it takes to be a woman and how social and cultural injunctions create and impose meanings to the image of the woman within the context of the family and society in general. Marriage functions within certain codes that require of the woman conformity to the socially accepted codes which very often are gender circumscribed. Indu's present life in her paternal family enables her to read the lives of the other women in the family as well her own, revealing to her how the biological fact of being a woman becomes a culturally constructed image that restricts a woman's spatial mobility and intellectual flourishing. Located within the family a woman is left with very little choice, she is trained and regulated into a life of silence and passivity and it is the body which is subject to such social and cultural codification.

The novel opens with Indu coming back to her home with which she had once severed her ties owing to her marriage with Jayant whereby she hoped to attain contentment and experience the true meaning of love. Through Indu the novelist also addresses issues pertaining to female sexuality and analyses how such facets in a woman would appear contrary to the socially and culturally accepted idea of femininity. Indu detests the idea of growing up into a woman and the significations associated with it and she recalls how she "had raged against the rules which had made [her] an outcast three days in a month" (*Roots and Shadows* 119). Considering the body to be the medium of all experience of living, female bodies emerge as the text of culture which reflects on the nature of the cultural and familial milieu. The experience of living within the framework of marriage also carries deeper

connotations for Indu. The popular and generally accepted romanticism associated with marriage escapes her as she realises that "marriage is not a plain and simple contract, but it is part of a larger human relationship, which traverses through attraction, love, sex, sexuality, living together and a whole lot of other phases such as parenthood" (*Gendered Realities* 79). The woman situated within marriage is generally expected to be a partner in love whose silence and passivity enhances her femininity in conformity to the given familial and cultural system and makes her attractive to the male partner. Indu thus has an apprehension that her passionate bodily desire for her husband would arouse his dislike for her instead of reciprocal feeling. She speaks to Naren, her cousin, of her relationship with Jayant and how a natural feeling of love in her was not naturally accepted by him and how "he was shocked . . . it shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off . . . I've learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I'm passive. And unresponsive. I'm still and dead" (*Roots and Shadows* 83). Cultural givens within the familial set-up provides us with the images of femininity acceptable within marriage and otherwise which subtly works upon the body to create, in the process, docile bodies. However, Deshpande allows Indu to deviate from the given image when allowing her a fleeting moment in which she makes love to Naren. This momentary bodily relationship that Indu has with Naren reveals that intense passion which one experiences through the body also naturally occurs in a woman. Indu is however, unable to accept the truth of this without a sense of guilt as she says "[w]hat ancient guilt still lie in us, I wondered, that makes us, even today, associate bodily desires with guilt and shame?" (*Roots and Shadows* 148).

The idea of love, generally believed to be fulfilled through the body is rejected by Indu as she realises how such ideas intend to contain a woman's body and her sexuality within a framework of regulations which are shaped by specific societal and cultural needs that are biased towards women given the patriarchal nature of the orthodox Hindu family. She believes that all satisfying idea of love is possible "[o]nly in books and movies . . . . [that] it's a big fraud, a hoax, that's what it is . . ." (157). She asserts that truth is different from this image of love that popular imagination has conjured in conformity with the cultural and social milieu of the society. For her "the sexual instinct . . . that is true. The maternal instinct . . . that's true too. Self-interest, self-love . . . they're the basic truths" (158 ellipses in original). She is aware of the disparity between man and woman in this context that a man within such a socio-cultural milieu is awarded a greater mobility and freedom to be his own self and that images of masculinity contribute in a positive manner towards the flourishing of individuality in a man. Indu's contends that the society and family situated within it imposes certain behavioral codes which aim to discipline the woman into believing and internalising the given codes in a manner that appears naturally given to the woman after prolonged years of deliberate practice. Thus she says "[a]s a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they had said, for a female to live and survive . . . [t]here had to be, if not the substance, at least the shadow of submission" (158). Her relationship with Jayant also requires of her this notion of meek submission and perhaps it is for this that Jayant could not come to terms with her assertion of bodily desire which to him must have appeared 'unwomanly'. The idea of femininity is established within

the Hindu familial context and as Jasbir Jain contends "is constructed through myth and traditional role models, defined by rituals and social customs and located in the biological functions of the body" (*Gendered Realities* 93). Indu finally is able to emerge from this life of self-deception as she is empowered now that she is the heiress to Akka's legacy and her subsequent decisions reflect the changes that have filtered into the family and society. The fact that Akka chooses Indu amongst all members of the family despite her being a woman is representative of the need to acknowledge that reality differs from prescribed codes and that women with their education and knowledge of the given system can actively participate in the shared experience of living within the system.

That Long Silence is a novel which has for its subject once again, the multilayered web of family life and relationships. It may be argued that the novel is a commentary on a number of issues ranging from social division of sexual roles incorporated through the disciplining tactics of culture operating through the institution of the family, the concept of womanhood constructed through the female body and its specific lived experience which reinforces the fact that socio-cultural disparities exist in the lived situation and in a culture which is predominantly patriarchal the woman's experience of living needs careful examination and compassionate understanding. The narrative reaches the reader through the consciousness of Jaya, the central protagonist who is in a critical situation in her life when the novel opens. It is a crisis which arises due to Mohan, her husband's temporary loss of his job and Jaya says, ". . . finally it came to me after all, my own special disaster; it came like a prize packet, neatly tied with coloured ribbons, a gift to me from my husband" (4). This serves a turning point in Jaya's life which allows her

to introspect on her life – her past, present and her aspirations which were there in her but could not culminate into maturity as she had taken up the career of a wife.

Critical perspectives on this novel present multiple views which would provide the reader with valuable insight in understanding the novel. Several critical studies devoted to this novel (Behera; Pal; Sharma) invite the reader to examine the novel from a feminist stance while understanding how the injunction of silence functions in the lives of the women presented in the novel. The Indian family which is generally defined by patriarchy perpetrates the notion of silence and passivity which wield a major influence in disciplining a woman's life primarily through her body, restricting her freedom in terms of speech and mobility. The cultural texts that mould popular imagination continue to assert the dictum of silence and submission as essential to a woman within society and family. Deshpande's novel locates the women in this context while engaging in a realistic critique of Indian familial set-ups to reach an understanding that "the old value-constructs have become outdated and need to be modified and changed drastically. . . . The change is less evident, however, in ancient and tradition bound cultures like the Indian, where the male hegemony persists" (Sharma 109).

Adesh Pal's essay titled "*That Long Silence*: A Study in Displaced Anger" (1998) invites the reader to analyse the novel from a psychological perspective arguing that the predominantly feminist stance adopted by most of the critics provide an incomplete vision of the Deshpande's novels and the female characters thereof. He opines that "the feminist readings of her novels fail to probe into the serious psychological problems of her protagonists. Shashi Deshpande's concern is to explore the root cause of the fragmentation and the dichotomy of her characters and

explore what happens in the psyche of these heroines in the process of individuation" (120). It is significant that the measure of a woman's perfection is gauged through her body's capability to perform the functions which patriarchal culture has designed for her. Therefore, signs of womanhood with a perfect body complete in all its aspects including that of motherhood act as determinants in positioning the woman within the familial and societal hierarchy. Therefore, within the novel's fictional world characters like Vimala (Mohan's sister) and Vanitamami are doubly marginalised first, since they are women and secondly and more importantly, they are women who fail in their role of producing a child. Kusum too is a woman who remains confined in her own world, as a failure in womanly roles owing to her mental illness. These women in the novel display how the family affects enslavement of their being through their diseased bodies and also how familial imaginations work out their discrimination and subordination through their bodies. Such an approach to the female body may be attributed to the socio-cultural presumptions which define women in terms of their bodies and views women as more intimately connected to their corporeal selves allowing them very little possibility of autonomous existence and action. The body therefore becomes "a locus of discrimination" (Sheldon 15).

On the other hand, critics like Guru Charan Behera argue that *That Long Silence* is a novel dealing with issues of female bonding so as to reveal a sense of solidarity in understanding that the experience of living that they are subjected to, is in the main, a product of the patriarchal principles which provide the essential framework to the society and its culture. In his essay "The Multicoloured Patchwork Quilt" (2005) Behera undertakes a study of the narrative pattern of the novel and remarks that it "is a representation of a woman's struggle in a society marked by male

supremacist ideology and of her situation as a woman writer in a patriarchal literary tradition. . . . is a configuration of various stories, situations and shades of experiences and feelings, reminiscences, fantasies, visions, imaginings and above all, comments and reflections on life and literature. . ." (131). The act of writing which reflects the individual's sense of autonomy allowing freedom of expression also appears to be under restraint with the imposition of silence on the woman and this shows how patriarchy regulates and disciplines the female being into an existence of silence where the only speech permitted is the one that conforms to the socio-cultural injunctions laid down. Deshpande alludes to various myths and stories to establish the idea that silence has been advised to women throughout the ages. She evokes a mythical incident between Satyabhama and Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* in which Draupadi advises the former to remain silent so as to retain her husband's attention. This silence has been sustained in the lived lives of women since the mythical past and in this context Deshpande observes:

> *Be silent*. There it is, the advice for all womankind, not just on 'how to please a husband', but on how to survive. This injunction of silence weighs down the entire history of women; in fact, it explains the huge blank that is woman's history . . . . women have to remain silent even about the small world that is theirs. (*Writing from the Margin* 182, original emphases)

That Long Silence as a novel is certainly about feminist issues, about women's silences, about myths and legends that reinforce these silences but it is also significantly, a novel which contemplates on intense issues such as the woman and her body, the cultural meanings created around woman's sexuality and disease which

render the female body peripheral. At the heart of the novel lies Jaya's reading of the socio-cultural construct of marriage which for all the discrepancies it legitimises, becomes for her an institution that needs to be questioned. Jaya reflects on Vanitamami's advice which she had given to Jaya. "Remember, Jaya", she had said, "a husband is like a sheltering tree" (32). This advice that Vanitamami gives to Jaya remains as a refrain throughout the novel. At various points of time in her life Jaya examines the truth and validity of such an approach. She realises much later in her life "After so many years, the words came back to me. A sheltering tree. Without the tree, you are dangerously unprotected and vulnerable . . . And so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing . . ." (32). The whole process of nourishing and keeping the tree flourished also entails that the woman as a wife within the partnership sacrifices herself and is subjected to passivity. It is also of prime significance that to attempt an understanding of the situatedness of the woman in the family, one needs to examine the cultural injunctions which regulate the family.

> The cultural version of what a family is meant to be is very different from the real-life version, which, as it takes off from the blueprint, develops in various directions subject to individual vagaries, strengths and weaknesses, to bodily hungers and capabilities, to illness or desire and fertility and barrenness. Vanitamami is childless and nurtures a cancer in her womb; Mohan's mother undergoes almost a yearly pregnancy until finally she aborts and, a week later, dies . . . . In the next generation, history is repeated if it is the ever pregnant mother who dies, later her barren daughter, Vimala bleeds to death with her ailment unattended to. And this time, it is the 'convent' educated Jaya who

terminates her third pregnancy without the knowledge of her husband. (*Gendered Realities* 45)

Shashi Deshpande works towards a revelation of the ground realities of the family and it is towards this end that she employs an exploration of marriage and sexuality: "Marriage is viewed not as self-fulfilment, but as fulfilment of a social and familial duty where the body is foregrounded as a commodity" (*Gendered Realities* 74). In *That Long Silence*, the central character Jaya agrees to marry Mohan because she feels that marriage is the destined point towards which a woman's life proceeds. Being informed of the family's approval of Mohan as her husband she realises that her opinion had not been sought as it had been taken for granted that she wound not have any reservations. Jaya realises that marriage is the destiny waiting for all women. She observes "And then, as we grew into young women, we realized it was not love, but marriage that was the destiny waiting for us" (91). And much later as she makes an effort to understand what inspired her to marry Mohan she realises that ". . . all this is actually a futile exercise, trying to figure out why I married Mohan; the truth is that he had decided to marry me, I had only to acquiesce . . . . We were married, we were husband and wife, so everything according to him was permissible. He had taken it for granted that I thought the same way" (95). Jaya's introspective observation makes a telling comment on what marriage as a socio-cultural institution expects and imposes upon the woman. It is not only that Jaya's opinion is not sought for but the fact that she has been understood to conform to the decisions taken by others on her behalf illustrates well the hegemony that culture admits in the institution of marriage. Thus situated within such a structure Jaya analyses how "he (Mohan) had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his

plans . . .” (11) and therefore, their relationship within marriage appears to her as that of “Two bullocks yoked together . . . it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful; and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?” (12).

Jaya’s view of marriage includes within its fold the roles, subjectivity and sexuality regarding which the woman’s voice appears to be culturally muted and is internalised by the collective lives of the people in the society. As far as the question of female sexuality is concerned, it is not only Jaya who is subjected to a position of acquiescence but others like Saru, Mira, Kalpana too, have their individual experiences which are gendered and inclined towards the privilege of the male counterparts. It is owing to cultural injunctions regarding female sexuality that a woman has a very complex relationship with her body during the various stages of life she goes through and her understanding and acceptance of the hegemonic inscriptions finally culminates with her marriage. In this context Jasbir Jain’s observations in *Writing Women Across Cultures* (2002) is worth mentioning:

> Women’s biological presence is muted . . . The exclusion of women from priesthood, and from social interaction during menstruation, the centering of creative energy towards the fulfilment of male sexuality are all symbolic of male control. The flow of female blood has traditionally been viewed as a source of pollution for which women are made to feel guilty. It is perceived as a failure to control the body . . . Woman’s dharma is restricted to stree-dharma, the duty and religiosity of a married woman who is guided by her duty to her husband, and the four stages (ashrams) of a man’s life are compressed for a woman into the duty of following her husband. (14)

The Binding Vine like other novels of Shashi Deshpande opens at a moment of crisis – Urmila (Urmi) the central character is seen grieving her infant daughter's death in the consoling warmth of her mother and her friend turned sister-in-law Vanaa. Critical opinions with regard to the interpretation of the novel vary and critics appear to read it along the feminist and postcolonialist lines (Guttal; Khan; Sivaraman). Female bonding and female camaraderie are significant issues that are present in the novel which enable the reader to arrive at an enriched understanding of the female experience, the lived lives of women belonging to the past and the present within the pressures of familial relationships within the Indian society. Shanthi Sivaraman in her essay "Women in *The Binding Vine*" (1998) engages upon a feminist study of the novel and observes that "The inner most recesses of a woman's heart are brought to light through the perspectives of the protagonist, Urmi . . . The experience is one which minutely analyses all the relationships a woman in the Indian society is subjected to" (134). Sivaraman is of the opinion that the novel has at its centre the issues of death and rape which are illustrated through the various characters and other events in the novel. Further, there is also a comment on sexuality, both male and female, which produces varied signification for both the male and the female. This disciplining of the woman which she attains through her body subjected to cultural impositions, is a significant attribute of the female experience in Indian socio-cultural life and is a crucial facet which Sivaraman appears to have overlooked in her reading of the novel. Vijaya Guttal's postcolonial approach in "Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* and *A Matter of Time*" (2005) focuses on the mechanics of patriarchy within the family and familial relationships in general and elaborates how the female body becomes the site of patriarchal control. *The Binding Vine*, besides dealing with women's issues, also brings to the fore several other

relevant issues which illustrate Deshpande's mastery over her craft and her superb ability as a novelist in enabling the seemingly repetitive issue of woman's problems to attain a different dimension altogether. In this novel the reader experiences an exclusively female world where the theme of female bonding is celebrated through an illustration of female camaraderie, the collective experience of femaleness within the specific socio-cultural sphere of the family and it may be said that "[t]he 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" (171). In Deshpande's narrativisation one may decipher the novelist's need to assert:

> … there is a genealogy of women. There is a genealogy of women within our family . . . . [g]iven our exile in the family of the father-husband, we tend to forget this genealogy of women, and we are often persuaded to deny it. Let us try to situate ourselves within this female genealogy so as to conquer and keep our identity. (Irigaray 421)

In Urmi's intense effort to know her dead mother-in-law perhaps lies her desire to connect herself with another woman belonging to the past as Urmi's says, ". . . because Mira in some strange way stays with me, I know she will never go . . . It is Mira who is now taking me by hand and leading me . . ." (*The Binding Vine* 135). Therefore, Urmi's obsession with Mira's life, her preoccupation with Mira's poems reveal her intense desire to rediscover the life of her now dead mother-in-law and her attempt to understand the sameness of the situation even the present. Carrying the idea of female bonding further the experience of all women in the novel including Kalpana, Mira, Urmi and Sakutai convey a sense of oneness and continuity in that they have all been subject to the dominant injunctions of patriarchy at some point of

time in their lives. The idea of female solidarity remains one of the fundamental issues with regard to *The Binding Vine* and its importance in understanding the significant issues pertaining to the woman's lived experience within the enclosed space of the family, cannot be denied perhaps because in no other novel did Deshpande deal with it in such an elaborate manner so that it becomes the indispensable tool with which to interpret the present situation. It is the bonding that the women share in the novel which enlightens them on the codes of patriarchy that are practised within the family and the unique manner in which discursive practices within the society and family have gained success in making generations of women since past to silently submit and internalise the patriarchal norms to such an extent that they appear natural and just. Cultural operations within the family and society habitually condition the woman into accepting and internalising a life of silent submission and therefore she remains confined within her enclosed world in conformity with patriarchal injunctions inflicted upon her and as Deshpande puts it

> [W]e are already burdened with a baggage that has been given to us. The fact is we don't start with a picture of ourselves on a clean slate. Inscribed on it are already things told to us by others. There's also what we read, what we gather from the ideas and expectations around us, what we imagine and dream. (*Writing from the Margin* 87)

Amrita Bhalla's volume titled *Shashi Deshpande* includes a study of *The Binding Vine* besides other novels by Deshpande. As far as this novel is concerned Bhalla feels that it "is about life and living, about love and possession, about death and . . . the novel is also about controlling women's minds and bodies" (49). It is this attempt to control woman's mind and body that finds expression in the theme of rape

which once again appears to be at the centre of the narrative and is shown to happen in the past, in the life of Urmi's mother-in-law Mira and which recurs in the present, in the life of Kalpana, the young daughter of Shakutai, a domestic help. In her effort to read the past from the writings of her now dead mother-in-law, Urmi suddenly realises "what has happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too. It runs through all her writing – a strong clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married" (*The Binding Vine* 63). Deshpande endeavours to analyse marriage as a socio-cultural institution and examines how the rights and authority it entails to both man and woman varies in the lived lives through the life of Mira. As Jasbir Jain observes "For Deshpande, one aspect of an arranged marriage is the confrontation with the unknown . . . The focus is on the body. It is the traumatic aspect of this physical relationship that is foregrounded through the concept of rape within marriage" (*Gendered Realities* 88). The meaning of marriage differs for the man and the woman as the latter is allowed only to remain as a passive partner within its fold unlike her male counterpart. "In other words, with marriage a woman's whole being took on the characteristics of her husband's" (Nabar 103).

As a novel *The Binding Vine* offers multiple perspectives in relation to the woman's vision presented in the text. Deshpande's focus in this novel too, remains concentrated on the woman's experience of living in familial relationships but it reveals not only the silences inflicted on woman as a class but also "silences they sometimes break and the stories they choose to tell" (Bhalla 50). There is a similarity in the structure of the novel with other novels of Deshpande in that this novel too, opens with a crisis in the life of Urmi, the female character in the lead. The deep sense of personal loss on her daughter Anu's death initiates a journey into the process

of self discovery for Urmi. In this journey she learns to live with her loss, makes an effort to understand the unanswered puzzles from her past including an analytical exploration of her marriage and her relationship with her husband Kishore and all her search for a renewed meaning in her life gains significance after two important events which she comes across in her life at present. Her accidental discovery of her now dead mother-in-law's poems and her involvement with Shakutai whose daughter Kalpana had been raped brutally by her uncle unleashes before her eyes the misappropriation of the female body that society and culture allows within and outside of marriage as revealed through the lives of Mira and Kalpana. Rape is a dominant theme in this novel which occurs twice throughout the narrative – once in Mira's life, as she becomes the victim of marital rape like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and in the second instance, in Kalpana's life when she is subjected to the brutality of rape again within the private sphere of the family. Mira's life reveals how within familial codes of conduct prescribed by culture, the female body is subjugated to silence in a manner that violent sexual behaviour within marriage too appears natural and given since "[in discourse] woman is always on the side of passivity . . . whenever a family model is brought into play . . . . you are led right back – to the father" (Cixous 265) and therefore within the hierarchised structure of the family the female always appears to be ordered into a position of passivity and silence. Shakutai's fear in making public Kalpana's rape is in fact the fear of breaking the long interiorised silence which culture associates with a female's dignity and thus she imposes restraint upon herself and even Urmi so as to safeguard her daughter's reputation. The lives of the women in this novel focus primarily on the theme of silence and the mechanics of culture that disciplines the women into an unquestioning acceptance of the silences imposed upon them. That culture and society embraces the

female body into its patriarchal folds and demands an unquestioning submission to it, is revealed in the prevalent cultural practice of changing the bride's name with marriage and needless to say that such practices legitimise "[t]he appropriation of women's bodies and minds is initiated at the time of marriage with the change in name; [and] the survival of past traditions in today's India is made plain" (Bhalla 54).

The Binding Vine has an overpowering presence of women characters and it reflects a sense of sisterhood, female bonding while sharing the experience of oppression and victimisation in a predominantly patriarchal society. The presence of men is made felt through the power they possess and exercise given to them by the society and culture to which they belong. The novel also makes a powerful statement regarding the way in which culture appropriates the female body while reducing it to an inferior subject which may be worked upon through the patriarchal principles. It is this context that the theme of rape which finds expression in the novel, gains significance. Jasbir Jain observes,

> . . . rape is a dominant image. It is the imposition of male will upon an unwilling female body which is the violent act which disrupts relationships. In the movie that Vanaa and Urmi watch with their children, rape is committed on an outsider, but in Mira's case it is rape within marriage and later, in Kalpana'a case, when Prabhakar, her aunt's husband, rapes her, it is almost a near incestuous situation. The impossibility of trust in any relationship, the consciousness that members of a family need to be protected from their own members subverts the concept of a safe hierarchical family. (*Gendered Realities* 53-54)

In *Feminist Theory* (2000) bell hooks states, ". . . sexism is perpetrated by institutional and social structures, by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress, and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity. . ." (43). However through Urmi, the novelist appears to be making an attempt to voice a protest against the internalisation and perpetration of patriarchal biases through her reaction and response to the issue of rape in both the cases of Mira and Kalpana as well. In Shakutai one may trace the voice of the victim as understood by bell hooks who act in connivance with the dominant ideology by a total internalisation of the values and meanings created by it. Therefore the reader witnesses a Shakutai lamenting after Kalpana's rape, finding fault in her own daughter who she felt ". . . was so self-willed . . . she went her way…walking out, head in the air, caring for nobody. It's all her fault, Urmila, all her fault . . ." (147). While Urmi's response to Shakutai's view may be seen as an attempt to subvert the given patriarchal undertones when she bursts out speaking for Kalpana "She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn't do anything wrong. Why can't you see that? Are you blind? It's not her fault, no, not her fault at all . . . The man, the man who did this to her. Don't you see, can't you see he's the wrongdoer?" (148), Urmi's approach is assertive of the fact that unlike Shakutai, she is no longer willing to comply with the conformist connotation ascribed to such an indignified action. Through Urmi the novelist desires to affirm that "Women need to know that they can reject the powerful's definition of their reality – that they can do so even if they are poor, exploited, or trapped in oppressive circumstances. They need to know that the exercise of this basic personal power is an act of resistance and strength . . ." (hooks 92)

Moving On deals with some of Deshpande's consistent concerns – family, relationships with specific thrust on men and women as individuals, death, disease and sexuality. The novel however, charts a difference from her earlier renditions in that she engages a male character besides the central female character, in the process of taking the narrative forward in time, and the reader is acquainted, to a considerable extent, with the male point of view too. Deshpande's novels predominantly present female concerns developed along the base of the family which are presented, to a large extent, only through a female narrator and her version of experience in the collective community of family life. But *Moving On* adopts an altogether different approach while allowing the narrative to emerge and progress through the diaries of Badri Narayan, the father of Manjari, the female character in the lead. Parallel to Baba's narration through his diary writing, is Manjari's narration which provides impetus to the progress of the novel.

In her essay entitled "*Moving On*: Individual Autonomy and Self Realization" (2005) Chanchala Naik observes that, "Deshpande weaves her narrative around multiple acts of transgression while bringing into contestation self/other, man/woman, bone/body, physical/emotional, sexual/ethical, individual/social binaries" (218). The narrative realm of this novel reveals the events of betrayals and violations in individual lives and illustrates how such betrayals and violations had, in the long run affected the life of the family and the members therein. It is Manjari's grandfather, a Brahmin, with whom the event of betrayal and violation is initiated into the text since he marries a non-Brahmin, a Harijan, and adopts Gandhism which went against the specificities of caste and honour permitted within his cultural location. The event of violation and betrayal continues into the next generation as Manjari's father, Badri

Narayan too, marries outside his caste. These betrayals that are recorded in Baba's diary which now emerge as a new source if information and it unsettles Manjari's previous ideas and understanding regarding her family and specifically about Baba and Mai (her mother), her parents. From his writings Baba evolves as a person who was as passionate with his profession as with his wife and Manjari realises how within the relationship Mai and Baba shared as man and woman, Mai singularly lacked the physical passion that Baba possessed and thereby gave way to a larger sense of disharmony that pervaded this relationship. Deshpande's portrayal of the husband wife relationship in context of Mai and Baba appears to subvert the conventional social understanding that a woman seems more intimately passionate about her body and its desires. In a completely contradictory light it is Baba who is shown to possess bodily desire intensely and perhaps this accounts for his passion for the human body otherwise also. It is also through their bodies that Mai and Baba play out their distinctive roles in the familial drama of subordination and domination within the limited space of the family.

As the narrative proceeds the reader is aware that Manjari is not ready to passively conform to a life of silence and passivity which encroaches upon her sense of self-autonomy. Thus, Deshpande presents in Manjari the traces of an emerging strong woman who feels responsible for all decisions she makes and displays courage enough even to confront external assault to her body. Throughout the novel Manjari emerges as a woman capable of making her choices, at times even in the face of her parents' disagreement, and stands by her decision till the end. She effectively exercises her personal autonomy despite socio-cultural constraints while taking several important decisions of her life. She faces the wrath of her parents first, when

she decides to give up her studies and settle down with Shyam who did not apparently match her parents' expectation. Unfortunately, Shyam dies and Manjari faces numerous struggles to survive, now with her son. Her life winds through difficult and trying times which do not deter her from moving ahead. And finally she also learns to drive despite warnings from Raja, her close friend who longed to marry her so as to provide her with a secured life. To meet the personal financial requirements of her life she installs a computer at her home and types manuscripts for others when she does not get a satisfying employment. She even thinks of running her car as a taxi; she faces the land mafia who threatens to rape her if she did not give in to their coercion leading to the selling of her ancestral home. Even in such trying times Manjari shows great tenacity to hold on to her decision and fight back in her own way and rejects offers of help from Raja and her children.

The novel presents Manjari, the central character in a strong light and the reader is also made aware that she refuses to suppress her sexuality and chooses to give in to the demands of her body and indulges in a sexual relationship with her tenant. Significantly, within this relationship too, it is Manjari who lays down the rule and her tenant has to accept in conformity. Manjari says "He tries to speak, to say something, but I stop him abruptly, harshly. I don't want to hear his voice either. Only the body, his body, only my body, my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensations (257). It is this assertion of her sexuality that Raja could not readily understand and accept and he gradually drifts away from the close friendship which he shared with her earlier. Though Manjari does not resist the demands of her sexuality and eventually ends up in sexual indulgence in defiance of the cultural regulations imposed upon the body, it is the voice of patriarchy emerging through the characters

of Baba and Raja against which Manjari exhibits resistance at various points of her life in her search for an autonomous individual self. However, given the socio-cultural compulsions and the situatedness of the individual within a particular relationship and the family in the larger context, exclusive autonomy is rather hard to attain and it is only relational autonomy that an individual can seek for. Manjari's decision to refuse Raja's marriage proposal and her tenacious holding on to the property displaying a rare show of courage against the mafia and driving her own car which reflects an increased access to mobility – these events of her personal life may be read as her effort to break free from the patriarchal mould of familial space. Moreover, even when she concedes to physical demands of her body while entering into a physical relationship with her young tenant, she dictates her terms to her partner, moving out of it when she wanted to – such action on her part reflects her inner strength, a woman who is able, in all sense, to take control of her personal and social life, capable of reclaiming her body within a particular relationship, representative of the new woman of the present age endowed with a greater sense of autonomy.

The body emerges not only as a text of female sexuality but also as the base on which meanings concerning marginalised bodies are inscribed. Marginalisation of the body occurs at various levels. The essentially patriarchal character of Indian social and cultural life tends to envisage the male body as iconic, reflecting strength and perfection, against which the female body emerges a poor contender keeping in mind the latter's biological compulsions. The natural and biological facts pertaining to the female body tends to be muted through the cultural approach and injunctions which ultimately aim at making the female body appear inferior and liable to be under the

surveillance of a comparatively superior male and the society's cultural requirements in general. While equating woman with nature and the man with culture society has, almost universally, facilitated the exclusion of woman "from the world of business and technology and also helped establish male control over a woman's sexuality" (*Writing Women* 22). Interpreted from such a perspective, one can then understand Raja's anxiety and unwillingness to allow Manjari to learn to drive a car, have a job of her and even live on her own terms.

Moving On thus exhibits a marked shift of perspective in the narrative in terms of sexuality and the body from Deshpande's earlier stance as evinced in the texts discussed above. In these texts the novelist deals with the body with relevance to sexuality while understanding the body as a cultural text which reveals its subject position within culturally legitimised power equations. Deliberation upon issues such as death and disease that afflict the body and its social usefulness are interspersed throughout the texts which shows Deshpande's concern regarding the socio-cultural politics that aim at an ultimate codification of the body through various hegemonising injunctions. Although in this novel too, Deshpande's preoccupation with the family and human relationships remain at the core of the text, one may notice that the novelist appears to move away from the manner in which she had been consistently dealing with female body and sexuality focusing on issues such as motherhood and barrenness, rape and other mechanics of control exercised on the female body while attempting to read the cultural politics that which privileges the male body over the female. With *Moving On* Deshpande makes an effort to understand socio-cultural notions associated with the body, both male and female while employing the body as a medium of deeper philosophical speculation.

The novel also takes into consideration issues such as disease which afflict the body and attempts to metaphorically associate such a perspective to the overall health of the family which too, appears to be afflicted with diseases giving an impetus to her belief that like all other entities, the family too is not perfect and may suffer from various lapses and lack. Manjari observes "All families follow essentially the same path: a gradual distancing, a tapering off of the bonds, hostility and rivalries between siblings, expectations and disappointments that distance parents and children" (47). Manjari's reflection on the divisive forces that operate within the families may be considered as the parameters against which a family's overall health may be measured. Just as the human body is never perfect and carries within it the potential to be afflicted with disease and an imminent tendency to collapse, so also the family as a body may be viewed as having a potential to succumb to various pressures and eventually collapse. It becomes all the more important to remember that as an essential component of social and cultural life, the family can provide sustenance only to a certain extent. While speaking to Manjari on the strength of the human bone Baba says "Everything is strong upto a point. The only difference is where that point is. Nothing is so strong that it will never break" (47). Much later in her life Manjari recalls how her family had disintegrated gradually which reflected that fact that the overall health of the family was at issue. In her attempt to make a diagnosis of the disease that rendered her family ill, she realises "Our family was given no time to heal; there was no time to pick up the pieces, to align them. . . Perhaps we suffered, to use Baba's words, a comminuted fracture, the bones splintering into tiny, sharp, hurting pieces. Or was it something quite different, a cancer that had been growing inside, invisible and painless, until it announced itself . . ." (48).

It is not only Manjari's family that alludes to a cancerous degeneration of the institution of the family but also BK and Kamala's family which we see through Manjari's eyes. Kamala epitomises perfection in whatever she does as far as her family comprising her husband and children are concerned. The sense of perfection and propriety within the family vanishes gradually with a sad and quiet realisation that one of their daughters Hemi is retarded. Manjari sadly recalls their family and the eventual degeneration it undergoes affecting, in the process the individual lives of Kamala and BK and other members in it as well. Manjari recalls:

> But I saw this new avatar of Kamala myself when I visited her. . . The shady lane in Matunga where they lived seems unchanged, the building the same, if a little shabbier, but the house inside was unrecognizable. It was a total contrast to the one that had welcomed us so hospitably. . . . It's a sad house now . . . . that Kamala, once a perfect housewife, had given up coping . . . . But it was the tension in the house that shocked me, the hostility among the three who lived in it and the angry silence . . . It's Hemi who's the cause of it all . . . . It's quite clear now that Hemi is not normal. (92-93)

There are other characters affected with the pain and ignominy of some kind of disease that ultimately directs these bodies towards the periphery in the context of the family and the society in general. Manjari's maternal grandmother Ajji who was a loveable person, turns senile during her later years and her senility affects her work – the quilts which Ajji stitched mirrored a sense of homogeneity in design when she was not mentally disabled reflecting her expertise in it. However, Ajji's senility later affects the quality of her quilts bestowing them with a sense of incongruity and as Manjari comments, "Senility changed Ajji from a silent, peaceful woman into a

ceaselessly babbling one. And the quilts became a haphazard patching together of old rags, untidy stitches going every which way, large gaping holes showing . . .” (126)

The novel brings to the fore Baba’s initial admiration of the human body as Manjari remembers how his “admiration was intense and fervent. He had absolute faith in the perfection of the human body . . . He sang praises . . . of the symmetry of the body. A symmetry that was not just aesthetic, but functional as well . . . . the super efficient back-up system” (23). Deshpande initiates a different point of view through Baba who does not seem to present a gendered view of the body. In him one may see a love for the human body which for him was the ultimate epitome of balance and harmony and all this perfectly “ordered to a purpose” (107). Baba also appears to realise that it is through the body that an individual may deliver meaning to the experience of living. It is significant to observe that the relationship that Manjari’s parents share do not seem to project a critical reflection upon cultural practices. Rather, through Baba’s writings, the novelist seems to dwell upon the body as possessing a natural capability to passionately experience desire and sexuality through marital relationship and the body is viewed as the ultimate medium of all experience. However, the same body meets its end in death and disease and thus puts to doubt all beliefs associated with the perfection of the human body. After the death of Vasu, Manjari’s mother, Baba embarks upon a renewed deliberation in his effort to come to terms with the fact that his beloved wife had to succumb to death finally after going through a painful journey of gradual decadence of the body. Baba is led to a deeper philosophical realisation as reads the Upanishads and is subsequently able to adopt a detached view while absorbing the “idea of the body being only the outer covering, within it the essence, the unseen formless essence . . . of life unwinds . . . . believed in

the body as a supreme assertion of creation…that the human body itself is a privilege" (112).

In her latest novel *In The Country of Deceit*, Deshpande's treatment of the body appears to transcend the paradigms of conventional morality where she has developed the concept of adult love between a married man and an unmarried woman and also shows the couple indulging in physical relationship without social sanction that comes through marriage. The issue of love and the physical demands that it makes upon the body is a very complex theme to work with since the former is an intensely personal choice and has an emotional side to it; love cannot happen with deliberate decisions taken by the individual involved, it just happens. On the other hand, the physical demands of the body tend to be bracketed within the norms of society and culture in order that such physical indulgence is legitimised with social and familial approval. While dealing with the theme of love through the central character of Devyani and Ashok, the District Police Superintendent, in the nondescript town of Rajnur, Deshpande perhaps intends to reveal how as social beings not only our bodies are subject to cultural inscriptions but even our personal and intensely individual emotions are also subject to such inscriptions. In this context it may be mentioned that the feeling of love that Devyani and Ashok admit towards each other is a very natural phenomenon and this natural feeling is subject to value judgement within the conventional worldview recognised in the Indian social and familial order. It may not be incorrect to say that the nature/culture divide exercises a decisive role in regulating our behaviour as socially responsible individuals and the fate that Devyani and Ashok's love meet with, may be seen as the result of culture

overpowering nature and the hegemony of institutionalised value system which constantly supervises individual actions.

With the theme of adult love at its center the novel continues to reflect the Deshpande's fascination and preoccupation with human emotions, familial relationships and the experience of living in the Indian societal realm. The small town of Rajnur provides her with a perfect locale to explore the lived lives and relationships which her characters share. Deshpande brings in a cross section of a typical small town society with their multilayered and varying lifestyles which include a former actress Rani, Sindhu her aunt whom the reader meets through the letters she writes to Devyani and also a section of people who act as land mafia – all situated in the sleepy town of Rajnur. Deshpande's preoccupation with human relationships is also reflected here in this novel but with a difference in that the relationship she intends primarily to examine in this novel do not belong to the category of man-woman relationship within marriage and the institution of family. Here family ties remain as a backdrop and Deshpande takes us into the world of love which happens between two adults, perhaps to explore how human beings receive such associations while situated within the limits of society within a given cultural system. Another aspect that emerges as unconventional in this novel is the fact that bodily desire appears to be accepted as natural once the feeling of love is admitted towards an individual and its expression is found in the physical relationship that Devyani and Ashok shares albeit with the knowledge that such a relationship would not receive the sanction of the society and that marriage too would be an impossible dream and it is perhaps this understanding that is reflected in Sindhu's letter to Devyani, "*Collective experience has value, individual experience has none*" (*In the*

Country of Deceit 41, emphases in original). Sindhu's letter to Devyani also allows the reader to contemplate upon the corporeality of the body, the body is our route to all experience of this material world. Sindhu who suffers from breast cancer reveals to Devyani:

> the body is important and so are the demands of the body . . . [o]ur country does not allow women to fulfil these desires without marriage. (And yet, do you know that here is a line in the Upanishad which says that the generating organ is the centre of all pleasures?. . . ananda . . .) I want you to think of this. Remember, this is a very natural feeling, a very natural desire and you have a right to expect your life to contain this ananda as well. (43)

Within the cultural and social meanings associated with an intensely personal emotion such as love it needs to be remembered that Indian society and culture does not allow and approve relationships that exist outside the institution of marriage. It is marriage then that becomes a necessary precursor to a physical relationship where one encounters an intense scrutiny of relationships positioned within marriage which reflect on the nature of the family. And after indulging in a love relationship with Ashok, after sharing intimate physical relationship Devyani has to acknowledge the fact that their relationship would be doomed to failure since it would not receive the consent from the social and familial sphere within the given system. She pens down her inner feelings in her letter to Ashok towards the end of the narrative where she confesses

> I don't know how to address you . . . [t]hat's the problem. There are no words for what you are to me, for what you mean to me. I have no right to use any of the words I want to say. Do you remember my telling you on our first day

> together that I had been thinking all night of right and wrong? I knew even then that nothing could be right between us, that everything was wrong. The word love can't change anything . . . [t]he wrong remains a wrong. (236)

It is evident that cultural and social practices not only intend to regulate human body in terms of physical existence but also human mind by establishing certain models of relationships and actions which conform to the given system and within which the individuals are expected to live their lives. Given such a situation what happens to individual emotions as the one experienced by Devyani and Ashok seems to be a vital question that this novel engages with. It is also significant to note that Devyani's recognition of her body's desire and her eventual gratification of it reflects the acknowledgement of her body's sexuality which is very intensely associated with her emotional attachment with Ashok, the man she loves. Whereas, in *Moving On* Manjari's bodily desire and its gratification which she accomplishes through her tenant is one without love and emotional attachment. Despite the presence of love in Ashok and Devyani's instance, both these instances however, impinge upon conventional morality owing to the fact that gratification of desire has not been sanctified by marriage and the society at large.

In all the novels that this chapter alludes to one cannot deny the intense critique of culture which Deshpande brings up through her reading of the body and more precisely, the female body situated within the Indian family and society in general. Throughout the dominant discourses that are prevalent in the society which are of prominence in the cultural lives of the people, the woman's body has been the subject of much deliberation. Indian consciousness seems to have been trained and regulated to view the woman either with a higher sense of esteem in which she is very

often imagined as the Mother Goddess or as an immoral being pregnant with lust and physical desires which highlight her more as only a sexual object. In India:

> the concept of dharma . . . excludes a woman not merely from power structures and social constructs but also from her own body, idea of a self as well as her sexuality. Also, whether decorated and exploited, or deprived and constrained, it is the female body which remains the stillpoint in this discourse. (Jain, *Writing Women* 77)

This explains the socio-cultural exclusion that a woman experiences in her life span within the domestic as well the public terrain of her lived life. It is not merely her exclusion, but also a denial of her very being that culture perpetrates through a series of regulatory texts which appear to overlook her as an individual with sexual desire negating in the process something that is naturally given, imposing on her various injunctions which aim at a total control of her sexuality with the aid of various myths and legends that deliver the image of the 'ideal'. It is however, significant to note that Deshpande's female protagonists are women who are educated and possess a sense critical judgement and throughout their lived lives they make an effort to contest, resist and if possible break free to a certain extent, from the unjustified demands made by culture and society upon their being.

It is significant to observe that all the novels considered in the present chapter portray a predominantly female vision since all her leading characters are women. It is therefore, a woman's vision through which Deshpande attempts to bring to light issues concerning her body and her sexuality. There are traditional versions of understanding in regard to the female body and sexuality voiced through characters such as Saru's mother, her patients and even her friend Smita in *The Dark Holds No*

Terrors for whom the meaning of their respective personal experiences are derived predominantly, in relation to the other sex. In Saru too, one may discover such an attitude in her initial experience in regard to her body and sexuality which, in her later life, leads her to question the apparently common destination of every woman in her life – that ultimate feminine dream of pleasing a superior male and find meaning through a complete merging of the self in the other. In *The Binding Vine* Deshpande reiterates the theme of marital rape through the portrayal of Mira's married life with her husband and brings to light Mira's life which succumbed to the pressures of domesticity and her innate talent of creativity faded unseen and unknown. It is much later when Urmi becomes Mira's daughter-in-law and the latter is no longer alive that Urmi visualises Mira through her poems and makes an effort to realise Mira's predicament. Rape recurs in the narrative once again when Shakutai's daughter Kalpana was raped by her uncle. And Urmi remarks to her dismay "I've suddenly realized – what has happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too" (63). The violation of the dignity of a woman, in Saru and Mira's instances, which are the extreme examples and even other women in these novels who are instilled with the virtue of sacrifice to such an extent that they tend to forget that they possess a being of their own, devoting their lives to the well-being of the family to the best possible limit. Such victimisation of women had been in fact, legitimised through the institution of marriage within which "Women are recognised as "body" – whether it is a body which fulfils the male sexual urge, or as a body which slogs until it drops down with fatigue . . . . Women are seen as objects of exchange or of assault, connected as their body is with the male concept of honour" (*Writing Women* 86).

That Long Silence delineates the concept of womanhood through several characters focusing on the manner in which cultural injunctions map the body into a definite regulatory performance. Jaya is the leading character in this novel who is witness to the lives of various women within her family who had suffered silently, others who had wielded tremendous power over the members of the family by virtue of their motherhood. Apart from these women are like Vanitamami who is childless and Kusum who is insane – these women occupy the periphery as they supposedly fail to fulfil the conventional duties allotted to them as their bodies do not conform to the ideal traditionally accepted by the society. One cannot indeed, overlook the fact that Deshpande has created several such characters who reflect physical shortcomings as in the case of Kusum. Jaya's measure of sanity and perfection is weighed against that of Kusum through whom the novelist attempts to present as Susan Bordo suggests ". . . tension between the psychological meaning of a disorder…and the practical life of a disordered body . . ." (2374). In understanding the manner of socio-cultural operations in a woman's life, one needs to remember that the society has certain preconceived ideas, images and criteria against which the life of every woman is measured and evaluated. Kusum falls short in such evaluation as she does seem to conform to the cultural version of womanhood owing to her disability in terms of her mental health.

Socio-cultural practices intend to provide a cultural conception of the body which is acted upon by "a set of *practical* rules and regulations through which the living body is "trained, shaped, obeys, responds," becoming, in short, a socially adapted and "useful body" (Bordo 2374 emphasis in original). Considering Kusum's character in this light then, it becomes rather evident that her life reflects a sense of

failure in the traditional notion of femininity which foregrounds a woman's sexuality as her essential trait which nurtures her towards the ultimate goal of motherhood. Vanitamami too appears to resemble Kusum to a certain extent in that her body does not lead her to the traditionally haloed experience of motherhood thereby, highlighting the idea that the conventional understanding associated with female sexuality which is seen only as a necessary precursor to motherhood, fails her. And when Vanitamami takes the insane Kusum into the folds of her family perhaps to substitute the absence of a child, her action is apparently interpreted as mysterious for she had opted Kusum out of other children who would have been a better choice by virtue of their healthy existence, both mental and physical. Jaya observes, "Why poor childless Vanitamami had taken to the feeble, spiritless Kusum of all her sister's brood is a mystery. Perhaps Vanitamami had felt a kindred spirit in Kusum, both of them born failures, born losers" (45). As said has been observed earlier in this chapter, the marginalisation that these two women experience may be attributed to the fact that their family and the socio-cultural milieu within which they are situated, visualises them as disabled individuals and their disability apparently seems to be measured against their sexuality which, culture believes, endows the woman with an essential and innate ability to be a mother. Sexuality then emerges as constructed within social and cultural discourses and it

> offers a prism through which we can better understand ourselves, the people around us and the values we hold most dearly. When we use it to look at disability, we may find to our dismay, we are not the people we thought we were. Although we speak of tolerance and diversity, many of us are

> uncomfortable with people with disability making choices in their lives, distressed by the idea of them having sexual relationships. . . (Chopra 4)

The body, therefore, comes to occupy a relatively prime focus in all attempts to understand and interpret an individual's lived experience in the context of his cultural and social lineage.

> [t]he cultural critic therefore, 'reads' in much the same way as s/he might read a literary text: not in the hope of revealing an essential truth about embodiment, but precisely to expose how various 'truths' and norms are constructed . . . The body's meanings (and they are always plural) can be contested and reconfigured, not simply through physical modifications, but by activating and putting into circulation alternative understandings of embodiments. (Atkinson 4)

Deshpande thus, may be seen as making an attempt to read the body through the prism of culture while trying to discover in it the ways and means through which bodies are culturally inscribed. Her intention behind such an enterprise is not merely to discover cultural politics at play but also to unearth how such politics lead to an underprivileging of the female body while subsuming the biological facts of her body beneath society's cultural ideologies. She alludes to the cultural norms and cultural texts besides socio-cultural institutions like family and marriage in the Indian context, in her attempt to reveal their regulatory and disciplining practices and legitimising discourses. While reading Deshpande's novels one needs to bear in mind the fact that it is not a reading of the body in isolation that she engages in, rather hers is an indepth reading of cultural practices through the institution of the family and marriage which form the base of a study of the body in relation to sexuality, death and disease which

act as a pointer to the overall utilitarian status of the body. Understanding sexuality as a natural fact of a female body, she attempts to release the uneasiness which is associated with various phases that the body experiences while trying all the same to reject the mythical idealisation tagged to it which in fact, result in creating meanings that are rather contrary. Through her novels she voices a dissent at the hegemony of cultural practices and institutions which negate an understanding of the female body in its real sense while asserting her belief in a need to rework the society's approach and understanding towards the female body not only in terms of physical attributes but also as a human body. Her women do not seem to endorse a total rejection of institutions like marriage and family and relationships within it but they appear to debate and contest the imbalance that culture permits while allowing the individuals of the other sex a privileged position. While dealing with the body and accepting the body's corporeality as a fact she objects to the general cultural and social notion that womanhood is an inferior status and remarks:

> I believe that the female of the species has the same right to be born and survive, to fulfil herself and shape her life according to her needs and potential that lies within her, as the male has. I believe that women are neither inferior nor subordinate human beings, but one half of the human race . . . I believe that Nature, when conferring its gifts on humans, did not differentiate between males and females, except for the single purpose of procreation . . . motherhood does not bar everything else, but it is a bonus, an extra that women are privileged to have … it has meant an acceptance of my womanhood as a positive thing, not as a lack. (*Writing from the Margin* 83)

It is this belief in womanhood as a positive thing, womanhood not as an essence by virtue of which the woman can be held in captivity by socio-cultural injunctions, womanhood as an understanding that transcends the idea of the woman only as a body, which remain at the core of her novels and which invites the reader into a close examination of the inequalities and exploitation that inhabits culture.

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Conclusion

> *Undoubtedly my novels are all about family relationships. But, I think I go beyond that because the relationships which exist within the family are, to an extent, parallel to the relationships which exist between human beings outside . . . But surely, when I am writing about the family, it is not just about the family. It definitely does not limit my canvas. On the contrary, that is where everything begins.*
>
> Shashi Deshpande

These words by Shashi Deshpande in an interview with Geetha Gangadharan reaffirm the importance of family in her works and also provide insights to the sustained use of familial relationships in her novels which allow the reader to move beyond the givens in search of an intense understanding of the family, and through it the world outside. Her relentless preoccupation with the family in her novels is literary testimony to the fact that the family is one of the social and cultural constructs of prime import. She invites the reader to a critical engagement with the manner in which the family takes shape in the cultural and social imagination and also to what extent, in reality, the family allows variation to the given imagination. It is in this regard that a study of the family in relation to her novels became an imperative in order to open up further vistas of debate, interrogation and negotiation in the context of this very essential unit of society.

Deshpande's continual and consistent use of familial relationships in her novels has received scattered attention as critics have usually focused on human relationships by theorising from the vantage points of feminist and postcolonialist aspects in her novels, overlooking the larger context of the family within which all

individual characters and their relationships are situated (Atrey and Kirpal; Joshi; Pathak; Sebastian). Such critical engagements appear constrained in the criticism of Deshpande's novels owing to their focus on issues and themes that are limited within the aforementioned spectrum. Deshpande's novels embody a larger significance in their engagement with the family and isolated studies of human relationships, characters and images in relation to her novels provide only a partial vision while impairing the reader's appreciation of her work. In her comprehensive study of Deshpande's fiction Jasbir Jain comments:

> Deshpande's novels show a concern with families and space . . . [w]hat makes family a family? Is it like any other 'group' of people with jealousies, squabbles, secrets and gossip? Or does it symbolise a bond that can be life-sustaining, a bond, which when it snaps, places the individual face to face with existential problems of identity and belonging? (34)

Jain's comment elaborates the fictional canvas of Deshpande showing how the writer's primary concern with the family is intended towards a close scrutiny of the family as a social structure which exerts a tremendous influence on the life of the individuals within it while providing them not only a personal and private world of existence but also a social existence that is of significance. Jain's assessment vindicates the need to probe into the portrayal of family in Deshpande's novels to explore several issues at work that inform the family within the society. The present work intended to discuss some of the issues that Deshpande deals with in her delineation of the family so as to reach an understanding which would definitely move beyond the more commonly accepted categories of feminism and postcolonialism. In this section of the present study a reappraisal of Deshpande's

engagement with the family as evident in her novels is attempted in the light of the analyses of the previous chapters so as to arrive at some general conclusions that would enable the reader to liberate the novelist from the confining image of a feminist writer writing about women's issues, especially in the context of contemporary Indian Writings in English.

Remaining mostly within the urban middle class family, Deshpande explores aspects of the intriguing and mystifying nature of familial relationships and every novel reveals her probing eye with regard to the multiple strands that weave the intricate fabric of the family. In more ways than one, Deshpande's handling of the family is directed towards a deconstructionist approach through which she attempts to re-read the cultural givens of the society thereby unveiling the complex politics that underlines this very essential unit of society. However, one needs to keep in mind that her questioning and re-reading is not intended towards a radical denial of the family and the relationships within it. Her novels on the other hand, engage with these issues and affirm the need of the family and human relationships in the individual and social life of human beings. What she seeks to establish is the fact that there is a need to understand the family and relationships anew which would allow a more humane image of the family wherein various contemporary changes could be incorporated. Deshpande dispenses with the romantic ideal of human relationships within the family to clear the critical space for a visualisation of the painful and ugly moments of family life, the multiple layers of meaning concealed beneath the romanticised image of self in familial roles. A study of Deshpande's various characters and their respective predicaments in isolation would be incomplete without locating them in the context of the family. Since as Jasbir Jain contends:

> The self is constructed by a multitude of forces. Of these the first is the family which may or may not be conducive to the growth of the individual, especially if the child is a girl child whose initiation into adulthood may work differently than that of the male. The family is a place of relationships, hostilities, estrangements, refuge and rejection. It is, in itself, a puzzle, its pieces fall apart before our very eyes. (33)

Having said that the family is the focus of sustained concern in Deshpande's novels, the present work has made an effort to critique the family in relation to the multiple factors that determine its function, shape and structure to arrive at an understanding of how it functions as a cultural construct within the life of the individuals and the society at large. With this end in view the various categories that have been explored in the different chapters are myths and archetypes, identity, conflict and power, and the body in relation to the selected novels for respective chapters. These categories, or cultural givens are questioned by Deshpande through her novels. Significantly located within the micro spatial locations of small towns and gradually expanding urban locales, Deshpande seems happy to work on her two inches of ivory, her constant scrutiny of the family being her forte, unlike many of her contemporaries who move beyond into cross border narrations dealing with themes and issues that are quite different. In an interview with Lakshmi Holmstrom, Deshpande remarks:

> And then, I am different from other Indians who write in English; my background is very firmly here . . . My novels didn't have any Westerners, for example. They are just about Indian people and the complexities of our lives. Our inner lives and our outer lives and the reconciliation between them. My English is as *we* use it. (251 original emphasis)

Deshpande's rootedness in the local culture and society emanates from her deep association with whatever is our own – good or bad. The family too, is projected in a light that echoes essentially everything that is Indian, things which immediately draw the reader into the center of action owing to the air of familiarity they breathe. A reviewer succinctly observes:

> What really sets Shashi Deshpande apart is that her writings hold a universal appeal that clearly emanates from her rootedness in everyday India. A society in which we breathe, a culture to which we belong. Her major concerns emerge from our own environment, from our immediate world, holding up mirrors to our own lives. And whatever critics might say, she has steadfastly refused to compromise in order to suit the global market, never exoticising India, never 'presenting' it - as she puts it -, and certainly by not playing to the gallery. Which is why she is often compared to regional language writers - firmly entrenched in our social realities and grappling with our issues. (Editorial, *Indian Review of Books*)

The introductory chapter of the present study has addressed certain general conceptions regarding the family including a theoretical study of the family and particularly the Indian middle class family as a social and cultural unit as has been consistently portrayed in Deshpande's novels. It should however, be remembered that technique is not sociological in the sense of providing macro-frameworks. Her close scrutiny of the Indian middle class family reveals on the other hand her eye for the micro, a technique that is exceedingly detailed and that enables her to register the minutiae of the lived lives within the family in the Indian context. It would be relevant to take note of Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's observations with regard to

Deshpande's novels and their consistent perusal of the family. She states ". . . the 'space' that Deshpande delineates for her protagonist is the domestic, the social milieu is the family, the narrative mode is social realism" (3). One of the most significant and important interventions made by Deshpande in her fictional renditions of the family is her compelling argument that "the family is not a divine, sacred institution, but one created for humans for the benefit of all society; and therefore, it should be built . . . on the co-operation and compromises of all its members" (*Writing from the Margin* 84).

The chapter entitled "Myths, Archetypes and Cultural Legitimation" includes a study of Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence* and *A Matter of Time* so as to examine how the novelist engages upon a re-reading of cultural myths and archetypes, both traditional and contemporary, to reveal how these work at the level of lived lives. More significantly, Deshpande wishes to make it clear that the various myths and archetypes that structure our lives are themselves structures that took shape at different points of time in history with an underlying ideology which radically conforms to the patriarchal nature of Indian society. It should however, be kept in mind that the novelist does not deny the necessity of myths and archetypes which have been internalised by the people and continue to remain as reference points in their lives. She challenges and contests them so as to drive home the fact that

> . . . myths are gender circumscribed . . . . the meanings of words have been built around the interests of men . . . [t]he problem arises out of the reduction of the characters of myths to stereotypes, in making them a kind of final

statement, rather than complex questioning characters. (*Writing from the Margin* 94-99)

Cultural archetypes such as Sita and Draupadi in relation to wifely and motherly images are evoked to reveal how even in the present context a woman's life is largely shaped by these mythical types. It is not only these conventional myths and archetypes that Deshpande probes into but also the more contemporary myths such as the one pertaining to the 'happy family' and its associated concept of romantic love which receives an equally intense examination.

A discussion of these novels posits them as a critique of patriarchal ideology perpetrated by the way of various myths and archetypes whereby a woman is seen in a straitjacketed existence that disapproves of her attempts to pursue a broad spectrum of life in which a variety of options would be made available. With *A Matter of Time* however, the focus shifts for the first time in Deshpande's narration from the female to an equally important male narrator who is allowed to offer his version of the narrative in his own words. Even in this novel the *Upanishads* remain at the core from which the narration takes shape. Through the fictional creation of mythical stereotypes and culturally acceptable images and events Deshpande is successful in finding connections of the present to a mythical past which continue to reinforce and shape the living experience in the present and is able to show how such reinforcements are related to the cultural politics of the society and are intended to justify and bestow rationality to issues that are otherwise questionable.

The third chapter entitled "Identity in the Family" elaborates the concept of identity within the family while addressing identity as a construct that is influenced and shaped by several forces and factors operating within the family and familial

relationships in the context of the individual self. The chapter takes into account a study of *The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence, The Binding Vine* and *Small Remedies* to arrive at an understanding of identity as a construct which is influenced by multiple factors. Without going into the psychological nuances of identity construction, the focus in this chapter is limited to an understanding of Deshpande's characters, especially the women who are located within various subject positions that are approved by the familial and cultural forces at play. Deshpande's novels consistently challenge the notion of identity as a given where the roles, relationships and subjectivities that an individual adheres to appear unalterable. On the contrary, Deshpande articulates the possibility and the need to accept identity as a fluid concept which will permit negotiations in relation to an individual's lived experience. While dealing with the familial roles, relationships and subjectivities, Deshpande articulates the issues of self-definition and self-determination and the resultant conflict within a complex unit as that of the family and as Amrita Bhalla observes:

> . . . the self-definition of the middle-class urban woman is further problematised. She lives in a society where tradition is an integral part of daily life and enjoins codes of cultural behaviour. The actualisation of a self and identity is counter pointed against the established norms of a patriarchal society. (14)

Deshpande's protagonists who are from the urban middle class are educated and, as Bhalla argues, face the dilemma of defining a self and their quest for a distinct identity of their own counter pointed against the established norms of patriarchy. What the novelist seeks to assert is the idea that a woman's self and identity need to

be accepted by the family not only in relation to the roles and relationships that she is in but by allowing her to transcend such given categories while acknowledging the fact that more than such categories it is her existence as a human being that defines her as a person within the specific familial context. Deshpande's novels vouch for the necessity of accepting the woman as an individual capable of nurturing and sustaining her unique identity rather than a constant need to define herself in terms of the male 'other' which appears to be the culturally accepted paradigm within the given patriarchal structure of the family.

The chapter "The Family in Conflict" makes an attempt to understand the theme of conflict within the family and familial relationships in relation to Deshpande's critical engagement with issues related to power, space and negotiations which have an emphatic say in the process of shaping and re-shaping of a woman's lived life. The chapter includes an analysis of *The Dark Hold No Terrors, That Long Silence, Roots* and *Shadows and Small Remedies* examining familial relationships especially within marriage to challenge the given understanding of marriage as a divine and eternal relationship to reveal how "[s]ocial conventions and the traditional marriage in themselves provide the man with a more privileged position, which can hope for subjection and merger of the Other; for the woman, the prescribed code is that of surrender and obedience (Jain 77). The novels included in this chapter display Deshpande's realistic treatment of the institution of marriage while revealing the conventional and traditional codes that define it and the position of her protagonists within it. In novel after novel she has been successful in affirming that marriage is an institution that is "culturally governed" (79) and that it, as Jain further observes:

> makes several contradictory claims on the individual – irrespective of gender. On the one hand it is based on domination of the other with the idea of female surrender and subordination built into it . . . [m]arried couples are seen as a unit, inseparable in the public eye. It is not just a power relation, it is also a power game where each is trying to define the other's territory of freedom and choice. (84)

Deshpande is a novelist with an eye for extraordinary detail which enriches her narrative with the intricate workings of marriage seen as a power relationship opening a new perspective of understanding that resists and challenges the conventionally accepted image of marriage as an ideal relationship built on the equality between partners. The novels of Deshpande are an intense exploration of human relationships within marriage through which the novelist shows how any understanding of power is fundamentally related to an idea of space within a given relationship. Following the patriarchal design often, the family acts as a support system in the creation of gendered spaces within which the woman seems frequently situated in a disadvantageous position of marginality. Without denying the necessity and importance of marriage in the society, Deshpande resists such structural demerits within it chiefly objecting to the fact that a woman ought to receive her due share of space because she is a human being too. She asserts the necessity of revising the age-old traditional structure of marriage and family in general which will allow a more rational understanding of the human condition as an alternative to the absolute approximation of idealised image of such structures as she is of the opinion that "[m]ore important than knowing what we are not, is to know what we are, what is possible for us . . . My search has led me to the discovery that above all we are

human, that what we share as humans is far greater than what divides us as being men and women" (*Writing from the Margin* 100).

The chapter entitled "The Body in the Family Politic" addresses one of the most vital issues in understanding the human situation within the family – the body, especially the female body. Taking recourse to the theoretical assumptions based on an understanding of the body not as a given but one that is made, this chapter examines how the novels of Deshpande critiques the social and cultural moorings which often undermine the female body into a position of inferiority within familial existence. This chapter includes a study of the novels namely *The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence, Moving On* and *In The Country of Deceit* examining how gender, desire, sexuality, disease and death determine the positional location of the body. The female body, due to reasons that are culturally governed, exist in the periphery of familial relationships as a site of exploitation. In the novels mentioned above barring her latest novel, the female body is examined as a site of exploitation in the main; she analyses how cultural inhibitions imposed on the female body result in the feeling of guilt and shame regarding one's own body. Unlike the conventional understanding of sexuality as a male prerogative, Deshpande's female protagonists voice the desires experienced by their bodies affirming the need of the body in real lived lives. But it is only in her most recent novel that she allows her female protagonist to indulge in a sustained sexual relationship outside of marriage in reality – the realisation and fulfilment of a long standing demand made by the body which could no longer be denied and deferred. As far as the question of body in the family politic in concerned her novels portray a fictional world where:

> [t]he idea of a consensual marriage is absent, and a woman's right to her body is not recognised. The idea of romance creates the myth of a merger, of a two-in-person, of shared thoughts and desires, but the relationship itself is built upon social images and leads to manipulation, secrets, and pretence . . .. (87)

Deshpande's novels voice genuine concern with regard to the subaltern existence of the female body reinforced by the institutional discourses which, in the opinion of the novelist, should not be accepted as absolute categories that determine our understanding of the human condition. Asserting the necessity of cultural texts Deshpande however, states the necessity of adopting a more analytical attitude towards an understanding of a woman's corpo-reality which would be based on a more humane outlook.

The constant experiment and exploration of family and familial relationship that Deshpande engages with novel after novel does not shrink her artistic canvas. On the contrary, her deliberations vindicate the vital significance that these issues bear in an understanding of society at large while enlarging the prospect of novelistic genre in Indian Writings in English. Deshpande's engagement with the domestic space of the family and her novels confined to the regional milieu does not restrain her art in any way. Significantly, her novels beginning with *Roots and Shadows* to the latest *In The Country of Deceit* reiterate her artistic commitment to with human beings and the complex social entity family. Deshpande contends that human beings are her constant source of inspiration and that she finds them fascinating. The alleged repetitiveness of her themes in her novels may then be attributed to her fascination with human relationships, the human condition:

> [o]ur endless variations, our essential sameness. Our strengths, our frailties. Our overwhelming desire to live, our anguish at what life offers us. And above all, our relationships with one another. In each novel I explore these things, going beyond the externals to the inner truth of people, of their relationships, asking questions each time, rarely having the answers, but finding that the questions themselves bring in a little more light . . . Each novel is a voyage of discovery for me, a discovery of myself, of other humans, of our universe . . . an understanding of the fact that as we go on living, we learn to cope, becoming . . . a little more compassionate . . . because humans have nothing else, no one else, but themselves. Writing is for me part of the endeavour to understand this process, to articulate human struggle, the human triumph. (*Writing from the Margin* 29)

The novels of Deshpande therefore, needed to be examined in the light of this assertion and the present study culminates with an understanding that Deshpande's novels indeed offer a close scrutiny of the dense gamut of familial relationships in a bid to explore the 'inner truth' of life. And every time she does so she illuminates our understanding of human relationships within the family, the woman in particular, which enables her to open up hitherto unaddressed issues regarding the sanctity of the family as a divine institution to be upheld at any cost. Deshpande's recurrent engagement with human relationships with the *family* at the core, strategically etches out avenues for the reader to contemplate on possible areas of resistance and challenge in relation to the family as a culturally given entity that contain the nation's ideology in miniature. And my final submission is that nowhere is Deshpande's

exploration of "inner truth of people, of their relationships" obviously manifest than in her astute and compassionate study of the family.

The possibility of further rewarding enquires cannot be denied with regard to issues that lay outside of the present study. Deshpande's fictional oeuvre stretches out to children's fiction and short stories as well which would certainly offer independent options for study though some research has already been conducted in this direction. A full-length study of her narrative strategies would also be another contribution to Deshpande criticism. To deliver home the significance of family in the lives of her characters Deshpande adopts various narrative strategies that succeed in dismantling our received notions about the family and the manner in which it functions within the specific social and cultural milieu. Working within the construct of family she presents "[t]he interplay of relationships, the parallels that are provided through subtexts and subnarratives, the shifting blocks of family ties, the poetics of loss are all used as narrative strategies. Deshpande further frames her narratives, at times, through epigraphs and expands their meaning through intertextual references. Often these references are followed throughout the narrative and their recurrence provides an additional meaning . . ." (*Gendered Realities* 278). Notwithstanding the limitations of the present work, we may however hope that it is able to establish itself as an ample addition to the ever expanding substantial body of literature on Shashi Deshpande while at the same time inspire and invite critical commentary into as yet unexplored areas within her novels.

To us it may seem that all stories may not be about families per se in the literal sense. Yet when we begin to reconsider her statement we begin to appreciate its depths. After all perhaps no story can be written with absolutely no reference to

relationships. And it is the family – not necessarily only in its modern form as we understand it – which provides both institutional framework and the reality where human relationships are lived out. Perhaps it is because of this realisation that the family remains an integral part of Deshpande's work and she chooses this canvas. This has also been the impetus behind the present study.

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