



**THE FEMALE PROTAGONIST OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S A MATTER OF
TIME: AN IMAGE OF SOLIDARITY AND DETERMINATION**

Tukaram S. Sawant, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Tuljaram Chaturchand College, Baramati, Dist. Pune

Abstract

Shashi Deshpande, a well-known Indian woman novelist in English, has eleven novels and four children's books to her credit. Her novels are simple stories dealing with the lives of the ordinary people, women in particular, with their heads and hearts. Her women are the human beings who breathe and live around each one of us. They belong to the world of flesh and blood. The main thread of her novels is woven around the life of her women with their struggle for self-realization, self-assertion and emancipation. Since Indian society, to a large extent, has deeply been rooted in patriarchy, women have been facing injustice, suppression, oppression, subjugation and exploitation in one way or the other. They are the victims of social ills and evils prevalent in a contemporary society. In spite of being educated, they have been looked down upon with contempt; they have been reduced to the status of a plaything; they have been treated as lifeless objects used to fulfil men's sexual desire and also as child-bearing machines. Deshpande, who is fighting for the cause of women, gives an outlet to her resentment at injustice done to them in the name of patriarchy. Her women exhibit inner strength, courage, confidence, solidarity and determination in their struggle against the hardships of their lives. They rebel against patriarchy and move on with an urge to turn their dreams into reality. The present article intends to explore the character of Sumitra, the protagonist of A Matter of Time, an epitome of love, strength, solidarity and determination.

Keywords: *commodity, consciousness, emancipation, empowerment, exploitation, individuality, patriarchy, solidarity.*



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Shashi Deshpande, the Sahitya Academy Award-winning Indian woman novelist in English started her literary career as a short story writer with the publication of her first short story in 1970. Her first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, appeared in 1980 while her latest novel, *Strangers to Ourselves*, came out in 2015. She has been writing for more than forty five years. She has eleven novels and four children's books to her credit. She was awarded Padma Shri in 2009 for her significant contribution in the field of Indian English Fiction. She is known for her realistic and life-like portrayals of the urban educated middle-class Indian women with their suppressed dreams and aspirations, their unavoidable silence and patience,

their trials and tribulations, and their plight and predicament. Her writings are a sincere attempt to explore the hidden psyche and consciousness of women caught in the trap of patriarchy. Women, who are deprived of care, love, respect, status, dignity, equality and freedom, are at the centre of her novels. She has a comprehensive understanding of the grass-root reality of the tragic life of women, victimized creatures. She regrets that they have always been socially, emotionally, psychologically, sexually and biologically oppressed and exploited in a male-dominated society. In an interview with Vanamala Vishwanatha, she said: "But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother, you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writings". (Vishwanatha 13). Women, she feels, must not be reduced to the level of a mere breeding machine. She said in an interview: "I have a very strong feeling that until very recently women in our society have been looked down upon as breeding animals. They have no other role in life. I have a strong objection to treating any human being in that manner". (Geetha Gangadharan). She is not happy with their pathetic condition.

Marriage, a social need, has been playing a key role in the life of Indian women. It is something that allows them to keep their social status and dignity intact; it is something that makes their lives complete; it is something that matters most in their lives. They believe that they are incomplete without their husbands. Born to make sacrifices, they offer completely and whole-heartedly to their husbands. They accept their name, religion, class, family with its customs and conventions; they become their *ardhangini*; they give them their person, virginity, almost everything in the name of marriage. They try to keep their marital homes happy, peaceful and healthy. They are always at the centre of human relationships which have been one of the concerns for Deshpande since she started writing. G. S. Amur remarks: "Women's struggle, in the context of contemporary society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being, is Shashi Deshpande's major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all her important stories". (Amur 13). Indian women, the embodiment of love and affection, hope and patience, sacrifice and tolerance, she knows, have been trying their level best to maintain human relationships normal and healthy, and exhibiting their strength and talent in various fields of knowledge and life as well. It is necessary for them to use the strength of their mind and their potential to deal with their pain, agony and anguish.

Indian women, she believes, need to be their own support and guardians. She wants her women, who are caught between traditionalism and modernism, to be economically free and independent, and ideologically, mentally, intellectually and emotionally strong. She wants

them to be complete and independent human individuals, equal to their male-counterparts. Her women have been showing their courage and confidence to “expose, question and challenge the age-old traditions and prejudices in male-dominated society”. (Kaur 15). Determined to fight for the cause of women, they have been raising their voice for the voiceless. Her female protagonists strive to be liberal and independent in thinking, making decisions, taking actions, working and creating on the same terms as men. They strive to move towards self-realization, self-investigation and self-assertion. They fight against age-old man-made rules with the help of their inner strength. Their mind itself is a battle-field, a centre of struggle, conflict and revolution. In an interview, Deshpande said: “The point is that the greatest revolution can take place in the mind, all revolutions begin there. How this thinking is translated into action is another thing, it is necessary to walk out, to commit adultery, to divorce, to show defiance or a rejection of tradition . . . But each person takes a decision depending on the circumstances”. (Vanamala Vishwanatha).

Anita Myles has rightly pointed out: “Shashi Deshpande, in all her novels, exhibits a sharp psychological insight into the subtleties of the human mind and society. She focuses in detail on the working of the psyche of her women characters who plunge into periods of psychic disturbance due to traumatic experiences of life. Nevertheless, the suffering leads to a stage of self-introspection and later self-discovery which evinces a fresh perception of life. Ultimately her characters emerge out of the crisis as strong women willing to compromise with life as it comes. In her analysis of the post-modern dilemma of women, she concentrates on career women and the problems they face outside the threshold of their homes in a basically male-dominated social set-up”. (Myles 11). She wants her women not to remain passive and submissive but to emerge as strong, confident and assertive characters in their own ways, attempting to and succeeding in striking a fine balance between traditional beliefs and individual needs. She wants her married women not to be mere shadows of their husbands, accepting them as sheltering trees, following them blindly and mechanically. She wants them to realize that true freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination to adhere to it. She wants them to be ‘new’ and ‘modern’ in the true sense of the term. About Indu, the protagonist of *Roots and Shadows*, S. P. Swain remarks: “The meek, docile and humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus defying male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman’s masked existence. Her self-discovery is a frightening vision of the feminine self’s struggle for harmony and sanity. She is able to discover her roots as an independent woman”. (Swain 95).

Deshpande depicts the innermost feelings of her female protagonists, peeping deep into their mysterious selves and their unending struggle to arrive at solutions to their problems. She believes that the solution to the problem cannot be given; it is self-bound, self-specific and individual-specific. She wants her women to fight their battle all by themselves. Sarala Palkar Comments: "It is only through self-analysis and self-understanding, through vigilance and courage; they can begin to change their lives. They will have to fight their own battle; nobody is going to do it for them". (Palkar 134). In addition to this, education, self-trust and self-confidence can help them to solve their problems. As has been realized by Yamunabai, in *A Matter of Time*, education is the only through which the woman's consciousness can be expanded and her place can be ensured in the society to which he belongs. She considers women individuals equal to men, as competent as them with a lot of capabilities and potentials. Her female protagonists undertake a psychological journey of self-realization with a purpose of defining themselves as free and independent individuals. They are capable enough to discover and assert their self, identity and individuality. They have a strong urge to make themselves bold and confident, to find space for themselves in order to grow and develop on their own. Though, many of her female characters are emotionally, sexually, or professionally frustrated or defeated, they fight against conventions and traditions within the framework of a family.

According to Usha Bande, Shashi Deshpande makes her women protagonists move "towards self-awareness at various levels and finally to an assertion for autonomy and freedom. The picture that emerges is of a self-reliant, emancipated and happy individual, a person, sexually uninhibited, intelligent, confident and assertive". (Bande 14). Elizabeth Robins writes: "Shashi Deshpande's novel, *That Long Silence*, announcing as it were, the intention of this talented contemporary Indian writer to break the long silence that has surmounted women, their experiences and their world . . . For a long time, woman has existed as a gap, as an absence in literature . . . This is not only true of the fiction created by men, but also by women . . . Women writers have also been fallen a prey to that repressive feminist ideology of creating strong women characters. This doctrine becomes as repressive as the one created by male hegemony and represses the truth about the majority of thin sisters and thin lives". (Robins 1991). Her protagonists emerge as 'new' women with new hopes, new dreams, new attitude to life, and with an urge, courage and confidence to start their life afresh. They are determined to assert their 'self' and 'individuality' living well within the limits of their families. They are neither traditional nor modern. They rebel against patriarchy, but gradually realize that their revolt cannot be the only solution to their problems. Their greatness lies in

the fact that though they initially fail, they are not defeated; they are not destroyed under the weight of Indian patriarchy. They confidently move forward with their life without submitting and surrendering to adverse circumstances. They undertake a successful journey which ends with a note of hope and compromise rather than with a total revolt and a complete revenge. They are determined to live their life on their terms and conditions. They don't allow the apparent failures in their life to adversely affect their growth and development. They prove themselves to be bold, courageous, independent, assured, determined and self-confident. The present article is an attempt to explore the inner psyche and consciousness of Sumitra, the protagonist of *A Matter of Time*, an epitome of love, strength, solidarity and determination.

A Matter of Time is a multi-generational tale exploring the intricate relationships within an extended family covering four generations of men and women. It is a story which moves around Arundhati, an eighteen-year-old girl struggling to understand the broken relationship between her parents, Gopal and Sumi, and a strained and oppressive relationship between her grandparents, Shripati and Kalyani. It is a fearful and horrifying story of the loss, pain and agony of Indian women caught in the trap of Indian patriarchy. It opens with Gopal's walking out of marriage deserting his wife and three daughters -Aru, Charu and Seema. Sumi is brought back to her ancestral home after her husband's deserting his family for the reasons nobody knows. He stays a few miles away from his wife and daughters in the house of Shankar, one of his old students. Sumi and her daughters are the victims of Gopal's desertion which disturbs the very peace, happiness and balance of the family. Sumi's coming back to the 'Big House' after Gopal's desertion is a matter of shame and disgust both for Aru, her eldest daughter and Kalyani, her mother. Kalyani, Devaki, Premi and others are worried about Sumi's failed marriage. The family tries to take her into confidence and even to comfort her. For them, Sumi herself is a puzzle difficult to be solved, a mystery, and an enigma.

After Gopal's desertion, though, Sumi appears to be calm and composed, her grief, anger and humiliation are so deep and intense that she becomes uneasy and restless. She is silent and impatient. Her silence becomes a cry of despair. She feels lonely and emotionally disturbed. She tries to comfort herself when she says: "It takes time to get used to sharing your life with another person, now I have to get used to being alone". (Deshpande 23). She decides to adjust herself with changing circumstances and to accept her tragic lot. She is worried about her daughters. She asks herself: "Am I the enemy? Do my daughters blame me for what Gopal has done? Do they think it is my fault? Why can't I talk to them, tell them what I feel, how it was? Why can't I open my heart to them?" (Deshpande 23). Her mind

becomes a battle-field. She has no other choice but to fight her battle on her own. She, therefore, decides to move on with her daughters and for her daughters, accepting her husband's desertion as her fate. Sumi and her daughters are united in a kind of friendship and companionship of wordless and rhythmic work with the thought that they need to confront their life as a cooperative venture.

There are no signs of anger, irritation or annoyance in Sumi. Her routine, getting out of bed, washing, making tea for all of them, going into her daughters' room, everything remains unchanged and undisturbed. She answers her daughters' questions with infinite and unbelievable silence and patience; she listens to their repeated exclamations with peaceful and composed state of mind. Her silence, patience and indifference make it difficult for her daughters to understand the seriousness and enormity of what has happened. Her daughters are astonished to find their mother's routine, as usual. Aru, in helplessness and distress, questions herself: "My God, what's happening to us and what am I doing, lying here on the floor like a refugee?" (Deshpande 12). However, in the course of time, Sumi and her daughters begin to adjust themselves in the Big House which now becomes a place of refuge for them. They are not on the verge of crisis now, but they mould themselves in the household routine in which grief and fear have a little place. Sumi shows no outward sign of pain and distress. Realizing that she has to carry out the responsibility both of a mother and a father of the girls, she develops a new habit, the habit "of touching them, holding their hands, smoothing their hair, as if this physical contact is a manifestation of some intense emotion in her". (Deshpande 33). Aru finds a kind of purposeless extravagance about her movements which is certainly different from her normal vivacity and quickness.

Aru is made strong by adverse circumstances. She tries her level best to give her full support to her mother. She wants to be a responsible member of the family. She leaves Charu free for her studies in her important second year of the college. She tries to steer her mother and her sisters through the stormy passage of change that has taken place in their lives. Kalyani is unwilling to accept any help in the household activities either from Sumi or from her daughters. In a response to Kalyani, who says: "Aru should be studying, Sumi, she should be having fun, she shouldn't be involved with this - this mustard seed of domestic life", (Deshpande 36), Sumi readily responds: "And at your age, you shouldn't be burdened with us, either. God knows none of us wants it, but there it is, we're stuck in this situation. So let's make the best of it . . . Amma, if we're going to stay here, and who knows how long it's going to be, you'll have to learn to take everyone's help. If you can't, it's going to be hard on all of us". (Deshpande 37). She does not want to be a parasite in the family. She, therefore,

takes up a temporary job of a teacher to support herself and her daughters. It is difficult for Sumi to deal with her daughters. On the surface, they seem to live a normal course of their lives, but Sumi notices some change in them. They have withdrawn into themselves. Aru's reserve has changed into secretiveness. Charu has become a single-minded book worm. She seems to be engrossed with her college, with her evening classes and books. Seema keeps aloof both from her mother and her sisters. Uneasily, she thinks: "I don't want my daughters to live with a hand clasped over their mouths, like Premi and I had to". (Deshpande 59). She wants her daughters not to be silent sufferers.

Sumi has no feeling of bitterness for her husband. But it is difficult for her daughters, especially for Aru, to forget what her father has done to them. She does not want even her mother to forget it. She wants her mother to consult the lawyer and to do something against him. Sumi does not agree with her. She just laughs and says: "Gopal has outsmarted the law. He's given us all that he had. And he has nothing now, not even a proper job . . . So what can the law make him do? . . . Do you want to punish him, Aru? I don't. I'm not interested. I just want to get on with my life . . . Let him go, Aru, just let him go. This is not good for you". (Deshpande 61). Aru, on the contrary, wants him to realize what he has done and to punish him. Sumi wants to go on with her life with her daughters without thinking of Gopal. Aru has a deep sense of bitterness for her father, who, she feels, is responsible for their sense of loss and displacement, for their shame and disgrace. During her visit to him, she calls him a callous father, a cruel husband and an unfeeling man. She expresses her anger and hatred in a question that she asks: "Why did you get married at all, why did you have children?" (Deshpande 62). Sumi is worried about Aru who has a sense of bitter hatred for her father and who wants to take revenge upon her father. She says: "I only want him to realize he can't get away scot-free. He shouldn't be able to do this and just walk away". (Deshpande 137-138). Sumi does not like Aru's consulting the lawyer. She asks her not to have the burden of other people's actions on herself.

For Aru, Gopal's desertion does not merely imply an empty space in the family, but a complete disintegration of the family. She feels: "There is no family left. We are five separate individuals, all of us going our different ways, five units that don't add up to a whole". (Deshpande 184). She has a sense of having lost her very foundation, her support in the world. She knows no way of getting it back. She also knows that the things are wrong and that they can not be right again. But Sumi knows that Aru will not be in despair for a long time. She will certainly come out of it; she will go on with her life. She will make sense of what is happening around her, her consciousness will move outside herself and reach out to

the others as well. Right now, she is confused, she is fumbling, not knowing what she wants, not knowing what she has to do. Sumi, who has full trust in Yamunabai's *mantra*, the article of her faith, '*Nimittamatrambhavasavyasachi*', meaning 'we must never forget that we are only the instruments', and Lord Krishna's advice to Arjuna on the battlefield: 'Be thou only the instrument, Arjuna', (Deshpande 188), is sure that her daughters will stand on their own feet. She knows that Aru is bold and courageous enough not to be affected by these adverse circumstances and that she is capable enough to take her life as it comes to her lot.

Sumi's pride and self-respect make her feel that she and her daughters are intruders, interlopers in her parental home. She thinks it is better for her and her daughters to leave the house. She thinks: "I must move out of the house. I must look for a house for my daughters and myself. I can't go on living here". (Deshpande 76). She says to her father: "I have no right to be here. I feel a parasite . . . You don't know how easy it is to become a parasite . . . There's Ramesh ready to give me money, and Devi and Premi, of course. And now you're asking me if I need any money . . . I'm looking for a job, Baba, I have some money right now . . . And don't worry, if I need any money I will ask you. But living here free, I think I can make what we have lost quite a while". (Deshpande 71-72). What she says underlines her self-respect, which does not allow her to accept any financial support either from her father or from her relatives, and to live in her parental home as free and inactive as a parasite; her determination to look after herself and her three daughters on her own. Though, she tries, she fails in her attempt to search for the rented house.

During her search for the house, she happens to meet her husband for the first time since the day he left home. They do not feel comfortable when they speak to each other. A burden of unsaid things lies between them. They just stare at each other in silence as if they have nothing to say to each other. She realizes: "We can never be together again. All these days I have thinking of him as if he has been suspended in space, in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living; his life has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives have diverged; they now move separately, two different streams". (Deshpande 85). They are like two different streams going in opposite directions. She comes to the realization that nothing can save her marriage. They are now two poles apart. With this realization, she starts a new phase of her life with her daughters in her parental home. Sumi proves herself to be a woman of courage, confidence, determination, dignity, responsibility, self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment by looking after her daughters even in the absence of her husband. She manages her family in her adversity on her own and evolves as a dauntless individual who can run the family without her husband. Though she is struck with grief and humiliation, she

tries her level best to keep herself calm, controlled and composed especially for the sake of her daughters.

Though, Gopal's desertion is the cause of great worry and concern for her family members, this unexpected crisis in her life gives her a chance to prove her inner strength and potentiality. She strongly accepts the role of a deserted wife. She does not encourage any discussion over it and prefers to be silent. Self-trust, self-confidence and self-respect are the important traits of her personality. Her self-respecting nature does not allow her to accept any monetary help from her close relatives. She does not expect any pity or sympathy from any of her relatives. She is determined to accept the challenge of her life thinking that real happiness lies in accepting challenges. Sumi's decision to learn to ride the scooter indicates that she is confident enough to live her life all by herself. We are told: "She begins all by herself . . . Aru is there to help her the next day. But it is not long before she dispenses with all help and rides it herself, going in circles round the pond, slowly, ready to put her foot down the moment she feels unsure of her balance. . . The next day, Sumi suddenly gathers speed and in a burst of confidence, goes out of the gate . . . Aru is anxious too; she wanders to the gate and waits there until Sumi returns and runs back in after her. Sumi stops and holds both her arms above her head in a triumphant gesture". (Deshpande 33-34). Her experience of learning to ride the scooter proves that she is, to the surprise of her family members, exceptionally confident, strongly determined and fully prepared to live her life with her daughters on her own.

Devaki arranges a family get-together with a hope to bring Sumi and Gopal together. It is her unsuccessful attempt at reconciliation between them. Sumi knows what Devaki is hoping for. She also knows: "To both Premi and Devaki, Gopal and she were 'the lovers', the touchstone for all lovers henceforth". (Deshpande 107). She wonders whether the love and the desire for possession are enough to keep the marriage intact. She remembers: "For a brief while, Gopal and I were part of this eternal story too. We fell in love. I fell in love with his physical being first. I have to admit that . . . but this passes. We don't need to be saints to turn away from physical pleasures. We don't have to go such a long way, either, as Yayati did, to realize that a time comes when the pleasures of the body pall. They taste flat, insipid, perhaps, even bitter. We want love to last, we think when we begin that it will, but it never does; it transforms itself into a desire for possession, a struggle for power. What lasts then? The loss of the familiar rustling by my side at night is what I mourn, not our lovemaking. I feel cold without the presence of Gopal in my life; sex has nothing to do with it, no, nothing at all". (Deshpande 168). She regrets that love does not last long and it transforms into a mere

desire for possession. Though, she feels cold in the absence of Gopal, she accepts the reality of her being the abandoned wife and tries to cope with it with grace and courage.

Sumi's concern and distress for Aru is only a part of what has brought her to her husband one year after his desertion. Her real intention is to remind him of what he said to her the night they decided to get married. She says: "You said that at any time if either of us wanted to be free, the other would let go. We are not going to be tied together . . . and I agreed . . . Then you began to move away from me . . . When you left, I knew I would not question you; I would just let you go. None of them, not even our daughters . . . could understand me . . . And I had to go back home with my daughters, I had to live with my parents. I had to see what had happened to my mother. I was frightened. It seemed like something being repeated - my mother then, me now . . . But now I know my life is not like my mother's. Our life, yours and mine, was complete". (Deshpande 221-222). She thinks that her life is different from that of her mother, who has not spoken to her husband for more than thirty-five years. She considers herself more fortunate than her mother who is compelled to live in oppressive silence. She is also ready with her future plan she is hoping to implement without her husband. During her final visit to Gopal, she, with a sparkling face and an exceptional vivacity, says to him: "I'm getting a job, Gopal, I think I'm going to get it . . . It's in Devgiri . . . And Seema can be with me, she can join the school, we can be together, I want the job so much".(Deshpande 223).

Gopal realizes his dream of being totally free only because his wife who sets him free of his duties and responsibilities towards his wife and daughters. All of a sudden, the girl he had married comes to his mind. He remembers Sumi, sleeping in the bus with her head on his shoulder, unaware of the crowd around them. He is in his thoughts of their travel together as husband and wife in a bus. He recollects every minute details of the time they spent together: "When we reached our destination, I woke you up and you got off obediently and staggered after me like a sleepy child. We got to the guest house where we were to spend our honeymoon . . . And there was no food for us . . . So we ate what we had with us and then I bathed but you went off to sleep almost immediately. It was a deep and easy sleep . . . When I woke up in the morning you were not in bed . . . I got out of the room, went down the steps and there was the river. You were in it as I had expected, floating, as if you were weightless . . . I joined you in the river. You were wearing your nightdress and it was clinging to you above your waist, but below, in the water, it billowed and ballooned about your body so that I could touch your bare flesh. I could feel it respond to my touch. I touched your face with my hands, with my lips and it was like touching a flower wet with dew . . . We came out of the

water then, we went to our room and it was there, with the sound of the river in ours still that we came together for the first time. And I knew then that it was for this, this losing yourself in another human being, that men give up their dreams of freedom”. (Deshpande 222-223). Gopal is excited at the thought of coming together and to lose oneself completely in another human being. He comes out of his thoughts and realizes that his body, after almost a year, is awake with a desire to be physically united with Sumi. He is angry with himself and his thoughts. Sumi knows that she can do nothing for him. She gets up and is prepared to leave never to meet him again.

During the early years of his marital life, Gopal was very happy with his wife. He was filled with emotions and excitement. Almost in the heaven, he thought to himself: “So I married Sumi. And I knew I was right, it was my body that told me the truth. I never had any doubts about my feelings for her . . . I knew I needed her, her warmth, her humanness, her womanness. It was my body that told me the truth once again, my body that could lie beside Sumi night after night, quiescent, feeling nothing. After the earlier humiliation of my inability to sustain my excitement, of being unable to go on, this was peaceful. But I could not avoid the truth; I knew it was over . . . But how could I have said this to Aru: Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes - a lifetime of commitment - is not possible for all of us”. (Deshpande 68-69). He feels humiliated by his inability to sustain his excitement laying beside his wife night after night, his inability to go on with his physical relationship with his wife. He begins to believe that the life of the body has to end. The demand of lifetime commitment that marriage makes, he feels, is not possible. This, perhaps, may be the reason of his walking away from his wife and daughters.

Sumi learns a lesson from the spider tirelessly working on its web, its shelter, scuttling to the centre and then back, over and over again. With a smile on her face, she thinks that the spider is busy with the business of its life. Sumi accepts that it is necessary for her to be busy with the business of her life. She thinks that the only business of her life is to weave a new web for herself and her daughters. She decides to forget everything about her past marital life believing that past is past. She prepares herself for her future life, for the job which she is soon to start with. She realizes the truth that things change with time; circumstances, too, change; and nothing in life is constant and permanent. She accepts the challenge of writing a play for the inter-school play competition. She writes the play, *The Gardener's Son*, the play based on the story that she heard from Goda-mavashi, the story of the king, his only daughter and the gardener's son. She finds herself filled with excitement and exhilaration while

working with the girls and rehearsing them. She, playing her role as a teacher, almost forgets herself, her pain and agony.

She believes that she is competent enough to cope with the sordid reality of her life by keeping her feelings to herself. Her image that she presents to the world is that of grace and courage, of confidence and determination, the image to be admired rather than to be pitied. She is determined to go on living on her own with the support of her stoic pride, self-respect and solidarity. Her inner strength does not allow her to lose her courage and confidence. She wants to do so many things in her life. She wants to start her life afresh especially for herself and her youngest daughter, Seema. She decides to accept a job in the residential school and to leave the Big House. She decides not to take Aru and Charu with her. With a renewed enthusiasm and impulsiveness, she says to Aru: Now we'll be on our own . . . Be happy for me, Aru. This is the first thing in my life I think that I've got for myself. I was sure I wouldn't get it . . . But one of the members of the Board saw my play . . . And do you know, Aru, I'm already thinking of another one. It feels so good, you can't imagine! I've been so lazy all my life. And suddenly I want to do so many things . . . There's Amma and Baba. I feel good to think that you'll be with them . . . You'll be all right, won't you? . . . You'll come to me often, I'm getting my own place, just a room and a kitchen, but we can be together". (Deshpande 230-231). On hearing her mother speaking so excitedly, Aru bursts into tears. Sumi holds her daughter close and tries to soothe and comfort her. However, before she begins to move towards the realization of her dream, Sumi and Shripati meet a tragic death in an accident. Her death shatters her dream to pieces.

Aru is strong and competent enough to take charge of everything after her mother and grandfather's death. She handles and controls the situation with full concentration of a rope-walker, holding the weight of her grief in her two hands, not as if it is a burden, but as a support. She reads the play, *The Gardener's Son*, the day after Sumi's death. She feels guilty when she reads it. She thinks to herself: "It's only for children, she said to me, but it's not, I know it's so much more. Sumi is saying something here which I must know. But I can't get it, not now, it's impossible. I can't think of anything but Sumi dead. Her figure keeps coming between me and her words; it won't let anything come through. I wish I'd read it earlier, I wish I'd spoken to her about it. I thought she didn't care about what Papa did, I thought she was uncaring, indifferent, I said angry words to her, but I know now that was not true. It's too late now, I can never speak to her, it's too late". (Deshpande 240). She understands her mother only after her death. She decides to be as strong and confident as her mother. She controls herself and says to her father: "Yes, Papa, you go. We'll be all right, we'll be quite

all right, don't worry about us". (Deshpande 246). Aru is ready to prove herself to be a 'new' woman prepared to live her life with Seema and Kalyani.

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