

**Moving on with New Age: Parent Child Relationship in Shashi  
Deshpande's Novels**

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**Abstract**

As social reality does not consist of perfection and uniformity, neither the parents nor children in the novels of Shashi Deshpande are entirely ideal. Beside the loving and caring, there are callous, irresponsible and disappointing parents too like the father of Kusum in *That Long Silence* and the father of Kalpana in *The Binding Vine*. The cases of Savitribai and Munnai in *Small Remedies* are the extreme ones. The latter ignores her child and keeps her off record while the latter goes to the extent of denying her parentage. Parent-child conflict is a problem found in several novels of Shashi Deshpande, which becomes an encounter between tradition and modernity. Aru's mother in *A Matter of Time* starts from the traditional point of view but moves towards modern outlook. This linear progress is the positive outcome of new ideas and thinking.

Madhav in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* dares not write to his father, but finds himself more at ease with his mother. Aru in *A Matter of Time*, however argues with her parents. This indicates that the gulf created by tradition between parents and children, which left little room for communication between them, has not disappeared but signs of change are observed.

*A Matter of Time* shows some parents are so much shocked when their children do not measure up to their expectations or when they lose a dear child that they make their own life and that of their family a hell but sane people like Urmi's Papa in *The Binding Vine* and Saru's father in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* take recourse to self-examination and attempt to make the best of the present. Urmi in *The Binding Vine* apologises to her mother as well as to her son, which shows modernity does not fight shy of admitting faults and apologising for them.

Shakutai in *The Binding Vine* conversing with Urmi reveals her preference for male children. It shows mothers have their own reason for craving for the male child, they are afraid that their daughters will have no better prospects than their own. In *A Matter of Time* too, we find the same thing. Thus, preference for male children persists, particularly in poor sections of society. Girls are tolerated only when they are beautiful, brilliant and well settled in life.

Both Madhav and Vinayak in *Roots and Shadows* are particular about their daughter's education.

Urmi in *The Binding Vine*, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* are well educated and at least one of their parents has helped them. It shows that despite tradition, a section of parents are turning to educate girls.

Attitude of Sharad's parents in *Roots and Shadows* demonstrates that most of the parents have yet to get rid of their misconceptions about occupations. They run after degrees and cosy office jobs and disregard the aptitudes and abilities of their children. They also think that certain professions are suitable for men only. That does not help them and their children. However, the experience is compelling the parents to think rationally.

The case of Indu, Sarita, Urmila on the one hand and those of Kusum and Padmini on the other show that in case of daughters, a good education and a bright career are still deemed dispensable than marriage. Potentialities of not a few talented daughters are nipped in the bud by their insensitive parents in this way. But the fact some of the latter resist and succeed holds a promise for better future. Marriages are still mostly arranged and confined to the limits of caste. Daughters have little say in the choice of bridegroom. His appearance, education and qualities are often not considered. If they, like Padmini and Kusum, are not bright and courageous, they have to submit to the will of their parents. Bright girls like Indu and Sarita are, however, asserting their will and choosing their partners of life disregarding caste rules.

Shashi Deshpande's novels present a wide range of types both in respect of parents and children and their relationship varies accordingly. To be more explicit, we have to examine the novels one by one.

Anant in *Roots and Shadows* has four children. He is a failed pleader. Most of the land he depended on formerly is gone and to cultivate what remains he has to depend upon others with the result that the cultivation is no longer profitable. He requires financial help from his brothers very often. Despite that, he does not seem much concerned about Akka's money. He is conscious of his weaknesses which have compromised his position in relation to his sons.

His daughter Padmini (Mini) is neither brilliant nor beautiful but docile and a realist, rather fatalist. Though the groom chosen for her by her grand-aunt is neither intelligent, nor educated and handsome, she does not object to her marriage. She submits gracefully to her lot as she has no option and also because she does not want to trouble her parents. She is so particular about the comfort of her father that she does not fail to serve hot water for her father's bath even on the day before her wedding.

Anant's sons present a contrast to Mini. Hemant, the eldest is married and has two sons. As he failed his first year in college, Akka (the virtual head of the family) refused to give him more than one chance again. So he remains undergraduate and employed as a clerk. Though his job is quite able to his abilities, he is dissatisfied and grumbling. Even when Indu admires his handwriting, he brings in the issue of his job as if she were taunting him. "I am both the dhobi's donkey and the scapegoat here" he says but the fact he blames others for his failure and shortcomings. Akka and Anant are his scapegoats.

Sumant, a graduate, married and employed does not reside at the parental home. He is jealous of his eldest brother who is living with his parents as he thinks Hemant has no expenses and no problems. He has a poor opinion of his father. Even Shirsasan, the only discipline Anant permits himself is the object of his ridicule: "Seems to be a good way of shedding worries and responsibilities". Thus he calls his father irresponsible by implication. We wonder what sense of responsibility to others he shows in his conduct.

Sharad, the youngest of the four, was a favourite of Akka who provided her with good clothes and permitted him to continue even after he failed. After getting a third class graduate degree, he wants to enter a medical college. That is not because of genuine interest in the medical profession but simply because of money and prestige it is likely to bring in. As his father can not support him in the pursuit he does not hesitate to blame him. It is only under the pressure of Indu that he joins the hotel business and prospers.

Anant cuts a sorry figure before his sons. Though he can not afford to pay taxes and repair his house, he is an easy scapegoat to them as evident from his sarcastic remark: "Who did not give Hemant a good education? Me. Who didn't help Sumant when he wanted some money after his marriage? Me. Who can't give Sharad money for entering a medical college? Me. It is only when the arrogant Sharad taunts Indu, he gathers courage to rebuke him.

Thus the relationship between Anant and his sons is a departure from the traditional model. As the latter are neither bright nor industrious and successful, tradition should have taught them to submit to their lot. Instead, they dare criticize their father. And Anant, unlike a traditional father, blames himself for the situation.

Govind is a widower and journalist by profession. His job keeps him away from home and his daughter Indu is reared by the elders in the family. However, he plays an important role in her life by insisting on sending her to an English medium school. That decision gives Indu the necessary head start in life. He is “so complete a person” to both Naren and Jayant. Unlike the rest of the family, he married intercaste. So he does not object to it when his daughter too marries outside community. He attends Indu’s untraditional marriage with Jayant. He and his elder brother Anant are the only persons in the family to attend. He never compromises with his ideals and values. Despite his frequent absence from family house, he has left a lasting impression on Indu. Though his simple, considerate nature makes him misfit amid his selfish and quarrelsome kith and kin, he is a role model to Indu who follows his intellectual, moral and social values and aspires to become freelance journalist and honest person in life.

Madhav has a son, Sunil and two daughters, Lata and Geeta. He cares little about the education of his daughters. But Sunil’s education “was so scrupulously and harshly supervised by him, that Sunil had turned deceitful, with the connivance, of course, of his mother”. So Sunil gets a third class B.Sc. degree while his sisters do better. Unable to find admission anywhere else and employment, he pretends to be “independent minded” and opts for a course of Business Management in a private institute “where you pay so much money and at the end of a year they give you a diploma that’s not worth the paper it is printed on”. That does not, however, remove his vanity and arrogance. When he walks in the family house with his father, he leaves the latter to carry a suitcase in his both hands. Worst of all, he is parasitical by nature. As long as Akka lived, he extracted money from her to the extent he could and after her death, he challenges Indu’s right to her property with the support of Sharad. Like Sharad, he too is scolded for that by his father.

Vinayak, the youngest of the brothers, has three daughters and pays much attention to them. He is so fond of the youngest that goes to the extent of plaiting her hair and tying a bow in her sash. Women disapprove it as a deviation from the normal role of a Hindu male. A licentiate doctor in a small town, he is proud of his “bouncing, healthy girls”. His wife, Kamala seems more concerned about the prospects of their marriage only.

Finally, there is Sunanda who has five children. Her husband Vasant is an irresponsible fellow who remains mostly jobless and recognized as a waster of money by Akka. He leaves the responsibility of the family solely to his wife. Sunanda pampers her son who has failed S.S.C. twice and rushes to the conclusion that the examiners have failed him simply because he is a Brahmin. She is foolish enough to think that all her problems can be solved with a part of Akka's money if she gets it. Naturally her children are not likely to become independent and industrious.

We find an exceptional case of Vithal too in the novel. His father was a professional cook whose wife left him due to his physical cruelty. Then the boy was subjected to mental torture by his father until he fled and started living on scavenging in the dust bin. Anant found him outside a shabby restaurant and sheltered him in his house. Old uncle discovered his literacy and interest in learning and encouraged him. Despite all problems, he has moved on well. His case demonstrates two things. First, the meritorious do not sit and moan blaming others. Second, a section of parents do not know that a child needs food, rest and above all, emotional security as well to grow and learn. Needless to say, such parents fail miserably in relation to their children and become a source of trouble to themselves and their children.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* presents a picture of the traditional Indian household with a "Sharp, clean line dividing the world of men from the world of women" (as Shashi Deshpande put it in an interview with Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal in May 1989). That set-up leaves the running of the household to the ladies of house. So Sarita's mother exercised power over the domestic domain.

The way she exercises her power appears far from pleasant to Sarita. She is domineering, oppressive, conservative and malicious in Sarita's view, a view based on her own unhappy experiences. Early in her life, Sarita observes that her brother Dhruva is treated somewhat differently and given indulgence denied to her. When Dhruva dies of drowning at 7 her mother blames her for the mishap. Her mother opposes her going to a medical college and when she marries outside her caste her ties with the parental house are snapped for 15 years. Even when her mother suffering from stomach cancer dies and is cremated in Bombay, she is not informed. Thus Sarita's mother appears an agent of the oppressive patriarchal practices to her. In her dislike for her mother, she tries to become as much unlike her mother as possible. Rejection of all that her mother defends leads her to the extent of almost rejecting herself as a woman! "If you are a woman, I don't want to be one," she declares.

Sarita's perception is however not objective. Her hostility is evident and rooted in the accumulated moments of rejection because of her gender-based discriminatory upbringing. Similarly, her mother's mind is rooted in an unhappy childhood. Sarita's maternal grandmother, deserted by her

husband, had to bring up her two daughters at her parental home. Sarita's mother was one of them. She grew into a silent and docile woman with "eyes joyless arid, the expression one of indifference". Her childhood feelings of insecurity and unwantedness have affected her personality and motivated her to seek power and cling to it. Conditioned to believe that a girl child must be prepared for her in-laws family, it is not unusual on her part to reject the ideas of female independence, equality and education. That is what leads to her harshness for Sarita.

Sarita's father like a traditional father leaves the entire affairs of household, including the upbringing and education of children, to his wife. That was painful to Sarita particularly because her mother's behaviour was so cold. Her distance from her father increases after the death of her brother. She perceives him as a weak man dominated by his wife.

That perception too is hardly supported by facts at crucial moments. Thus, he supports Sarita's decision to join a medical college in Bombay despite vehement opposition from his wife. He pays for her fees, books and hostel charges out of his meager salary and does not, unlike his wife, bother about its impact on the prospects of her marriage. That is a turning point in Sarita's life and enables her to realize her aspiration to become a doctor.

Then, her father plays a decisive role in her life during the most critical phase of her life. Her husband, suffering from inferiority complex, turns a sadist and subjects her to nightly sexual abuse. Strangely enough, Sarita does not seek the advice of some friend or acquaintance in the crisis but goes to her father. He listens to her patiently and advises her against running away from Manu :

".....Talk to him. Let him know from you what's wrong.....Don't turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them"

That leads to her realization that it is wrong to hide man's sexual aberration from him, that she must initiate a discussion with her husband boldly in order to solve the problem.

Though critics have called him "the typical Indian father— old fashioned, conservative" etc., his advice appears sound and realistic. Unless a woman decides to walk out of her marriage and loses faith in the very institution of marriage itself, there is no other course left open for her under the circumstances like that. So it would be better to call him a realist, a compromising man who prefers to avoid quarrel and conflict to the extent possible.

There is another character (minor one) in the novel that deserves attention— Madhav, the son— substitute to Sarita’s father. He is a student who lives with Sarita’s father, shares odd household work with him and plays carom too with him. It is a very easy and warm relationship.

Madhav’s parents are living. His father is a learned priest who wants his sons to follow his footsteps and learn Sanskrit. It appears he has left family affairs entirely to his wife. He is not much communicative with his children. Madhav dares not talk or write to him even when his brother Satish is about to ruin his own life. He is ignorant of what his son Satish and daughter Mrinal think and feel. Nor does he care for the choice or opinion of her daughter about her marriage. When Satish disappears he lays the blame at the door of his wife and goes to the extent of refusing to eat anything cooked by her. He is reconciled with Madhav’s option for Accountancy only in the hope that his other sons or at least one of them will opt for Sanskrit. Thus inspite of his learning he is far from practical. He is insensitive in relation to others and conservative in outlook.

Madhav’s mother is more practical and communicative. She manages all the affairs of the family without bothering her husband about them. Her softness for the cine-crazy, terribly wild Satish prevents her from reporting the matter to him and she is blamed for it when Satish disappears. In fine, she is mild mannered woman of the traditional type.

Madhav is honest, studious and independent minded. Much against the wishes of his father, he chooses Accountancy instead of Sanskrit as it is clean and paying. He views his father with awe but feels confident enough to communicate with his mother. So he learns about Satish’s secret visits to town and his treat to run away to Bombay from his mother. When Satish disappears, his mother sends a telegram to him. He goes to his village but refuses to go to Bombay in search of Satish as his mother wants in view of his examinations. We cannot but appreciate his decision because preparing for examinations in order to build a career is more worth while than the wild goose chase after a truant, irresponsible boy.

Jaya’s father in *That Long Silence* like Indu’s in *Roots and Shadows* is broad-minded and free from the sexist bias and plays an important role in shaping the personality of her daughter. He breaks convention by marrying out of his community for love and setting up a nuclear family. Though he is a favourite of his mother he dares express his independence. Unlike traditional fathers he displays his love for his daughter and goes to the extent of even encouraging her short temper. He is also particular about her daughter’s education and provides her western education. He pulls her “Out of the safe circle in which the other girls had stood” and makes her different from her cousins. He prides rightly



in that accomplishment when he says “You are not like others, Jaya”. Indeed, he has made Jaya independent and rational leading her far from conservatism.

Jaya’s relationship with her mother is not that smooth. She resents her mother’s preference for her sons. It appears to her that “She behaves as if she owns me” Domination is not the only fault she finds in her mother. The latter seems a superficial person devoid of deep feelings in her relationship with her husband. She refers to her daughter “gay and girlish, even after she was made desolate by widowhood” rather disparagingly. Her “slapdash way”, her inability to even hem properly makes her far from a “perfect mother”. If that were not enough, she accuses her mother of preparing her “for none of the duties of a woman’s life”. Such an accusation is conditioned by patriarchal expectation and explains the paradox we find here. That is, Jaya resents her sexist bias on one hand and accuses her of neglecting her duty to train her for her future role of wife and mother. However, the paradox plays an important role in Jaya’s life as she aspires to become unlike her mother a successful wife and mother who holds power and matters.

We learn a little about Jaya’s grandmother (Ajji) too. She was a traditional type of woman who wanted to make her children and grand-children too good Brahmins. She too was dominating. She favoured her youngest son Vasu, the father of Jaya. Her other sons followed her precept and sent their children to Kannad Schools. Her cousins were, therefore brought up in traditional manner with a pronounced gender bias. Girls of the family like her cousins were taught it was unwomanly to be angry and it was woman’s job to cook and clean. That is why Veena and Sujata had to clean and not Jaanu and Shridhar.

Vasu, Jaya’s Appa loved her mother but had the courage to think and act independently. So instead of choosing a ‘good Kannad girl’ as his mother desired, he married a Marathi girl. Then he left her soon after the marriage. He was called cruel and his wife was blamed for the decision. It was not only an act of self-assertion but a wise decision to avoid problems of adjustment. Again despite “disapproving and scornful” attitude of his mother, he sent all his three children to English School on pragmatic grounds.

Vasu and his mother illustrate the fact that affection need not be based on agreement all the time. Vasu cycles three miles to the town to see his mother and goes back to his wife three miles regularly. Jaya holds that the cause of his death. “She gave up even her single meal” after his death and died in six months- that is what we learn about Ajji, Vasu’s mother.



Kusum and her parents stand apart from all the above. What sort of parents did Kusum have? “A father who cared for nothing but smoking and movies, who never worked a day in his life; a mother whose world centered round her youngest, the baby on her lap, while the rest of her kids ran around in wild abandon, unkempt, dirty, unfed.”

With parents like that Kusum had hardly any chances. She started wearing a sari at 13, was married early and had three daughters, lived a disorderly life and became mentally deranged. At last she threw herself in a well and died of broken neck.

Only one of the many children of Kusum’s parents, Dilip, became “a suave, successful man”. Though he failed his Matriculation, he was able to make money and that brought him recognition and admiration from people around him. Finally he built a brand new house on the outskirts of the city “littered with overstuffed sofas, bolsters, cushions.” That success, however, was achieved at the cost of morals. He was a muscleman who scared everyone, whose trade union activity included accepting “black’ money from the factory owners. Dilip illustrates the point that even if one achieves material success, one cannot become a scrupulous person without proper upbringing.

In *The Binding Vine*, Priti leaves her parents in the United States and returns to India alone. Her excuse for the decision is that Robert Kennedy’s assassination became the ‘moment of truth’ - She “could no longer stay in a country that could suffer such pointless violence”. As a matter of fact, however, she is making a heroine of herself at sixteen by “linking a personal decision to a moment of national drama.” Her mother is alcoholic, has run over a number of people sleeping on the pavement during one of her annual visits to India and become manic depressive. As life at home become impossible for Priti, she leaves. Priti’s case illustrates the brittle nature of parents-child relations in the affluent families like the Non-Resident Indians.

Vanaa and her daughter present cases of parents failing to satisfy the demand of children. Mandira does not like her mother going to work. She feels her mother; Vanaa is neglecting her and her sister Pallavi thereby. True, she has employed Hirabai to attend them but she thinks that is no substitute for mother. To Vanaa that seems unreasonable.

Vanaa’s mother was a teacher. She too had to go out to work but Vanaa did not feel wronged. She is fond of her mother and proud of her. But she is not entirely satisfied with her other parent - her father. She feels that her father did not love her as Urmi’s did love Urmi.

Urmi's father is old-fashioned as evident from two major incidents. When she was a child, her mother went out leaving her with a trusted male attendant Diwakar and her father found her crying. He deemed it an offence on the part of her mother to leave the child alone with a male servant. So Urmi was sent to Ranidurg and had to remain there under the care of her grand-parents. Later he feels guilty about it. Secondly, he did not like her idea of marrying Kishore initially, though he conceded soon.

With all that, it is evident that he is affectionate and cares for his daughter so much. He regrets he did not look after her when her son Kartik was born. He trusts her too and leaves his Ranidurg House to her and Amrut. That is an act of no mean trust as with that house is linked the fate of his half-brother Balkaka. Urmi on her part esteems her father protecting her as "pragmatic" and "firm" while her brother, Amrut warns her against over estimating him.

Toward her mother Urmila's attitude has been full of resentment based on a misunderstanding. As she had been sent away to Ranidurg to be looked after her grandparents, she perceived that indicative of rejection. Even as a child she expressed her hostility by preferring the old-fashioned, ill-fitting dresses made by her grandmother (Baiajji) to the expensive ones sent by her mother. She kept the dresses sent by her mother in the cupboard until they became "too small" for her.

Even as a grown up woman she continues in the same vein. Her brother tries to correct her with the information that their father was a domineering person who brooked no challenge. But she pays no heed until her mother reveals the truth that the decision was her fathers who did not care to inform her mother or concede to her requests to bring the child back. That revelation smoothens the relationship between the mother and daughter.

There are two other things here worth noting. Sons and daughters are generally not permitted by tradition to address their parents by name. But Urmi calls her mother Inni (short for Yamini). That is unusual but nobody seems to take exception to that. Secondly, and similarly, unusual is her politeness as she apologies both to her mother and her son for losing temper.

While all the above characters belong to the affluent or middle class, Sakutai and her family represent the poor. Sakutai works in a girls school in the Principal's Office. She has three children- Kalpana, Sandhya and Akash. Initially, she appears to have a dislike for daughters when she exclaims: "Why does god give us daughters?" Later we come to know that, that outburst lies the agony rooted in the sad experiences about the plight of women in the society. She is aware of the sufferings women have to undergo all their lives and does not want their multiplication.

As a matter of fact, despite her poverty, Sakutai is an affectionate and caring mother. She does not want to deprive her children of anything. She does not like her children going to other people's houses to watch and being treated like beggars by them. So she has bought even a TV set for them. Kalpana, the eldest is her favourite among them. She likes to talk about her most of her time and permits her to buy what she calls 'rubbish'- hair clips, bands, bangles, nail paints etc. Kalpana is given the indulgence to keep a cat too. Kalpana is smart, stubborn and secretive. She has learnt how to speak English and found a job at a shop for herself.

Though Sakutai appreciates and pampers Kalpana, she is fearful she will invite trouble for herself if she does not keep a low profile. She shares the prevailing view that young girls provoke boys by appearing in attractive dress and make-up in public. That is the male chauvinist approach which ignores women's right to choose their own life-style, even their dress—something not unusual in a male dominated society. That is the first difference that makes the mother-daughter relations uneasy. Secondly; Sakutai does not like her secretiveness about her pay. Moreover, while Kalpana grumbles about giving money to her mother, she does not bother about giving it to her, a gambler. Thirdly, when her father leaves her mother for some other woman, she blames not him but her. Thus the mother-daughter relation is not entirely easy.

The other daughter, Sandhya, is docile and helpful to her mother and does all she can to keep the home in order. Prakash is critical of his mother and defiant. He believes what other people say about the sad plight of Kalpana and holds her mother responsible for the rape of her eldest sister. He holds the silly view that the rape occurred as his mother had permitted Kalpana to get out of hand. When Sakutai asks him to go to the hospital where Kalpana remains admitted, he goes the first day but refuses to go the next day.

Kalpana's father who remains unnamed in the novel and appears only once before the readers, is hardly an ideal father. He has left his wife and children and lives with some other woman. So he is far from performing his duties as a father. Still, his feelings for his daughters do not seem to be mere pretension. When he sees Urmila at the hospital, he says, "Look at her. He should have killed her, the bastard. I wish I could get my hands on him." To that his wife retorts: "That's enough of your heroics" and asks "you think this is a film?" Urmila notices that he gives her a look and "has tears in his eyes."

About his feeling for the other daughter, we find the following:

He puts his hand in his pocket and fishes out a small plastic bag. 'Take this; it's some khau for Sandhya. He calls it 'khau' using the child's word for sweets.

'Khau' she repeats bitterly, 'she's not a baby.'

'give it to her. She'll eat it.'

Indeed, Sandhya is no longer a baby. She goes to school now. But to a loving father she remains still a baby. Readers can only wish he were dutiful too to his children. Though he belongs to the lower section of a society that remains patriarchal, he never mentions his only son, Prakash but favours his daughters only.

*A Matter of Time* records the relations between parents and children over three generations mainly involving women characters. Kalyani presents the first generation while Manorama belongs to the second. They belong to the past but make their presence felt in the main narrative which concerns with Sumi and her daughters.

Manorama was the eldest of the four daughters of her parents. She was tall and beautiful. She was sent to a school but had to leave soon as she attained puberty. Custom in those days demanded a girl's marriage before puberty. Still, Vithalrao's father who had chosen her for his son did not object to her marriage. She distanced herself with her poor father's family after marriage and her mother died a year later. So her relations with her parents did not last long enough and seems to have been more or less formal. But we cannot brand her careless or callous. She cared for her younger brother, got him educated and married him to her daughter, Kalyani. Even when Sripati virtually deserted Kalyani, she invited him to come and build a room for himself upstairs.

Manorama like most of the women of those times wanted a son but had only a daughter, Kalyani, after several miscarriages. Moreover she was not brilliant or beautiful. That disappointed Manorama. Her disappointment became deeper and deeper when after her marriage, she bore a son only once and that too was found an idiot. It reached the extreme when she was deserted and returned to her parent's place. To the conservative women Manorama was, it was but a disgrace to the family. So she turned hostile to Kalyani. When Vithalrao had a stroke and died some time after it, she blamed Kalyani for that too: "You are my enemy, you were born to make my life miserable", she declared.

In her bitterness for her daughter, Manorama wanted to deprive Kalyani of the opportunity to look after her father in his last days, though she could not.

But there is something far from simple in her behaviour that defies explanation. In her own last illness, she allowed no one but Kalyani to look after her. Kalyani had to experience a lot of mental torture those days because Manorama “was not only tyrannical, she became suspicious and fearful, charging Kalyani with trying to kill her as she had her father.”

As a matter of fact, however, Manorama was the person who ruined Kalyani’s life. Kalyani was good at Mathematics and she could have become an engineer had she not been taken out of school and got her married. At fifteen, Kalyani had received letters from a young man who watched her going to school. Though she had not responded, Manorama held her guilty for it. Much against the wishes of her father, Kalyani’s schooling was abruptly ended at that point by her mother. That shows how conservative and irrational Manorama was.

Kalyani’s relation with her father presents a contrast to it. He was a modern man in the real sense of the word and Kalyani was right in being proud of him. Though he had no son, he refused to remarry or adopt a male child. He preferred to leave his property to his daughter. He wanted to make Kalyani an Engineer - “the first woman engineer in the country.” Obviously, he was not happy when that dream was shattered to pieces by his wife but submitted to her will to keep peace at home. The first rift in his married life is caused by Manorama’s harsh treatment of Kalyani when she came back as a deserted wife with two daughters. The shock changed him from a man of science to a man of astrology. Soon he suffered a stroke and became helpless. Kalyani attended him with love and care during his last days and had him “removed from the bed and placed on the floor” before his death. Besides that, we must add that Kalyani never let her daughters know about the injustice her mother had done to her. She absolved her mother of all wrong doing and blamed herself of timidity and dullness.

The novelist contends that Kalyani was right in “playing down everything but her mother disappointment in her.” To Manorama, Kalyani was not unloved child, but the “visible symbol of .....failure to have a son” and moreover she had failed to fulfill all the dreams she had for her daughter. Thus Manorama represents a type of parents we find around us not infrequently who expect too much from their children and thereby make a hell of their own lives as well as those of their children. Sometimes the children failing to live up to their expectations become depressed and commit suicide. It speaks a lot for the mental strength of Kalyani that she survived all the trials.

Kalyani, as a mother is kind and sensitive to her children. She has got a guilt complex too as she lost her only son Madhav at VT Station while coming home to Bangalore. The boy was well grown physically though only four but mentally retarded. As he was frequently violent, Kalyani could

not manage him. So she cannot be blamed for the fact that the boy was lost. Still Kalyani believes she is not a good mother. She strives hard to make her daughters Sumi and Premi happy.

Her daughter, Sumi is old enough when she tries to ride a scooter. She is a mother of three daughters by the time. Still, Kalyani “goes in and out with a nervousness she cannot conceal”. The moment Sumi feels confident and goes out of the gate speedily, she says: “She shouldn’t have done that; she shouldn’t have gone out on the road.” Such an outburst is absurd because nobody learns riding the scooter to whiz around in the front yard but it shows the extreme of anxiety and concern the mother has for her daughter.

As an untoward event has ruined her married life, she does not want repetition of something similar in case of her daughter. That is why when she learns about the desertion of Sumi by her husband Gopal, she cries out ‘no, my god, not again’. She tries her level best to argue with and convince Gopal so that he comes back and lives happily with Sumi. Her effort bears no fruits but it shows her real maternal feelings.

While Kalyani had a mother who made her life painful, the role is reversed in case of her daughters. The father plays the role of cold, indifferent parent here. We find hardly a trace of tenderness in his relation with his daughters. Most of what we learn about him comes not from Sumi, but Premi. Sumi prefers not to say any thing about him. Premi informs us that her father Sripati never came out of his room and spoke to anyone. Premi did not hear even a word from him until she was ten and then what he said to her for the first time was: “why are you here?” The first he summons her and speaks is after completion of her medical finals and that too to announce her marriage with Anil. Ever since her marriage, Premi gives to her room as a matter of formality whenever she visits her parental home but the distance between the two makes it an ordeal for her. She finds it odd that though her father speaks about her husband and father-in-law, he says nothing about Sumi and Gopal.

Sripati, thus, does not represent a normal parent. A normal human being, a father or mother in his or her senses, is expected to think about the present and not the past- to think about what one has and not what one has lost all the time. True Sripati has lost a son but that is hardly a right excuse for penalizing his wife and daughters all the time. That is irrational and inhuman. His irrationality has ruined his own life and also the lives of his daughters. One of his daughters is lucky enough that she is married in a family where people talk to each other easily, hug and touch and use words of endearment so casually. That is an alternative undoubtedly preferable but that comes out of sanity and understanding and not obsession.

Sumi has three daughters - Aru, Charu and Seema. Aru occupies a prominent place among them. Though only seventeen, she behaves like a grown-up adult willing to shoulder responsibilities to help the family and keep it going in good shape. Her father thought she was born an adult. Though she loves her parents and cares for them, she is unlike a traditional girl revering her parents and viewing them in awe. She addresses her mother as Sumi as if were a dear friend. Her mother thinks she is hostile to her and blames her for Gopal's departure:

“The sight of Premi flanked by her daughters, the hostility on Aru's face as she said, ‘I rang her up’, had made Sumi feel suddenly vulnerable.

The three of them ranged against me. Am I the enemy? Do you daughters blame me for what Gopal has done?”

But Sumi's perception does not necessarily mean the whole truth. Thus we find the following in the novel:

“Seeing her mother's face, hollow-eyed, hair disheveled, Aru feels a pang; this is how she will look when she is old. But when Sumi comes out of the bathroom after her bath, smoothing down the pleats of her sari, she looks so reassuringly normal that Aru has a sudden lift of spirits.” This shows how much she cares for her mother.

Her argument with her sister Charu too reveals her real feelings:

‘Why do you call her “She”?’

‘What?’

‘Why do you call Sumi “She”?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Can't you say “She”?’ Sumi, or Ma or anything else...

‘Why do you say “She”?’

‘Hey cool it, Aru, what's with you?’

“Just because Papa has left her, it doesn't give you the right to be rude to her, it doesn't mean she is worthless...”

She cannot tolerate rudeness or insult to her mother under any circumstances.



Her feelings for her mother deepen after the latter's sudden death. Reading the type script of the story 'The Gardener's Son', she realises that her mother was not "uncaring, indifferent" to any one and she had misunderstood her.

Aru's relationship with her father hardly conforms to the tradition which demands awe, reverence and uncritical submission to the father. Gopal, her father, wrote an article which was supposed to be for Brahmanism. He was attacked and beaten for it by the students. The charge was absurd as he was never proud of his caste. His father had "disclaimed his as a Brahmin out of disgust when they revealed him for marrying his brother's widow" and "being a Brahmin meant nothing" to him. Still, he retracted the article. That made Aru furious who called her a coward. That shows she is outspoken and does not hesitate to criticize her elders when she deems them wrong.

Aru is emotional by nature and takes the departure of her father hard. When her mother proceeds to vacate their rented house, she does not like it. She hopes "that Gopal will return that they will be able to resume their lives." Her love for her father makes her hope that her father will return one day himself or can be persuaded to do that. It is only the realization that they cannot afford to pay the rent for that house any longer compels her to give in.

Her mother, Sumi, realizes the fact and reconciles with her lot but Aru does not understand it. She mistakes it for apathy on the part of her mother. She wants to reclaim her past and live with both of her parents the way a child lives in a family usually. So she goes twice to her father and tries to bring him back. During the first visit, he begins like a cool, reasonable adult asking polite questions about him but breaks down at last; unable to control her. During the second visit she is unrestrained. She accuses him and threatens legal action against him. Both the visits end in failure as Gopal does not come back.

Now, Aru begins to think seriously about legal action against her father. She writes to her uncle Anil asking him for legal advice. Then she seeks the help of Surekha, a social worker and feminist. But Gopal sticks to his resolve. Thus we find that despite her love for her parents she is demanding. She expects them to live a normal life with their daughters and she is uncompromising in that respect. When they fail, she goes to the extent bordering hostility- quite reverse of a mild, submissive girl.

Aru's sisters differ in their response to the changed situation. While Aru becomes secretive and cares less for her college and studies and resigns from student's council, Charu becomes "Single minded and dogged": "Nothing else seems to exist for her, apart from her college, her evening classes

and her books when she is at home”. She intends to pursue her course of five years and a half at medical college with the help of her maternal aunt. Thus she seems to be a stern realist and a careerist.

That Gopal has left the family does not appear important to her. She perceives it as nothing more than her parents’ hassles, as evident from the following advice to her sister: “Listen to me, Aru, let’s not get involved in their hassles let’s go on with our lives. All these things are not important”. Naturally she does not go to her father to persuade him and deems Aru’s attempts to do that futile.

It would be easy to conclude from the above that Charu is rather cold and callous. But when her mother gets a job and decides to go to Devagiri, She is “the first to react, suddenly and to her own surprise, bursting into tears”. Her grief becomes louder and uncontrollable when she learns that Seema has learned about the job first and going to Devagiri with her mother. She calls it “not fair”. Thus we find that Charu is not insensitive or hard as she tries to show herself. Her real self concealed behind a hard shell of apparent self-centeredness is revealed after the death of her mother when she sobs and repents: “I was selfish, I should have spent more time with her, I kept saying, “my exams, my studies” I never sat down with her, if only I had known”. She makes a similar gesture when Gopal returns from the burning ground. Charu moves toward him in rain and brings him to the rest of the mourners.

The novelist has little to say about the youngest daughter of Sumi. Her mother feared most about her reaction to the departure of her father but she has proved her fears misplaced. She “looks the most untouched” and keeps aloof of her mother and sisters, spending most of her time with her grandmother, Kalyani. The next things we learn about her is her visit to her father, she turndown Aru’s offer to accompany her and chooses her mother instead. And then, she asks her to “leave her alone with Gopal.” We do not know the content of their conversation but we are informed about the result: Gopal and Seema remain unaware of each other, a gulf of distance remains between them. But there is no hint of bitterness or resentment. Thus Seema, the youngest, appears the most calm and composed in relation to her parents.

In *Small Remedies*, we find both types of parents and children- loving and caring as well as the indifferent ones. Madhu and her father and Adit and his parents the first type of the relationship while Savitribai and Munni represent the second type.

Madhu was born a year after the marriage of her parents. As her mother died of tuberculosis when she was only six months old she was deprived of one of her parents by fate. Her father brought

her up with the help of a servant, Babu. It was not an easy task as he was a professional, a doctor. Yet he looked after her with care and affection which gave a secure childhood to her.

There is an incident in the novel that reveals his concern and sound conduct in the upkeep of his daughter. Munni asks Madhu to gift her gold ear-rings on her birthday. When Madhu asks her how she can get the money, Munni suggests her to take it from the open drawer of her father. The plan comes to naught as the jeweler comes in the way and reports to Madhu's father. He buys the rings and presents them to Munni himself while Madhu is directed to give some sweets instead to Munni on her birthday. Madhu's father keeps the drawer locked since then.

As an affectionate father, he knows that the motherless child needs company and a good one at that as well as amusement. That is why he does not allow her to go to movies with Munni who lives in the neighborhood next door. Instead, he accompanies her to movies. Again a wise decision.

The love and care Madhu receives fills her with faith in her father. Munni's statement about her father's affair with a woman does not move her. At that age, the fact of his having a mistress does not mean anything to her. It is beyond her capacity to understand its implication but the vulgarity of the narration horrifies Madhu and she feels sick. That ends her brief friendship with Munni.

Her father's death at Bombay cuts her away and she finds herself alienated from every one. But soon she comes to know that her father has not left her in lurch, he has left her in the care of an aunt. That aunt Leela is a loving, inspiring and radiant personality who leaves a lasting impression on Madhu. This too demonstrates wise and caring nature of her father.

Madhu and her husband Som are remarkable for their loving and caring attitude toward their son, Adit. Madhu who has lost her parents in early life showers all her affection as long as her son is alive. She is worried that he too may lose his parents one day like her and seeks an alternative in Tony and Rekha. She believes that they will look after him properly if he loses his parents. Som wants to make good money after his birth so he can bring him up decently. He was not a teetotaler before his birth but stops drinking after his death.

Thus both of them are ideal parents but it would be far from truth to think that are free from human weaknesses. That is particularly true about Som who disturbs the peace of home when a forgotten incident of the adolescent life of Madhu is revealed to him by her. Adit who never appears in the novel as a living person is a promising, intelligent and sensitive boy of seventeen. One day he

leaves home annoyed at the quarrels of his parents and dies a terrible death. He dies in the Bombay blasts following the demolition of Babri Masjid.

The relationship between Munni and her parents stands apart from all the above, Munni is the illegitimate daughter of Savitribai and Ghulam Saab. Savitribai, a married Brahman woman comes into contact with Ghulam in course of her pursuit of music, becomes intimate with him and gives birth to a child, Munni. Though the “child is a beginning, a renewal, a continuation, an assertion of immortality” as the novelist puts it. Munni is barely a year old when Savitribai abandons her as she leaves her husband’s home with Ghulam Saab. Later she keeps Munni with her at Neemgaon but does not pay much attention to her.

She calls her in sharp voice and even slaps her once. As Savitribai remains busy with her own pursuit of music, Munni feels almost ignored. She moves in the company she chooses and goes to movies alone. As case of typical indifference is narrated at length in the novel, Munni takes part in the school concert and plays jaltarang. While most of the parents are present to watch the concert, Savitribai is not there. After the concert is over, Munni walks home with Madhu and her father. Madhu’s father notices the apathy of Munni’s mother and pities her. Later Savitribai sends her away and deliberately forgets her. She does not bother even when Munni dies in the Bombay blast.

Ghulam Saab, her natural father, is gentle and kind. But as his relationship with her mother is not socially approved, she denies he is her father. She begins with rejecting the name given to her by her parents and chooses the name Meenakshi instead. In her attempt to look different from her parents, particularly her father Ghulam Ahmad, she treats “her own natural good looks with lofty disdain” and tends to “distorting her features.” As the novelist puts it : “ She resembled her mother more than her father, but her eyes, her light grey eyes, cat’s eyes, as they were called, unmistakably linked her to the man she strenuously disclaimed as father. She calls Ghulam a cruel man, a kidnapper who has taken her to Neemgaon by force and is keeping her there against her will. She adds that she is beaten by him and her father, Sadashivrao, a lawyer in Pune dares not rescue her lest Ghulam kill her mother. Thus she hankers after the identity her mother has left behind. Ghulam on his part loves her daughter deeply and when she leaves him and goes back to Pune, he starts drinking to suppress his feeling of loss.

As Savitribai is stern, uncaring and neglectful to her daughter, she too reciprocates her. Her mother’s life style means disgrace to her and she tries to cut herself from it. Her mother’s talent, her looks and her associates are all allergic to her. An instance to the point is her refusal to attend

Savitribai's performance at the inauguration of the new radio station at Neemgaon. "I hate music", she declares bluntly.

Later she leaves her mother and goes to Pune or is sent there, marries and becomes known as Shailaja Joshi. That seems to be the goal she has been ever eager to achieve. Thus she gains an identity separate from her mother. But it is ironical that all her Endeavour comes to naught in the end as the obituary published after her death refers to her as the "only daughter of Savitribai Indorekar". How different that is from her wedding card which contained names of her father and grandfather, but not the name of her mother.

In *Moving On* we come across four generations of people. First we learn a little about Gayatri's grandfather and her father. Gayatri's grandfather was an orthodox wealthy landlord. As he lived in ease, he cared little about education but still Gayatri's father got a graduate degree as it was supposed to "enhance family's prestige and status" and expected to "increase the amount of dowry. The old man had a foul tongue and was proud of his caste.

His son, Gayatri's father was a rebel "whose actions scrupulously followed his convictions." Education made him a Gandhian who disliked "a life of lordly inactivity", had no respect for his parent's belief in rituals, feasts etc. He did not concur with their presumption of the superiority of the Brahmins, refused to attach enormous importance to food and rejected their idea of purity. He went to jail which amounted to treachery on the part of a son of Roy Bahadur with the additional horror that he lived in close contact with men of all castes including Muslims. Then he married a Harijan girl-an orphan brought up as a daughter by his guru which came "like the end of the world" to his parents.

The conflict of ideas ended their relations. He walked out on his parents and his father disowned his son ritually and disinherited him legally There was a complete severance as the son too "cast off even his family name". But the son had a soft corner for his mother. After his release from jail, his parents decided to perform a puja for purification. Though he did not believe he had become impure and made his family too by going to jail, he acquiesced "mainly so as not to displease his mother" but proved adamant in his resolve to marry a Harijan girl as there could be no compromise on principles. Obviously his mother too was not happy about it but she could find no rescue for what he had done. So here is a case of sever conflict of ideas leading to complete severance of relations, a case of heterodox son's revolt against parental orthodoxy reaching its logical conclusion. In an acquisitive society where people often sacrifice their principles for sake of wealth, Gayatri's father foregoes all for his convictions.

Gayatri's father had two children- Gayatri and Badri Narayan. Complete severance from his parents and loss of two wives had made him a joyless man. He smiled sometimes but never laughed. He was a quite man who spoke rarely and when he did, he spoke softly. But he did not make his home a sad or melancholy one for his children; they lived a normal life.

Though he was always available to his children, when they needed him, he was not authoritarian or interfering. Unlike their friends, Gayatri and Badri Narayan enjoyed a kind of freedom which was quite unusual in those days. That freedom made it possible for them to have a gathering of a mixed group of friends, boys and girls, at their home. Gayatri was not denied that freedom as her father was discriminating in the case of his daughter. As a matter of fact, most of the gatherings were her friends.

As a considerate father, he attaches utmost importance to the education of both his daughter and his son. He cared to leave enough money so that her son could get through medical college. When Gayatri resolved to marry RK, "a very estimable young man, with a promising future", he could not obstruct. He knew Gayatri would be "both comfortable and happy" but he "was unhappy that Gayatri's education be interrupted." That was rather unusual in a society where parents often interrupted their daughter's education for the sake of marriage.

Unlike the traditional type of father, he did not inspire fear in his children and did not remain unapproachable to them. Though he was "inarticulate man" he made his son a confident in his last days. It was his openness that made it possible for RK and Gayatri to talk to him about their desire to marry. When Badri Narayan was admitted to medical college, he celebrated the occasion by going to a movie with his daughter and son.

Naturally his children loved him deeply. When Gayatri learned about his heart attack, she comes and stays with him for two months and his death left her distraught and inconsolable. Badri Narayan was also hit hard by his father's death, though he recognized it only when he went to his hostel. He had a feeling of "blankness that seemed to swallow" him up. Later, he had "a great satisfaction in remembering him and our relationship, in seeing things I never did then."

In the next generation, Gayatri has no children and Badri Narayan has two daughters- Manjari (Giji) and Malu. However, BK's son Raja attends Gayatri and Badri Narayan despite his mother's resentment and they too treat him as their own. When RK dies and Gayatri finds it hard to move into her new home Raja comes and stayed with them. Then he plans two rooms on the first floor for Badri

Narayan. He remains with Gayatri and Badri Narayan when the latter's wife dies and helps him after Gayatri's death.

Badri Narayan found pleasure in working, thinking and loving and children, specially his children, "was a constant source of delight" to him. His children received proper attention and a healthy environment in their early life as both of their parents had enough time for them and there were uncles, aunts and cousins too to get pleasure and emotional security as evident from Manjari's recollection.

Complications, however, arise when the daughters grow up. Manjari, the elder one, falls in love with a Sindhi Cinematographer, Shyam. As she declares her intent to marry him, both of her parents are annoyed. Badri Narayan's objection is based on the fact that she has completed her studies and the marriage will disrupt it. And as a matter of fact, she does not continue her studies. As her father tells her later it is 'like committing suicide'. He wants her to graduate and become a doctor before she marries but she is not willing to wait for five years even though she is too young. Her refusal to wait disappoints her father. Vasu's disapproval of Manjari's marriage with Shyam is based on different considerations. Shyam belongs to different community, his profession is "disreputable" and his income is not steady. Besides these, she invents other grounds like Shyam's rudeness for her disapproval. She goes on to declare that her love for Shyam is "only physical" etc.

The marriage takes place at last due to the resolute stand of Manjari. As for her father, he is liberal and takes it rather easy. His attitude is well expressed in his speech to Manjari : "It's your life. You have to live it the way you want. As long as you're happy." To her mother it is surrender after defeat and bitterness remains. It is a heart break too to her. Even though the parents visit her after her marriage and she too goes to them for Anand's birth, their relations remain estranged particularly due to Vasu. Later Badri regrets he has failed in time to her need because of the opposition from his wife. However, she visits her parents before her mother's death but Vasu goes into coma before her arrival. Again, she comes to her father when she learns about his illness (cancer) and attends him in his last days.

Badri Narayan is quite friendly with Manjari and Raja during his last days. He drinks with them on Saturday evening something a traditional father can not even dream of. As a medical expert, he is aware of the demands of body and when he discerns Raja's gestures, he does not disapprove of it. Instead, he hopes she will respond to it. He feels that as she has lost her husband Shyam, she need not spend the rest of her life the way a traditional widow does. Instead she should remarry and raja



will be a suitable match for the purpose. Eventually Manjari turns down Raja's advances but Badri Narayan's desire expressed in his diary testifies to his sane, liberal approach.

Manjari becomes eccentric after her father's death. She takes long bus rides without any definite purpose which appears odd to the bus conductors. In fact, that is her way to escape loneliness and sense of loss. Her initial reaction to her father bequeathing his house not to her but to Sachi is a feeling of being "cheated, betrayed done out of something that" is hers. As Sachi ignorant of the truth thinks that is a punishment for some commission or omission on the part of Manjari, she is embarrassed about it even more. But sooner than later Manjari overcomes that feeling. We find her resist all the threats of the under word and protect the house in deference to his will.

Despite all her bitterness for her mother, she does not disappoint her in the critical moment. When Malu, though unmarried becomes pregnant, her mother devises a plan to save the honour of the family and Manjari cooperates with her to carry out that plan and when Malu dies of a post-natal complication after giving birth to a daughter (Sachi). She adopts her as her own to fulfill her wishes. So, she is compassionate and considerate in her dealings.

Raja, the son of B K belongs to the same generation as Manjari. But his relationship with his parents is not that smooth. He is a responsible son with a high standard of filial duty. That is why he grumbles when his sister does not visit their parents even once in a month excusing her on the ground of being awfully busy though she is living in the same city. He does not think it suffices to ring up every day.

As a teenager Raja becomes annoyed of his father's constant disapproval of everything he does, his sarcasm and his admonition. So as soon as he graduates he leaves home with the pretext of wanting to work with a firm of architects in Bangalore and staying with Gayatri (who is left alone after the death of R K) at the same time. Raja stays with Badri Narayan and an easy, intimate relationship develops between them. At last Raja becomes sympathetic towards his father but his relation with his mother, Kamala remains strained. This is because Kamala, formerly a gentle, soft-spoken, perfect housewife has now become a nagging woman. She is always complaining against her husband as she thinks he is neglecting his duty as a father leaving his daughter Hemi unmarried. The fact, however, is that Hemi is abnormal and therefore quite incapable of shouldering the responsibilities of a married woman. First, Raja has merely to listen to his mother's complaints against his father and then his mother starts on him too. Secondly, Raja refuses to marry the girl chosen by his mother and marries Rukku, a Tamil girl instead. That is the other reason of her disappointment and resentment.

Pawan, Anand and Sachi are the children of the next generation. Pawan is the only son of Raja while Anand is the son of Manjari. Sachi is the daughter of Manjari's husband, Syam born of his extra-marital relation with Manjari's sister, Malu. As Malu died of a post-natal complication. Manjari has adopted her as her own daughter such a way that Sachi does not ever suspect it.

Though in her conversation with Raja, Manjari complains about the secretiveness of her own children like that of Raja's Pawan, she has given all liberties to them. They dare criticize her when they feel it necessary. For example, Anand does not hesitate to let her know it when she uses "a word he thinks mothers shouldn't use." However, they are friendly and attach utmost importance to her health and safety. Though Manjari does not like the idea of selling the house, she leaves it to Sachi to decide conceding to her will. Sachi's motive behind her idea of selling the house is not commercial. She thinks Badri Narayan has done wrong by leaving the house for her alone and intends to set it right by selling the house and buying a flat jointly in the names of Anand, herself and Manjari.

Thus she deserves the characterization as a "good fairy" done by Manjari.

To conclude, though we find merely his name mentioned in the novel sometimes, Pawan too is sympathetic and considerate towards his father. Raja is so confident about the three that when he wants to marry Manjari, he feels they will not oppose. Eventually the marriage does not take place as Manjari does not respond to Raja's proposal, but it shows the amount of understanding between the people of two generations.

Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal express the general view of the critics when they state that "a better daughter-father equation than a daughter-mother equation" is the "usual pattern in Deshpande's fiction." Such a statement means little if the general and specific context of the equation is ignored. It is worthwhile to see what sort of son-father and son-mother equations we find in Deshpande's novels and then to discuss the social significance of the pattern. We have discussed above the novels and it is not difficult to see that even though mothers tend to pamper their dull, lazy or parasitical sons sometimes, fathers realize the merits of their daughters in some cases. That is a healthy sign in a patriarchal society where girls are generally viewed as unwanted burden. That mothers pamper their unworthy sons shows that limited, insufficient nature of their experience. It would not be so pleasant to staunch feminists but it is reality that most of the women are still lagging behind in education and experience. Any attempt to deny that will serve as a plea for status quo and would not improve their lot.

Tradition gave absolute power to parents over their children, particularly to the father. Though the scriptures asked parents to bring up their children properly, their emphasis was always on rights of the parents. The parents could give them to others for adoption, could sell them, banish them and even kill them. We find in the Ramayan, that Dasarath banished his son, Ram fourteen years for no fault of his. Ajigarta attempted to sacrifice his son Sunapshep as an offering to the deity Varun. In the Bible, we come across a similar tale about the patriarch who attempted to sacrifice his son for Jehova. The lives were saved in both cases but the tales illustrate the traditional view that the parents had unlimited power over their children. Cases of sale and desertion were not rare, though generally people sold their children during famine or calamity and desertions occurred as they still occurred sometimes, when the letter defied social norms.

Tradition taught children to rever their parents, scriptures declare that children are born indebted to parents and they ought to be grateful to them. They should not address their parents by name or even utter their name in conversation. They were not expected to question or challenge their decisions.

Instead they had to carry out their orders. Nobody could speak ill of one's elders, not to speak of parents. Blind adherence was norm sanctioned by the traditional for children. Needless to say, that gave utmost relief of the men of licentious character who married a large number of women and had a large number of concubines and had no qualms of conscience to look after their children. Those unfortunate ones rotted in neglect deprived of education, medical care or even basic needs in many cases. Tradition provided ample opportunities to elder brother etc. too to exploit cheat and abuse younger ones. Whatever the real intent of the author, the Ramayana is popular with many a father nowadays who shirks from his responsibility to his children. It is also the favoured text of the cruel and deceit full elder brothers. Such people interpret the epic as the gospel of servility to silence the younger.

While modern thought does not favour corporal punishment, tradition attaches utmost importance to it. 'Spare the rod, and spoil the child' said the tradition. In India, traditionally it was held that children were to be looked after affectionately for first five years and treated severely for ten years and to be treated as friends on attaining the sixteenth year. Such wisdom ignored the sensitivity of the child and the adolescent. Modern pedagogy prohibits corporal punishment and teaches respect for the personality of the young. Older generations paid no attention to the needs of children. There were persons who taught in schools for years and still though that toys made little ones greedy and the young needed no games and sports for their development. Such faulty notions die hard.

True, a lot of change has taken place during the last century. Still, all is not well with the children in India. According to a UNESCO report, for 2000 there were more than 72 million children deprived of basic education belonging to the age group 5 – 14. Again, India's Labour Commission Report, 2001 gives the number of working children more than 100 million, ten times more than the official figures available from the Census and NSS reports. Among the illiterate working class families, children suffer a lot at the hand of the alcoholic fathers. They are subjected to malnutrition and receive medical care hardly. Generally, ignorance accompanies poverty with the result that often their parents are superstitious. Whether it is a case of snake-bite or some disease they turn to the magic remedies which are not always cheap as we usually think, but in variably useless and often fatal.

Children of the well-to-do families receive the education and training their guardians deem worth while. They do receive all they need materially to make one happy. But that too is possible only if the parents are loving, attentive and wield power in the family. But when the parents are dead or powerless, they are left at the mercy of others who do not treat them. Home becomes a terrible place to the young ones when there are frequent quarrels in the family among the elders, the worst case being the quarrels between the parents. We find a fictionalized account of the plight of a child left at the mercy of others in *David Copperfield* while Gorky's *My Childhood* presents a real version.

Shashi Deshpande's novels focus mainly on middle class families. Hunger and malnutrition are not the problems there. But the children in such families often miss their parents if they are employed. Some of them are sensitive to the emotional needs of their children; some of them are careless and irresponsible. Kusum's father in *The Binding Vine* is not employed and does not care to do anything, while parents of Adit in *Small Remedies* and of Manjari in *Moving On* present due type who try their best to make their children happy. But sometimes they forget that money alone does not suffice to make everybody happy. When Som in *Small Remedies* make the most of the pre-marital sexual encounter of his wife with a painter, an isolated incident which she had forgotten and failed to mention to him, he destroys the peace of the home. His son leaves the house and gets killed in the blasts. Similarly B.K.'s son leaves his parents as his mother's obsessive concern about her abnormal daughter Hema's marriage becomes unbearable to him in *Moving On* that shows even the educated, and responsible parents are not as careful in maintaining the peace and harmony at home as they ought to be.

Sometimes parents' ambition ruins the life of the child. Educationists and psychologists attach utmost importance aptitudes and capabilities of the child and seek to provide suitable conditions for

the development of his or her potentials. Ignorant of all that, some parents attempt to make their children doctors, engineers, chartered accountants or business administrators. When they fail, they treat them harshly or humiliate them. Even if they do not move to that extreme, their neighbours do not spare them. Children who fail to live up to those expectations tend to become depressed and sometimes meet a tragic end. Every year, we find reports in the newspapers about the students who failed and committed suicide to escape humiliation. We are also well aware of the tragic end of sub-junior table-tennis player Biswadip Bhattacharya (14) who died on Jan. 8, 2007- a victim of his father's ambition. Unfortunately, there is no dearth of the ambitious guardians like Biswadip's father in middle class families.

Shashi Deshpande's *Manorama* in *A Matter of Time* presents that type of such ambitious parents. First, she wanted a son and became disappointed when she got a daughter, Kalyani. Many men and women even today are ignorant of the scientific truth that the sex of children depends on the mixing of the chromosomes which is purely accidental. They also forget that the human race needs both sexes for preservation and reproduction of itself. *Manorama* got even more disappointed when she found that the daughter was not beautiful. When Kalyani bore us on only once and an idiot one at that and was deserted by her husband, her dreams were totally shattered. That made *Manorama* hostile to Kalyani. She blamed Kalyani for making her life miserable though the truth was quite contrary to her accusation.

To conclude, our society has not as yet reached where parents and children live in an ideal relationship pleasant to both. There are a lot of obstacles in the way. Poverty, ignorance, superstitions and gender are the main ones. But the novels of Shashi Deshpande present a promising glimpse of the changes taking place around us. We find the children striving to assert themselves on one hand in different ways, on the other the parents to grasp the reality and realize the demands of the new age, the sensibilities and aspirations of the new generation. There in lies the hope for the future, though a lot remains to be achieved.

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