Shashi Deshpande voices the problems of Indian children in general and Indian daughters in particular. Deshpande is not in the verge of blaming men alone as being the stumbling block of women but has shown in her stories about women who are not gender sensitized showing discrimination between their own sons and daughters. She has also painted the picture of mothers who value their assets and accomplishments more than their daughters. As she herself has said she uses her writing not as a propaganda of any –isms but also not as a knife against any men as she realistically portrays the various mothers in her novels both kind and proud. The aim of this paper is to analyze the relationship between the mothers and daughters in Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terror, Small Remedies and A Matter of Time*.

Shashi Deshpande is successful in portraying the tortured inner psyche of the female protagonist, who is a victim of gender discrimination by her mother, who always favours her son and neglects the daughter. It is customery in a middle-class Indian family to celebrate the birth of a son as the symbol of God’s blessing upon the family, as they believe that their soul would attain eternity, only if there is a son to keep “Agni” for the parents.

Women in general are expected to be with fair complexion. If not it becomes a great stress for the mothers as their marriage will be a big question mark. Deshpande’s protagonist Saru’s mother is also not an exception. Charu’s dark complexion irritates her to the core and she explicately expresses it thus:

“Don’t go out in the sun. You will get even darker” (*The Dark Holds No Terror*- Pg No 45)

Without having least concern about the intensity of her words in the minds of the young daughter the mother further adds petrol to the burning fire thus:
I was an agly girl. At least my mother told me so. I can remember her eyeing me dispassionately saying, ..... you will never be good looking . You are too dark for that” (The Dark Holds No Terror Pg-61)

Indian mothers in general are worried not about their daughter’s education but only about their wedding with a groom of their choice. It is their thinking that the daughters could be sold easily in the wedding market if they are fair even if they are not educated. Charu’s mother denies her ambition to become a doctor. But her father who used to be a submissive husband opens his mouth to let his daughter to have her dream fulfilled. Though her mother is not willing she agrees.

Charu is heavily affected by the mother’s ill-treatment right from her childhood. Her brother Dhruva’s birth was celebrated grandly but her birthdays were of no importance. She becomes a longing child and shows her hatred towards her brother. Here Charu is the representative of the girl children who are affected by the gender discrimination shown not by the males but by the females especially mothers.

Charu meets Mano in her medical college. When he comes and proposes her she gains some sort of self-esteem which has been denied for her from her mother. Her tortures soul because of the accusation as the murderer of her own brother’s accidental death gains a solace through Mano’s love. According to Ammu, Mano is a means of love and security, which she had always lacked in her life. To her, Manu is the ideal hero, who would save her from the insecure, loveless existence. She feels him as a medicine of her soul, affected by the abuses of her mother that she is responsible for the death of her brother Dhuruva.

You killed him. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive when he is dead? [The Dark Holds No Terror p.17]

Because of her mother’s accusation, she begins to wonder that she, in reality, had killed her brother. After her mother’s death, she realizes the accidental nature of her brother’s death. As long as the instinct, her mother is there, she is feeling guilty. She realizes the fact only when her father consoles her, that she or no one can be the cause of other’s death. If she had realized it before her marriage, she would not have eloped with Mano. As she does not realize this, she thinks that, through her marriage she has avenged her mother and fails to recognize that she has only wronged herself.

She is able to gain personal and social identity as a doctor, which brings in the conflict in her marriage life. She fails to identify the conflict, which goes on in her husband’s mind, as a result of her success in her profession and her position as the sole bread winner of the family. She losts herself in her guilty consciousness of being responsible for her brother’s death, her husband’s present condition and her act of avenging her mother through her elopement with Mano. She longs for her mother’s love and care during her time of pregnancy. She is not ready to show her mother, that her marriage life is a failure and so fails to take any initiative, to solve the problem, but conflicts it.
There can ever be any forgiveness. Never be any atonement. My brother died because I heedlessly turn my back on him. My mother died alone because I betrayed her. My husband is a failure, because I destroyed his manlyhood. [The Dark Holds No Terror pg. 198]

She wants to prove that she too is worthy enough which makes her to accept Manu without any objection and elope with him. She thinks of having a happy married life which is disastered when Manu becomes a failure in his profession while she is successful. It makes her to accept his nightmarish sexual harassment as she indulges in self pity and lets her to think she is responsible for his failure. She does not want to show this failure to the world in general and to her mother in particular. She wants to give a picture that she is a successful wife leading a happy family life with Manu and her children. She dares to visit her parental home as long as her mother is there. But when she learns about the demise of her mother she gathers courage to visit her parental home as a relief from the nightmarish experiences she faces at her home.

Savitri Bai Indroker, mother of Munni in Shashi Deshpande’s Small Remedies is interested more towards music than towards her daughter which breaks the mother-daughter relationship. She is a famous singer but Munni purposively tells that she hates music as she feels it is her competitor in gaining her mother’s attention. Mathu puts it thus:

And this glamorous creature on the stage, the centre of attention, was Munni’s mother! But why was Munni not there to hear her mother sing, to enjoy her glory? I thought of it when I met her the next day, and asked her the question.

“I hate music’ she said.’ I simply hate it. Small Remedies 135

Bai also does not pay much attention to her daughter in her pursuit of glorious name in the field of music. A child which comes back after a performance on the stage will definitely long for her mother. But Munni was not blessed for that.

But Bai was not there to watch Munni play the jaltarang. After the concert was over, Munni walked home with my father and me. Small Remedies 135

When Madhu visits her for her article after a long gap Bai is keen in showing her her accolades and achievements.

This is a guided tour of her career, of its highlights, its great moments, her performance all over the world, her awards, the accolades she has received. She is so familiar with these albums that she never falters in her instructions, nor is she ever wrong.’Go on, a few pages ahead,’ she says.’That was in Geneva. It was the first time I went abroad, I never knew it would be so cold. I’d taken my shawl and sweater, but my feet….., I was wearing men’s socks that evening, thick woollen socks, under my Benaras sari.’ Small Remedies 73

Bai does not even talk about Munni. Madhu wonders how is it possible for a mother without the memory of her daughter. But when she sees the wedding card of Munni with the name of Savitri Bai in it she realizes that both the mother and daughter has denied each other.
It occurs to me that like her daughter, Bai too is into denial. There’s no Munni in her life, no illegitimate child, no abandoned husband, no lover. In showing me her album, she’s presenting me with her own illusion of her life. A life of success and achievement. Nothing lacking; no reconciled child, no dead daughter. *Small Remedies* 78

Madhu was able to understand the feeling of Minni. Minni’s non-acceptance about her unfulfilled love expected from her mother was expressed in an opposite way. She pretended as if she is happy outside. But she was always a longing child. Bai had never felt for her daughter both in her young age and also in her old age. Madhu’s words expresses it thus:

She is still the same Bai I saw as a child, walking on without a backward look at the child hovering in the shadows, the child who was waiting, it seems to me now, for a word from her mother, a glance. Any kind of recognition of her presence. A recognition which she is still being denied. *Small Remedies* 169

Manorama mother of Kalyani in *A Matter of Time* was also not satisfied with her daughter’s abilities as she expected more from her like a boy as she didn’t have a son. Her daughter’s cleverness and her ability in studies in studies has nothing to do with her ideas about her.

‘I was a clever girl’, Kalyani said once. ‘I was very good at Maths like my father. He wanted me to become an engineer- can you believe that? You will be the first woman engineer in the country, he used to say’. *A Matter of Time* 129

According to Manorama, mother of Kalyani the future of her assets is more important than her daughter’s own future. After getting her married to her own brother she feels relieved.

And yet Kalyani was not allowed to complete her schooling. She was taken out of school and married off by Manorama to her own brother Shripati. Perhaps, after this, Manorama felt secure. The property would remain in the family now. Her family. *A Matter of Time* 129

Even when he leaves her for loosing their son, Manorama is not angry as her pride and vanity about her assets and its safety hides her eyes than from seeing her daughter’s feelings in that state of rejection. But Kalyani as she had undergone this state of rejection feels for her daughter being rejected by Gopal. Gopal disowns his own family and walks out. Sumi manages to accept the situation as she had seen her mother being rejected by her own father. Though her father and mother are in the same house Shripati will not even look at his wife Kalyani’s face. Kalyani who was able to bear this rejection could not bear her daughter’s family is being rejected by Gopal. She goes to Gopal and talks to him. Anu, her grand daughter too accompanies her. Daughters of today’s generation are bold enough to question their fathers for their behaviour. Aru goes one step forward and warns him that she would go for a lawyer to seek divorce while Kalyani begs for her daughter’s life.

Shashi Deshpande has also portrayed mothers who value their children and takes care that they are not affected by similar problems what they faced and paralysed them. While Sumi has seen the broken marital life of her parents she does not hesitate to go for a marital life. Even if it fails her she faces it with
greatest possible will power and also protects her children from being suppressed by the patriarchal society. She trusts her daughters and stands with them to let them achieve their vision. Though she has not spoken against her father either for herself or for her mother she does not hesitate to speak in favour of her daughters without hurting her father too.

He’s confused, he thinks still I’m still a teenager, that can find comfort in the company of friends. Yet, when I was at home, he disapproved of all my friends. Boys, especially. He saw me once with a boy and said. Remember my dignity.’ And then found Gopal right here at home” A Matter of Time 73

When Shripati her father expresses her dissatisfaction of Aru going with her boy friend to her classes she favours Aru. The daughters who are able to bear the suppression against them are not able to bear the same for their daughters. They know very well how their daughter will feel because of this gender discrimination. They speak for their daughters too and justify them in front of their fathers. Sumi who is able to accept her father’s suppression is against her daughter being suppressed.

“It saves her time, Baba. And, anyway, how else would she go for her evening classes? There’s no bus going that way. A Matter of Time 73

The experienced pain of being suspected for the friendship between a boy and a girl makes them to trust the daughters fully. It helps them to feel the male-female relationship in a better way. Even when others suspect the daughters the mothers who had undergone this pain of being suspected does not give way for suspicion.

But she is so wrong. Charu and Hrishi have grown up together. They’re easy and comfortable with each other, but there’s nothing of the male-female in their relationship, they’re like two friends of the same sex, they don’t think of each other that way. A Matter of Time 125

The emotional distress of the mother will always affect the children and in turn will turn out to be an impotent anger towards fathers who pushed the family to such a pitiable condition. When there is a chance to blast they do it and will question the father. When Seema was waiting for the father who didn’t turn up it is Aru who is affected by this. When she gets her chance to blast her father she calls him a ‘callous father’. She accuses him as a cruel husband and an unfeeling man.

She calls him a callous father –’it was Seema’s birthday, you know that, you could have sent a letter, she was waiting, we could all see that’ – a cruel husband, an unfeeling man. A Matter of Time 62

Today’s daughters are not afraid of asking their father why they got married and had children if they are not able to fulfill their wishes and need. Even if the wife is accepting it without any question the fathers have to face the children. Divorce is a word which frightens even the elders. But today’s children dare not to meet their their fathers in the court even if the mothers do not want it. Aru is a representation of one such child and her emotional outburst is a sign as the witness of the sufferings of a single mother and an irresponsible father.
When she is sure there is no more to come from him, she speaks, “I’m going to see a lawyer.”

Aru  A Matter of Time 62

The elder children are the ones who are mostly affected by the marital failure of their parents. This results in their hatred towards marriage. But the younger ones take it easy and they are able to be normal. It may be because of the status they feel as a motherly daughter to the mothers and motherly sisters to the younger ones. It is they who also bear the loss and pain and protect the younger ones.

A mother’s emotions will be felt by the daughters consciously or unconsciously. If Aru is conscious Sumi was not conscious about this. Though her mother didn’t express in words her feelings it penetrates deep into Sumi and her cousin who grows along with her. That awareness in the unconscious mind only had made her to face to tough situation given by Gopal. She knows well that marital life will not be always a bed of rose petals. Her mother’s unexpressed emotions had taught her this.

No that’s not possible, it’s never possible. Gopal was right. Kalyani’s past, which she has contained within herself, careful never to let it spill out, has nevertheless entered into us, into Premi and me, it has stained our bones, Premi’s more obviously perhaps, but mine as well. And will this, what is happening to me now, become a part of my daughters too? Will I burden them with my past and my mother’s as well? A Matter of Time 75

Conclusion:

Shashi Deshpande as a writer has portrayed the mother – daughter relationship realistically without any exaggeration. She never hesitates to portray that mothers are the greatest threat to their daughters if they have discrimination in terms of gender. She has also painted the image of mothers who are after their assets like Manorama or in pursuit of their passion like Savithri Bai Indurekor. She pens with great details the agonies and pains of the daughters like Saru of The Dark Holds No Terror, Kalyani of A Matter of Time or Minni of Small Remedies. She is so balanced because she has also painted the images of mothers like Kalyani and Sumi who inspite of their failure in marital life stands with their daughters with the thought that at least let them have a happy and peaceful life. In short Shashi Deshpande’s works are not about kind mothers on one hand and proud mothers with vanity on the other hand.

Reference: