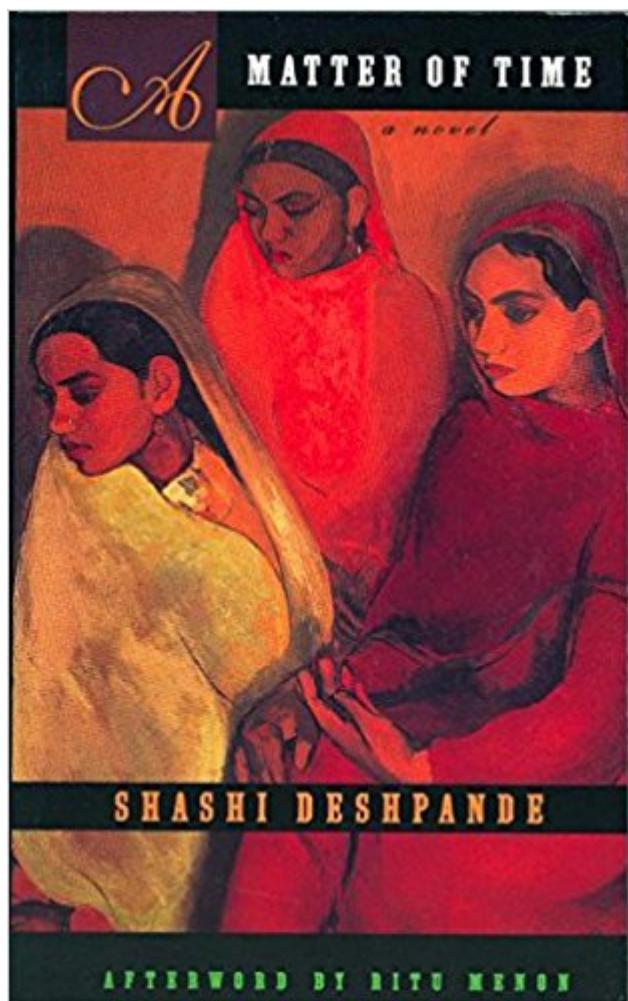


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A Matter Of Time



Synopsis

One morning, with no warning, Gopal, respected professor, devoted husband, and caring father, walks out on his family for reasons even he cannot articulate. His wife, Sumi returns with their three daughters to the shelter of the Big House, where her parents live in oppressive silence: they have not spoken to each other in 35 years. As the mystery of this long silence is unraveled, a horrifying story of loss and pain is laid bare—a story that seems to be repeating itself in Sumi's life. This multigenerational story, told in the individual voices of the characters, catches each in turn the cycles of love, loss, strength, and renewal that becomes an essential part of the women's identities. A Matter of Time reveals the hidden springs of character while painting a nuanced portrait of the difficulties and choices facing women—especially educated, independent women—in India today.

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Customer Reviews

Deshpande has published, in India, four novels, a screenplay and dozens of short stories. Her first book to reach these shores reveals a novelist who cares less for exotic cultural properties than for the intricacies of family relations. When respectable professor Gopal walks out on his wife, Sumi, and their three daughters, she has no recourse but to move back into her family's house in Bangalore. There she reencounters her estranged sister Premi, delves into the scandal behind her parents' marriage (they have not spoken to each other for more than three decades), and then into her grandparents' complex past. With psychological acuity, Deshpande switches between first- and

third-person narrators, crosscutting skillfully among passages of fraught conversation, swaths of remembered narrative, and meditation: "the bliss is only for moment," Premi speculates, "It touches us and goes on." As Sumi, Premi, Aru and their peers unravel the problems Deshpande poses, they discover new and clearer ways to think about their own status as mothers or daughters or wives. Analogies from Hindu belief and myth make clear that Deshpande writes for readers inside India first and foremost. But her careful exposition renders literary and historical reference no more a barrier to comprehension than the characters' unfamiliar names. Published in India in 1996, this novel places Deshpande in distinguished international company; readers who enjoy Anita Brookner or Isabel Allende may find distant analogues here. An afterword by Indian feminist editor and publisher Ritu Menon helps American readers grasp Deshpande's aims. (June) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In her first, somewhat charmless book to be published here, Indian writer Deshpande tells a story familiar to readers in the West: a family crisis is triggered when a husband walks out on his wife. Deshpande, the author of 80 stories and seven novels, begins her tale briskly. When Gopal leaves his wife, Sumi, for reasons that are, at first, unexplained, he opens a wound in her through which her family's legacy pours onto the page. While very little actually happens here, dozens of chapters are spent retelling the history of Sumi's people. Bearing her husband's sudden and unexpected departure with unexpected fortitude, Sumi relocates herself and her three daughters to the Big House, her family home. Sumi's mother, Kalyani, lives there with her husband, Shripati, whose own abandonment of his wife is recalled. Manorama, Kalyani's mother and Sumi's grandmother, quietly presides over the unfolding family story, which is rich in abandonments and betrayals. Finally, Aru, one of Sumi's daughters, completes the circle, and it is her fate in the context of her family's historical patterns that provides much of the intrigue. The fragments of this history are often moving, but they seem a loose jumble, lacking the particular flavor of a specific perspective. Given the complexity of Sumi's family tree, Deshpande's failure to clearly demarcate her characters makes for a thinly presented present time, through which recollections dart quickly into view. After a tragedy at the close, Gopal suffers an existential crisis of meaning in his life. Aru sends him away, freshly fortified among the women of her family. The concept that the patterns of family history sustain the women who are able to confront and cooperate with them is compelling, but the execution, with rare exception, is rather dull. -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Shashi Deshpande's book "A Matter of Time" is a "must" book for all those who are interested in the Indian way of thinking. In her book Deshpande tries to answer some very important questions like, "What is a relationship?", "What is life?", "What is death?", "Is death the final act which wipes out all that has been?" - questions that have bothered human beings from time immemorial. Seeped in Indian thoughts and philosophical thinking, rich in Indian images, the novel is a tapestry of human relationships. It is quite unconventional in the way it uses the relationships within a family to explore the ways open to a man who is disenchanted with the material world. Gopal who he is haunted by a feeling of emptiness walks out of his family life leaving behind his young and beautiful wife, Sumi and three daughters. Sumi accepts his decision even if she does not understand it, and concentrates on continuing to live. It is as if within her heart she knows that no human being has the right to chain up another one, that each person has to travel the path of life alone. Aru, the eldest daughter does not have this ripeness of outlook. Just 17 years of age, she thinks that justice is something which can be obtained in a court of law. She divides life into fair and unfair zones. Kalyani, the grand mother has led a macabre married life. Her husband has not talked to her for decades, and leads a solitary life in a room built on the top of the house. But the fact that he is there in the house seems to lend an air of respectability to Kalyani's life. She does not understand the loneliness of the heart, and neither understands why Gopal has walked out nor why Sumi takes it so calmly. Thus in this novel Shashi Deshpande brings together women of three generations and shows their different outlooks on life. As with her other books, a variety of experiences await the reader of this novel. What a reader gets out of this book very much depends on the his/her own mental frame work. This novel is not meant to entertain, but to enlighten.

As a writer, Deshpande speaks with the voice of truth. The core of her talent is a profound understanding of the layered complexities of women's familial interactions, the nurturing friendships and smoldering silences of past deeds. She weaves the story of four generations of Indian women caught in the "metaphor of silence". When Gopal, in a rush of existential angst, tells his wife, Sumi, that he cannot stay married, he makes this decision in good faith. Unable to find joy in the small moments of family, he is hyper-aware of the fleeting nature of happiness. With the simple intention to be true to himself, he sets in place a series of events with tragic consequences. The most wrenching change is for Sumi, Gopal's beautiful still-young wife, who must return to live in her parents home with three young daughters. In her struggle for a new definition of herself, Sumi grieves and accepts the loss of her marriage, discovers untapped strengths within herself and

possibilities for her future. Sumi begins anew knowing that "where I stand is always the center to me". Of the girls, Anu, the oldest, struggles hardest to understand how her everyday simplicity could change so drastically. She watches the grownups carefully: her mother, Sumi, her grandmother, Kalyani, and distant grandfather, Shripati. And Anu listens to old family stories in an attempt to comprehend the intricacies of the women's subtle alliances. No one is prepared for tragedy as they attempt to reassemble their hopes and dreams with an eye to the future. But life is ever unpredictable and this Indian family is dealt a blow that leaves them staggering for balance. In her powerful, quiet way, Deshpande lovingly renders her complex characters, bringing the reader into their home just long enough to love these women too, and mourn their loss, a rare gift in a writer.

I confess I could not even complete the book. There are too many characters and it was hard to keep track of everybody. I had to go back many times to check whether the character was really introduced before. The description of places was remarkable. I felt I was physically 'seeing' them. The story might be enlightening to some but Shashi Deshpande must keep the pace and interest of the reader. There were hardly any dramatic happenings in the first half which I read. Do the readers feel compelled to read? My definite answer was big NO. Unless the reader feels compulsion to turn over the page and reach the last page neither entertainment nor enlightenment will be experienced.

This book is fantastic! Deshpande uses such incredible imagery, such rich detail, I felt like I was part of the book. While exploring the inner workings of the Indian brain, this book also deals with the strength and power of Indian family life. I read this book from cover to cover in one sitting, and would gladly read it again. I absolutely loved it!

I absolutely loved this book. The dynamics of the characters were outstanding and her ability to describe things in such detail made this book impossible to put down. This is one of those books you have to read more than once, and will do so gladly.

This must have been the most boring, hard to follow book I have read in my life. There was not enough substance to hate it or to love it...just plain boring.

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