Chapter 5

Conclusion

In recent years a great volume of literature has come to accumulate on the crisis of modern society which has become a lonely crowd or hords of individuals without any links to one another. The past decades have witnessed a systematic erosion of primary ties in the wake of urbanization, industrialisation and competition. Technoculture has upset man's balance with nature and with others, instead of helping them to interact as full, emotional beings. No term is more widely used to refer to the despair and malaise of contemporary society than the term alienation.

The different meanings connected with it right from its denotations in theology and philosophy cannot be easily separated from the current range of meanings within the social sciences and even these are not much distinctive from its different meanings in psychiatry or politics. It may refer to objective social condition or states of self-alienation observable by others and subjective states of alienation not detectable to outsiders, but felt by the individual. It is now pictured as ubiquitous, a prototypical 'given' affecting the lives of individuals. In varying degrees a sizeable majority of contemporary society, including women, migrants, children and the aged experience this.

The development of the notion of alienation may be traced to German philosophy, but Karl Marx first made use of the concept as a powerful diagnostic tool for sociological enquiry. It may be classified under four general headings: alienation from others, alienation from work, a feeling of powerlessness and alienation from culture. According to psychology a six-level hierarchy of motives determine human behaviour: 1) physiological needs, 2) security and safety needs, 3) need for love, 4) affection and feelings of belonging, competence, prestige and esteem 5) self-fulfilment 6) curiosity and need to understand. If these needs remain unsatiated the individual is prone to pangs of loneliness, rootlessness, ostracism and likely to be maladjusted and a victim of psychological disorders. Individuals usually adapt three kinds of defence mechanisms--they reach out to people, move away from
people or move against people—in an attempt to provide some meaning to their chaotic lives.

Literature, particularly fiction, reflects the contemporary social conditions. It forms “the background and the deterministic conditions of the lives of their characters.” Hence a wide range of alienated characters populate the fictional landscape of Indian novelists as well. Women writers all over the world have been recording their experiences and invariably each experience is based on a particular cultural, political, religious and social milieu. The segment of the Indian society most affected by the changes around is woman. When the whole world is rushing forward, Indian women are most often required to conform to traditional ways. With feminine sensibility, sensitivity and understanding women writers portray a life-size picture of the contemporary Indian woman with all her longings, aspirations and frustrations.

The status of the Indian woman has been intertwined with the history of the country which is primarily one of repeated impositions of many an alien ethos on its culture necessitating a frequent restructuring of the social system and consequently individual identity. As centuries rolled by, the situation went on changing adversely for women who once enjoyed considerable freedom and privileges in the spheres of family, religion and public life. Idealistically a woman is deified in India, but factually she is defiled. Indian woman’s freedom from the shackles of illiteracy and ignorance has generated a new sensitivity about covert and overt oppressive conditions of womankind. They have begun to stir out of their placid stoicism. Yet, even the pursuit of career has not diminished the taboos and pressures. Modern woman values individuality and an insistence to preserve it from the gathering demands on it alienates her. The search for an independent identity “has negatively influenced the quality of our familial ties.” The psychologically tense, socially dynamic milieu often becomes unconducive to the establishment and development of healthy interpersonal relationships. Deprived of a sense of identity most women feel emotionally incapacitated to face life. Too fragile to withstand the onslaughts
of the external world, they drift towards loneliness, isolation, neurosis or death. Female marginality, psychic and spiritual despair, broken marital relationships, suppressed sexuality or the thwarted attempts of establishing individuality are some of the problems touched upon by women writers. In their attempts at charting the feminine sensibility Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee portray the sensitive, intelligent woman who refuses to accept any more the myths created by patriarchy.

These novelists have generally concentrated on the plights and problems of educated women mostly with an urban base. Desai unravels the complex responses of middleclass women to their domestic world, associated with husbands, parents, siblings and children. Deshpande deals with the middleclass earning woman who is pulled asunder by the problems of marital adjustment and quest for the assertion of her individuality. Mukherjee depicts the plight of women who have experienced cross-cultural crisis and all except Jasmine belong to the urban background of Calcutta. An analysis of their novels reveal fascinating similarities and differences among a wide repertoire of contemporary females ranging from emotionally starved children to psychically famished old women, from conventionally brought up young girls to multi-married cultural transplants. While Desai’s women except Bim, are confined to their limited space of home as hypersensitive housewives and the realm of Deshpande woman is more extended with their employment and exposure, the protagonists of Mukherjee go beyond the confines of the nation itself. Behind the facade of their normal, comfortable lives one can hear aberrant notes. Inspite of differences in experiences in their arduous journey to self-assertion these protagonists have a common thread, Indian and feminine.

The theme of alienation in Indian womanhood is projected mainly through marital relationships. The highly hierarchical nature of the Indian society is manifested within the family and the concept of equality is unknown to them. In India where even “intimate personal experiences and psychological habits tend to be dominated by conventional mores and traditional experiences” constitutional
guarantee of equality is superseded by social institutions like marriage and religion. In the Indian cultural context marriage forms an important institution to which the lives of the protagonists, except a few, are linked with. But for women matrimony is not a mere sociological institution, but an intense personal experience based on love and understanding. In Desai the quest for an authentic self is triggered by a crisis which leads to the immediate past which is heavily dominated by marriage and marital relations. While Toto's death gives Maya a chance to ponder over her marriage which is marked by lack of understanding and communication, fifth pregnancy forces Sita to evaluate her marital relationship. The constricted home atmosphere coerces Monisha to evaluate her marriage which is filled only by loneliness and lack of love. Homecoming helps Tara and the casual visit of Ila Dasa forces Nanda Kaul to review their marital bonds. Almost all the marriages in Desai are born out of convenience and the partners drift away failing to hold on to each other for emotional rapport. The marital bonds in Desai resonate with despair and dissonance between two irreconcilable temperaments and diametrically opposed attitudes to life. Both the main protagonists and those who are related to them are quite disgruntled in their marriages. Failing to achieve a closeness of mind between the sensitive wife and the prosaic husband, Maya-Gautama relationship is imprinted by silence. Monisha and Jiban share nothing in common. Sita and Raman too stare uncomprehendingly at each other. While disparity in cultural background too amplifies marital alienation in the other protagonists, Nanda Kaul is deprived of a harmonious and gratifying relationship despite her efficiency as a wife because of the infidelity of her husband. Those like Tara who achieves matrimonial harmony attain it at the cost of their individuality.

The protagonists of Desai fail to achieve a harmony in their lives: their desire to love and live clashes with the world of reality. They are permanently in search of a more authentic existence than that is available to them. Further they lack involvement and surrender. All except Maya try to achieve peace of mind by alienating from others. Lack of communication between the spouses is the bane of
all matrimonial relationships. The impossibility of verbal communication with the spouses causes Maya, Monisha and Sita to withdraw to a world of silence. Though they occasionally indulge in introspection, they lack the maturity and courage to achieve an honest appraisal of themselves. In their attempts to escape their cages they get mentally bruised and spiritually battered with no anchor to tie the tempest-tossed ship to. With their lonely strivings, desperation and near neurotic urges their worlds become destructive. When the demands on the self become unbearable they either withdraw or choose homicide or suicide as a solution to their problems.

It is the hiatus between dream and reality that darken the life of Mukherjee’s Dimple also. Both Desai’s *Cry, the Peacock* and Mukherjee’s *Wife* explore the inner space of neurotic individuals. Dimple’s maiden dream of freedom, love and luxury clashes with what she attains. She fails to reconcile Amit with the husband of her fantasy. The shift to the land of freedom shocks her to realise that America with all its glamour allows Indian women little escape from the traditional routes chalked out for her. If it is memory of the prophecy and Gautama’s inability to soothe the troubled psyche that define the tragic predicament of Maya, it is cultural transplantation and her addiction to the world of fantasy that cripple the mind of Dimple. While Gautama does not help to liberate Maya of her terrifying nightmares, Amit thwarts Dimple’s attempts at acculturation. Disenchanted with life for different reasons they become neurotic and the gradual descent to the role of murderers is carefully patterned.

The three protagonists of Mukherjee have differing views about marriage. Tara does not consider marriage as the absolute goal as Dimple does. Yet marriage to a foreigner does not liberate her psyche from the age old myths of submission and surrender. While Amit demands it, David sees no reason in it. Despite a liberated marriage Tara fails to attain oneness of soul because of cultural disparity. Though there is no apparent marital discord, lack of understanding and communication gap hovers over them too. Like the Desai novels, marriage becomes more of an escape
from the cultural nowhereness experienced by Tara. But instead of aiding her to assimilate, it only makes her an alien at home too. For the many-married Jasmine, each marriage carves a different destiny for her, none of which is dissatisfying for the ever-accommodating protagonist. Each marriage, which demands a separate identity, helps her to fulfil her march towards establishing her own identity. Though marriage alienates her from family and nation, by taking the fragrance of jasmine with her to each of her relationships, Jasmine is able to transcend the confines of her sex, race and nation. It is not in flight that she tries to establish her individuality but in fight. Marriage provides her a sense of fulfilment than it does to any other wife of the three novelists.

While maladjusted marriages born out of convenience make the wives miserable or neurotics in Desai and Mukherjee, the love marriages of Deshpande protagonists confer on them only split-personalities. Torn between the awareness of the need for establishing their individuality and the demands on them by the cultural constraints, they become schizophrenics. Like Desai novels, each Deshpande novel also begins with a crisis in marriage that provides scope for introspection: for Saru it is the nightly assaults by her husband, for Jaya the suspension of Mohan, for Indu dissatisfaction with work, for Sumi desertion of Gopal, and for Urm and Madhu the death of their children. Through the landscape of their minds Deshpande addresses the issues concerning the individuality of women. She too digs into the nature of human relations to excavate the known but seldom understood principles of life which might help individuals to live happily. Man often is unable to muster enough courage to emerge out of his shell or throw away the garbs of hypocrisy and be his real self. Fearing to face himself, he moves into an atmosphere of make beliefs, mechanically pursuing a life scarcely asserting his own will. Marriage forces Deshpande women to mask their real selves. Even the liberated Indu is compelled to be passive and unresponsive, carefully hiding her real self from Jayant who remains a conventional husband expecting his wife to play a submissive role. Jaya realises that she has lapsed into the stereotyped, placid wife: dependent, needing
help and support. Mohan has crushed both the writer and the woman in her. Both Indu
and Jaya are alienated as writers for lack of supportive husbands. Saru-Manu
marriage turns sour because of sexual sadism emanating from professional jealousy.
In *A Matter of Time* the theme of alienation is more pronounced spreading to two
generations. While a dangerous silence pervades the marriage of Shripati and
Kalyani which also was arranged as an expedience, the love marriage of Gopal and
Sumi breaks when Gopal unexpectedly walks out of the life of Sumi. The blissful life
of Madhu loses all its charm with doubts of infidelity which lead to the loss of the
only child. As a part of the “burden of wifehood”\(^4\) they learn to hide their real selves
as a strategy to survive within marriage.

Sex becomes either a unifying force or an alienating agency in man-woman
relationship. While Desai’s *Cry, the Peacock* is marked by an inadequacy of it,
Deshpande novels are characterised by the abuse of it. Sex becomes traumatic for
the wife, bruising her mind and body, when it is used by man as an instrument to inflate
his ego or as a tool to victimise. The ruthless domination of Indu’s Akka that alienates
her from others issues from the effect of sexual abuse on the child-wife and the
cruelty imposed on her by her much older husband. Mohan’s mother was subjected
to physical and mental violence which she bore silently. Urmi’s mother-in-law Mira
too got estranged from a husband whose carnal desires could not be satisfied by a
young bride. While Indu and Jaya are never allowed to express themselves in sex,
Urmi too remains ungratified in her physical desires with a husband who is mostly
absent. In *Small Remedies* Som too uses sex as an instrument to take vengeance on
a wife whom he believes has fallen from the pedestal of chastity. That not only rape
in marriage, but that outside marriage too causes women to lose their dignity is
proved by the case of Kalpana.

Deshpande succinctly presents the inequalities and injustice heaped on women
because of the inferior status thrust on her. Not only the stories of the protagonists
but of all women who are associated to her, the various relatives and servants,
reinforce the subordinate position of women. Saru’s husband is a daring example of
the fragile ego of the man who finds it difficult to accept the superior status of a wife. Mohan is a typical Indian husband who expects his wife's Gandhari-like support for everything. Through Mira, Saru and Madhu Deshpande, focus attention on all those women who are doomed to suffer the nightly assaults on them for discussion about sex or protest against sexual abuse is still difficult even for a doctor like Saru. Through the story of Akka and Shakutai, she shows how marital vows are flouted by men of both the upper strata and the lower strata of the society respectively. Sexual starvation adds to the misery of Maya. While her despair and agony over unattained sexual satiation is suggested by Desai through the cry of the peacock, we find Mukherjee's Dimple engaged in sexual fantasies with glamorous heroes from sports and cinema.

Each of these marriages is marked by silence. "Silence is a symbol of oppression, while liberation is speaking out, making contact. Contact is what matters: a woman who lies or who is silent may not lack a language, but she does not communicate." Desai women also fail to communicate and resort to silence. The silence that creeps into all these women is symptomatic of alienation, apprehension and anger rooted in every female soul in different forms: a silence which is often misunderstood by men as the symbol of contentment.

Incompatibility with their spouses often drive Deshpande heroines to extramarital relationships. None of her "protagonists are presented in the traditional pativrata mould." Sarita's flaunting by Boozie becomes inoffensive only when the fact of his homosexuality is revealed. She thinks of him as a catalyst to boost her career. Her association with Padmakar is used as an escape route. Jaya finds a critic, lover and confidant in Kamat. Yet she disciplines herself to safeguard her marriage. Urmi never allows her association with Bhaskar to cross the limits. None of Deshpande women oversteps the limits of propriety except Indu who deliberately sleeps with Naren in whom she finds an alter ego. Though Jayant, Mohan and Kishore remain ignorant of the ventures of their wives, it definitely adds more bricks to the wall of silence between Saru and Manohar. The realisation of the futility of such
endeavours enables them to disentangle from the short adventures. It is not extramarital but suspicion about a pre-marital affair that leads to the tragedy of Madhu. Inspite of disenchantment with marriage none of Desai protagonists goes beyond the traditional lines marked out for them. Neither betrayal of the husband nor sexual starvation force them to find a relief in an affair outside marriage. Depsite western education and liberated outlook Mukherjee’s Tara remains monogamous though she becomes a victim to Tuntunwala. The incident only strengthens her decision to leave India. Dimple’s flirtation with Milt Glasser is only a desperate attempt to merge with the new culture by outward drabs. Instead of fulfilling, it only deepens her estrangement from self. Amit and the surroundings. Caught in the traumatic turbulence of guilt over adultery and the wish to become American she becomes a murderess. Jasmine too murders the one who assaults on her widowhood. But though her involvement with both Taylor and Bud are offensive in the Indian standards, cultural transplantation allows her ample freedom to be totally unIndian. Further, her relationship with both of them has been faithful. At the end of the novel when she rides away with Taylor carrying Bud’s child she identifies with the American self.

Together with marital alienation and its consequences these novelists highlight the misery of widows too who become victims of neglect or exploitation. The lives of Mira Masi, Indu’s Atya and Jasmine’s mother are all doomed because widowhood is considered as a bane. Jasmine’s determination to leave India arises from her refusal to be confined to the life of a widow like her mother. Her life abroad with the Vadheras too highlights the behaviour that is expected of an Indian widow.

A civilization that perpetuates myths created by patriarchy makes marriage physically and spiritually dissatisfying for the women. In the restrictive social code she becomes an automaton plugged into the social system. Though each of these characters, except Jasmine, feels marriage as a constricting force obstructing self-development since they have internalised their culture they never relinquish marriage. Monisha alone among Desai protagonists at least thinks about a divorce, but
still remains trapped in the culture. Though the wives in Deshpande novels temporarily withdraw from their partners, they wish to live within the social framework. For Jasmine the belief that marriage is sacrosanct undergoes a total change. Yet she does not question the validity of it. By remaining well within the bounds of marriage these women have raised some significant questions pertaining to gender issues, and the position of women in India.

The last three novels of Deshpande echo the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15: “A sound is heard in Ramah; the sound of bitter weeping. Rachel is crying for her children; they are gone, and she refused to be comforted.” Urmi refused to be comforted over the death of her little Anusha. Shakutai mourns the rape and death of Kalpana. Small Remedies projects the void and pain caused in Madhu by the loss of her only child Adit. Kalyani is forced to suffer in silence not only the loss of her son, but that of her daughter too. The two-tier system of the house becomes a permanent reminder of her loss. Though the death or loss of children distances them from their husbands and affects their attitude to life none of them wallow for ever punishing the surviving children for the dead as Saru’s mother did.

According to Sudhir Kakar, motherhood confers on woman “a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can.” Barrenness becomes an aggravating factor of the ultimate catastrophe of Maya and Monisha. Though Monisha does not brood over her incapacity to bear a child, sterility alienates her from Jiban’s relatives who endlessly discuss about her blocked tubes. Contrary to cultural expectations motherhood is not a fulfilling experience for Desai’s women. When the mothers themselves are in need of nurture there is no mothering. Scalded by the infidelity of the spouse Nanda Kaul fails to relish her maternity. She had played her role to perfection but it has left her exhausted that she does not want to don that mantle again. Baffled by her own predicament as a woman motherhood adds only tension to the sensitive Sita who desperately attempts to have an immaculate conception in the reverse. The protagonists of Desai fail to internalise feminine, maternal virtues for they lack a role model. If absence of mother creates a void in Maya and Sita, the
presence of a mother does not mitigate the misery of the other protagonists. There is hardly any loving bond between the Ray trio and their mother. The Das children too grow unattended by a disinterested mother. Uma vegetates under a selfish mother who does not care to provide emotional rapport. The debunking or deglamourising of the myth of the mother runs through Desai novels.

In Deshpande mother-daughter alienation is more pronounced and it creates a vehemence and hatred towards womanhood in general. The resentment towards the female role ensues from their ungraceful initiation to womanhood and the constant reminder of their inferiority to the male. Saru’s estrangement from her mother, which destroys not only her childhood but her adult life as well, is felt throughout the novel. To be loved by the mother means to be alive, to be rooted, to be at home. Rejected by her mother, Saru feels rootless. Motherless Indu fails to establish rapport with the dominating Akka because she symbolises authority. Jaya shows no affinity to her mother or grandmothers. She expresses vehemently her hatred towards mother for making her homeless. The forced separation between the mother and daughter has erected an unspoken emotional barrier between Inni and Urmi. If Madhu feels the absence of a mother in her all-male childhood, her childhood friend is rejected as a daughter by the celibritee mother Savitri Indorekar. The selfishness and cruelty of Manorama permanently darkens the life of Kalyani. Animosity towards the mothers make them rebels and they refuse to toe their line in marriage. Saru’s antagonism towards the mother, and through her the traditional values symbolised by her, drives her to the arms of Manohar. Indu marries Jayant in rebellion against the family, particularly Akka. Jaya and Urmi too marry against their mothers. Flight from the constraints of matriarchy ends in another trap. Hence it is not love that binds them in marriage, but refusal to admit their failure. The inkling of alienation sneaks to the second generation also. Saru, Jaya and Vanaa fear alienation from their children, especially girls. As Adele King rightly comments: “in all Deshpande’s works there is no mother who could serve as a model for the daughter.”
In the fictional world Mukherjee there is no close affinity between mothers and daughters. Tara experiences a distance from her pious mother on account of her mlecha husband. Dimple's mother too fails to provide emotional crutches to the daughter in her hour of need. Jasmine is the only daughter who receives understanding and support from her mother. With remarkable determination she opposes an incompatible marriage inspite of opposition from the traditional family. While Tara remains childless, Dimple considers pregnancy as a hindrance to her voyage to America and manipulates an abortion. But Jasmine, without becoming a biological mother functions as a mother figure to Duff and Du. Infact it is the immigrant Indian Jasmine who glorifies the image of the nurturing, caring mother.

Deshpande and Mukherjee unveil the subtle process of gender discrimination operative in the Indian society where the female child is acculturated to her secondary position. Deshpande defines the girl child through the various factors that shape her like myths, legends and the environment. The lack of intimacy between mother and daughter in Deshpande springs from the undeserving greatness bestowed on the son. It is the environment that decides the attitude of the child: her personality develops through upbringing and socialisation. Saru is a victim of gender discrimination which ultimately leads to sibling jealousy and her involuntary involvement in the drowning of her brother. The guilty conscience engendered by the groundless accusation of the mother scalds her psyche. Witnessing the secondary place attributed to women in the family, Indu becomes a rebel. The constant reminder that they are mere sojourners in their homes breeds in them a sense of rootlessness. Yet these protagonists cannot completely sever from traditional upbringing. They become peaceful only after a reconciliation with the past. In Mukherjee, Dimple too is led to consider marriage as her sole raison d'etre.

Desai also uses the past of her characters as a key to their unconsciousness. As daughters they, except Uma whose education is curfailed for nursing the prized son, enjoy reasonable adolescence without feeling the discrimination of being girl children because of the absence of parental interference. Yet seeds of unrest are
sown from their cramping home influences. The joy and trauma of their childhood experiences get reflected in the attitudes and sensibilities of all these characters. The experiences and interaction during the formative years too contribute to their inability to construct and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships.

Nurtured by a domineering father in a fairy-world like childhood, Maya suffers from father-fixation and over protection which hamper her marital life. Parental negation, partiality, the uncertainties and upheavals of childhood cause Sita to harbour a feeling of insecurity. The animosity between the father and the mother creates only absence of trust, confidence and sharing for the trio from Kalimpong. The policy of neglect followed by the parents fails to inculcate a feeling of unity among the Das children. While disintegration of the family immediately after the death of the father leaves Sita a drifter, without a centre to hold them together the Das children escape from the uncongenial environment leaving Bim alone with the retarded Baba. The psychic hurt felt by Bim spreads to her adult life building barriers with her siblings. Infact none of the Desai children experiences the joys of sibling support and peer group confidence. Hence their relationships as grown-ups become too fragile. Raka’s traumatic childhood with an oppressive father and an ever-suffering mother withdraws her to a cocooned world with no affinity to the adults. Suffering from emotional deprivation under a host of dominating, over-protecting, partial or selfish parents Desai children march towards their womanhood like cripples with no crutches. None of Deshpande or Mukherjee protagonists has a sister. Mukherjee does not probe deep into the consciousness of her protagonists nor have they gone through traumatic childhood experiences. Yet the over protected, socially and economically insulated heritage removes Tara from the actual, ugly side of Calcutta. Lack of experience with the hard realities of life prevents Dimple also from responding to her environment positively. Both Tara and Dimple become misfits at home and abroad.

Eric Fromm suggests that by uniting oneself with others in the spirit of love and shared work one can hope to end his alienation. “There is only one possible,
productive solution for the relationship of individualized man with the world: his active solidarity with all men and his spontaneous activity, love and work, which unite him again with the world, not by primary ties but as a free and independent individual." But Desai’s women do not wish to relate to things and persons around them except Maya who is tragically denied the chance. Childlessness estranges her from friends who gloat over their impending motherhood. While Sita exhibits an aversion towards Raman’s family and friends, Maya is never allowed entry into the male world of Gautama. The monotony of domestic chores distances Sita and Monisha from the other women of their families who uncomplainingly undertake the drudgery of kitchenwork. Psychological warfare of women in the joint-family system and lack of a sense of accommodation carve Monisha and Sita as recluses. While Nanda Kaul fiercely guards her privacy, Uma is not given the freedom to mingle with kindred spirits. Hence these protagonists become “epitomes of loneliness and the angst that is characteristic of many modern, urban, sensitive people, particularly women.” A study of the early novels of Deshpande also reveals the essential loneliness of protagonists. Social life becomes a routine, mechanical programme and fails to grant any comfort. Saru’s search for a face to confide her problems fail. Indu admits that in her social life there are no friends, but only ‘contacts.’ Jaya admits her inability to establish empathy with Mukta, a resident of the same apartment. For Mukherjee’s Dimple immigration alienates her from the only friend Pixie. News of the glamorous life style of her friend only aggravates the sense of failure in Dimple. The unconscious guilt over the abortion repels her from the pregnant mother Meena Sen and the shift to the Mukherjees further increases the distance. Neither Ina Mullick nor Milt Glasser succeeds in providing succour and support to the crumpling spirit. Returning home after seven years to the company of kith and kin does not help Tara to overcome a sense of isolation.

Leisure, which is a marvellous liberation for those who learn to use it, can become great emptiness for those who don’t. In the absence of any activity Maya is obsessed with her past and broods over the coldness of Gautama. The intellectual
pursuit of Monisha does not provide her any reason to continue in this world. Sita too senses boredom and loneliness with a busy husband and grown up children. Nanda Kaul's disinterested activity has instilled in her only a craving for privacy which does not in any way mitigate her misery. Denied a chance to be involved, Uma wastes her life catering to the whims and fancies of her parents. Ila Das' real involvement in the welfare of the people assumes tremendous symbolic significance when contrasted with the barren, unfulfilled lives of the other lonely protagonists in Desai. Yet her end proves that neither complete attachment nor total detachment is feasible. With her education and employment Bim is able to add meaning to her life and establish her individuality. But activity or job alone fails to render significance to the lives of Deshpande heroines. While Saru is disturbed by a feeling that her professional success has detrimentally affected her marriage, Indu fails to glean satisfaction from a job that curtails her freedom. Jaya too feels castigated as a writer when Mohan unceremoniously demands her to hide behind the 'Seeta column.' Engrossed in their occupation Urmia, Sumi and Madhu are able to tide over their loss. In the alien world of Mukherjee, Tara gets no pleasure and approval for the debasing works of an Indian wife from a foreign husband. Aloneness and inactivity destroys the spirit of Dimple too and drags her to the pits of neurosis where her only company becomes the T.V screen. The denial of the unexpected chance to flourish as a working woman thrusts a wedge to her marital bond as well. Jasmine becomes a survivor in the alien soil by seeing a possibility even behind a problem. The status as an aupair enhances her self-esteem.

Without an interesting occupation women become obsessed with their peculiar personal traits: Maya with prophecy, Monisha with privacy and claustrophobia, Nanda with loneliness and Dimple and Sita with violence. City life and its associated business and violence causes, a malediction on the lives of the heroines of Desai and Mukherjee. Sita retreats from the menacing life of Bombay that fills her only with tedium and tension. Ila Das and Nanda Kaul suffer from social inequities and injustices perpetuated by a cruel man-dominated world. The tragic rape and death of
Ila corresponds to the symbolic death of the widow Jasmine on the alien shores. The fictional world of Mukherjee, at home and abroad, provides horrific sights of violence. Infact the life of Jasmine cannot be separated from violence which trails her from the remote village of Hasnapur to the vast expanse of America. Though it is violence that governs the shifting identities of Jasmine, she refuses to be disheartened by it. Having no direct experience with violence, the violence on the screen seeps into the mind and blood of Dimple that she feels it as the most natural experience and ultimately becomes a murderess. Tara’s first displacement too has been caused by concern about her safety in the turbulence of Calcutta. Back in Calcutta from America, where she has experienced the trauma of the fear of assault, it is violence, both subjective and objective, that determines her finally to leave India. Sexual violence characterises many marital relationships in Deshpande. The child-bride Akka, Urmi’s mother-in-law Mira, the young girl Kalpana, the educated employed wives like Saru and Madhu are all silent victims of sexual abuse.

According to psychology disturbances in human relationships, particularly in marriage, and thwarting of individuality generate neurosis. There are two types of adaptation: static and dynamic. While static does not make demand on the personality, dynamic demands changes on the personality giving rise to neurosis. When the external reality becomes too harsh to bear they retreat into fantasy world. The protagonists of Desai and Mukherjee’s Dimple experience psychic disturbance due to severe demands on their personality. But neither Maya’s retreat to her past nor Monisha’s refuge in books save them from their problems. When the past and present become equally dissatisfying and unacceptable Maya and Monisha resort to the last refuge for a neurotic, suicide or homicide. Even the stately Nanda Kaul has been shading herself behind the lies of love and glamour. Sita adopts escape to Manori as a survival strategy. Self-introspection helps Sita to assess her self and to accept life with all its imperfections. As Usha Bande opines “Symbolically when Sita walks back home placing her feet in Raman’s foot-marks on the sand, she decides to contribute positively to their lives.” An intense introspection aids Bim also to
emerge out of the feelings of disappointment and wrath. When fantasy is used as an important narrative technique to project the inner world of Maya, it becomes a means of reinterpreting reality for Sita and Bim. The inner change definitely heralds a bright future for them where there is hope for achieving amalgamation with society and others.

Deshpande women also leave their family of procreation overburdened by their roles. But nostos or return to their families of orientation which they left in rebellion against maternal authority itself is a part of the process of reconciliation. The journey helps them to analyse their relationships and assess themselves as imperfect individuals. The temporary withdrawal helps them to acknowledge their own contributions to their misery. They realise that living to the expectations of others have led to loss of identity. They have been compelled to seek identity by continuous approval and recognition from others. But return home helps them to release themselves from emotional bondages. Saru undergoes the arduous journey into herself and learns to free her of guilt, shame and humiliation. Indu liberates herself from the shadows of the past and gleans strength to resign her job. From an individual without an identity, save that of her husband, she matures into an individual with her own identity. She decides to build up her life on love and honesty. Jaya understands that pursuit of happiness is a mirage and through articulating her predicament she ends her silence and decides to remain whole. Madhu understands that only by sharing their sorrow, they will be able to recreate Adit. They step back to the grooves of marriage, definitely with a marked change. It is difficult for women to outgrow the image bestowed on them. It is only through self-analysis and self-understanding, through vigilance and courage that they begin to change their lives. They fight their own battles. As Rani Dharkar rightly comments, they begin "in ignorance and grow into self-knowledge through suffering."

Without the strength to fight their own battles Dimple and Tara fail like the early protagonists of Desai. Incapable of interrogation and integration they become unrealistic at home and on the exotic land. But Jasmine shows indefatigible courage
and spirit and overcomes obstacles and assimilates to the changing conditions. She is a survivor conditioned to alien surroundings. But the transformation is not without pains. She admits: “There is no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams.”

In her attempt to document the pangs of alienation of the gendered subaltern Deshpande also emphasises the strategies and readjustments her protagonists have undertaken inorder to forge an identity of their own. While Desai novels present the terror of facing single-handedly the ferocious assaults of existence the early protagonists of Deshpande struggle to become one’s own refuge and the later novels recognise the value of female bonding. Thrusting the need for female solidarity Simone de Beauvoir comments: “Women are comrades in captivity for one another, they help one another endure their prison, even help one another prepare for escape.” In suffering a unique sense of fellowship is forged, not only with the living but also with the mute and the dead. The pain over the death of her little daughter motivates Urmi to reach out to other suffering women. Urmi is drawn to Shakutai, Kalpana and also to her dead mother-in-law who suffered rape in marriage. Each of the relationships in The Binding Vine reinforces the idea of sharing and supporting. While Vanaa, Akka and Inmi rally round Urmi helping her to recuperate the loss, Urmila reciprocates by rushing to help Vanaa and Shakutai. By establishing rapport with these women Urmila is able to forge the binding vine of womanhood in love and sympathy which functions as a strategy for empowerment. While Urmi is saved by the company of her mother and friend, Kalyani is assisted to bear her sorrow by her friend and cousin Goda who rushes to her aid when Sumi returns to the same house inheriting the fate of her mother. In her hour of trouble Sumi also has a long line of relatives who help her to harden to a self-reliant woman. Madhu too is helped to bear her loss by the care and concern of her friends. Lilian Gordon’s concern for illegal aliens also speaks of female bonding. Mukherjee equips Jasmine to flourish in the alien soil by the help of generous souls like Gordon, Mother Ripplemeyer and even Karin, Bud’s first wife. Jasmine also exhibits tremendous willpower and dignity. It
is through her unselfish care and willingness to help that she is able to win the hearts of many.

The novels of Desai, Deshpande and Mukherjee discuss the alienation and despair confronted by the female section of the middleclass society. Desai’s protagonists are capable of dissent but are incapable of finding a solution to their problems, except Sita and Bim. The desire to maintain their identity and individuality lead to disruption of relations. Lonely and not as autonomous as Deshpande women, most of them fail to find a way out. Until Bim, Desai protagonists are variations of recognisable types: hypersensitive, intensely emotional, misfits in their worlds, struggling to preserve their identity despite pressures on them. Trapped in their culture or in their familial roles they try to retain their autonomy either by withdrawing to their subjective worlds often acting in ways which seem neurotic or they cultivate a coldness and detachment refusing to make adjustment. Each tries according to her psychic needs to get rid of the despair and anguish. While Maya and Monisha fail to find a way out of the labyrinth of adversary experiences, others come out of the spiritual impasse after tormenting searches. Sita who gleans courage and wisdom to continue life hearals the apperance of the independent, self-confident Bim who not only plays her gender roles but also that of a brother and father. Desai considers the fight more important than the final result. Her protagonists register their protest though they do not necessarily find positive solutions. Bim represents the emancipated contemporary woman who tries to seek solutions and who is able to carve out an identity for herself, independent of her gendered class. Desai suggests that an honest appraisal of one’s own role with its strengths and weaknesses and admiration for the positive qualities of other persons can save relationships and pave way for serenity of mind and harmonious interaction. With Bim a strong female, who achieves transcendence over inner divisions and social restrictions through celebrations of her nurturing self, acceptance and accommodation, emerges. Sita and Bim show a movement from illusion to reality, darkness to light, the twilight kingdom of death to the clear light of life.
The protagonists of Deshpande take their leap from Desai’s Bim. But education and employment seldom guarantee happiness for them. Though urban and educated they are firmly rooted in India with the weight of centuries of tradition and culture behind them. Yet they refuse to be crushed when confronted with challenges. None of them take death or murder as an escape route. The temporary withdrawal from their familiar domestic space equips them to face life, not by submission but by establishing their individuality. Like Desai’s Sita, they acknowledge the need to connect. The novels end in a note of hope, suggesting the possibility of positive action in future. The crowning impression is that of dignity and strength. Conquering their fears, reconciling with the past and acknowledging the need of bonding they achieve harmony in life. They make allowances for others, adjust and accommodate, yet without sacrificing their individuality and deciding to begin a new, honest life. Deshpande portrays the vulnerability, the deviousness, the helplessness as well as the courage and power of woman.

Immigration and exposure to the West make the protagonists of Mukherjee slightly different from the other Indian women. Yet like Maya and Monisha, Tara and Dimple too exhibit a lack of courage and maturity to confront life whether in India or abroad. While marital and cultural alienation compounded by neurosis transform Dimple to a murderess, Jasmine rises from death and murder “as a protean assuming new guises inorder to merge into the flow of a transient society,”16 While Deshpande provides fictional constructions of feminist individualism within marriage and family, Mukherjee presents woman as a contender for achieving a self-forged, fulfilling identity. Immigration enables the protagonists to undertake two journeys: transcontinental and inner. While the two fail to merge in Tara and Dimple, for Jasmine they forge a new identity

The survey from Maya to Jasmine highlights the perceptible changes in the phase of Indian womanhood. None of the protagonists belong to the all-suffering, self-negating woman of the past. Even when incapable of changing the existing pattern they show remarkable calibre to question them in their own ways. Inspite of
differences in style and approach the three novelists accord on the need of self-examination, self-reliance, and self-determination to maintain individuality for woman, without which she will be alienated. Though not avowed feminists none of the novels project a well-developed male character. Being woman centred novels, men are either pushed to the periphery or they are felt only through the experience and observation of the female characters. The husbands in Deshpande appear to be cruel and inconsiderate compared to the more caring, responsible partners in Desai. In the realm of Mukherjee only Amit gains any detailed description whereas David remains an absent husband. The men in the life of Jasmine, except Half-Face, assist her to function as a normal human being with perception, self-esteem and individuality.

In the delination of characters and in the manipulation of style and technique each of these novelists demonstrates originality. As obvious corollary of being character based novels, plot occupies only secondary position. Since much of the action goes through the minds of the protagonists, Deshpande and Desai employ introspection to make them more transparent. Her preoccupation with the inner world of sensibility has forced Desai to use a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the stream of consciousness of her hypersensitive women. Most Desai novels have a tripartite structure providing ample opportunities to take trips down the corridors of memory. Infact memory becomes a technique to spot light the consciousness of the characters who are enmeshed in their past.

Deshpande also manoeuvres memory and dream as effective devices to probe into the psyche of her various protagonists who carry the heavy load of the past into their present. Beginning with a crisis, in each of the novels there is a nostos that helps to a final reconciliation. Using a clear, lucid and unembellished language that suits the intensity of emotions the novels are written from the inside. Dreams and nightmares are employed to exemplify the feelings of guilt, fear of desertion, sexual assault and to reinforce the poignancy of the loss of the grieving mothers. By mixing past with present using flashbacks Deshpande succeeds in fathoming the minds of
her women characters. An abundant use of literary allusions, myths and folklore seamlessly meshes the works of Deshpande with earlier literature and highlights the rootedness of the females in Indian culture.

Mukherjee advances from omniscient narrator in *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* to the first person narrative in *Jasmine* to join the various identities of the central character. The structure of the novels too corresponds to the various stages in the lives of the protagonists who experience different locales. Starting with the alien experience of Tara, Mukherjee prepares the ground for her atrophied status through the different traumatic experiences that culminate with the violence at Catelli Continental. *Wife* too is compartmentalised to shifts of locale: first in India, then at the Sens in America and the last at the Mookerjees. The unique experiences of Jasmine in India and America are bridged together by Jane Ripplemeyer who embarks on her challenging journey from Hasnapur as Jyoti and after meandering routes gets ready to ride with Taylor to reposition her stars. Since place and displacement are of great import for an immigrant, the outside world also gains significance in her novels.

Desai skilfully correlates the landscape of the novels to the psychic states of the sensitive individuals that people her canvass. The city of Delhi highlights the lack of affinity experienced by Maya. The cry of the peacock forms the background music suggesting her sexual starvation. *Voices in the City* too tries to capture the polyphonic music of the metropolis echoing through the winding lanes of Calcutta. Recurrent bird images signify the fettered life of Monisha. The island stands as a private refuge for Sita. The prey-predator image is continued in the next novel to disclose the inhuman assault on Ila. The barren landscape of Carignano matches with the loneliness and rejection of Nanda Kaul. The deserted, crumbling, tomb-like residence of Bim in Old Delhi represents the disintegration of familial ties. In Mukherjee the violence in the city of Calcutta intensifies with the accelerating feeling of nowhereness in Tara. *Wife* is replete with corroding images suggestive of the deteriorating mind of Dimple. In *Jasmine* the vast expanse of America can be
identified with the heroine who is willing to forge multiple identities. Deshpande repeats the thematic pattern of a woman's unhappiness and frustration in marriage through different images. To Indu marriage is a cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce. The image of marriage as a cage where two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other effectively communicates the constrictive nature of it. Umi sees a bride as a lamb waiting for the butcher's knife. Reflecting on her marriage Jaya considers them as two beasts tied to a cart who perform their duty mechanically with no love or trust between them.

Thus Indian womanhood gets estranged from self and others, though most often it goes undetected by others, due to reasons varying from personality traits to societal expectations. Uncongenial domestic environments characterised by emotional deprivation, parental neglect or partiality, gender discrimination and lack of peer group or sibling support incapacitate girl children to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships. Broken marital relations, sexual abuse, loneliness, despair, identity crisis, thwarting of individuality, sterility as well as loss of children, dislocation and culture shock too contribute to darken the lives of these women. Absence of emotional rapport with kith and kin drives them to the pit of despair. Unless they lit the corridors of their minds, break their silence and learn to assimilate without surrendering individuality they will end up as strangers in strange worlds.

Modern investigations have made available strong and effective medicines for most of the diseases. But for the hurts of the mind the strongest medicine should come from within, through love. Love is defined as "union with somebody or something outside oneself, under the condition of retaining a separateness and integrity of one's self." It is an experience of sharing and interdependency which is central to human nature. One cannot have meaningful identity without acknowledging an emotional relatedness to others. Identity is an influential psychic and social mechanism that guides human behaviour. Awareness of her value and identity assists women to become autonomous. Since the private world of the
woman merges with that of her outer world, she will find it difficult to live as a meaningful individual unless she learns to assert herself. Self-negation, eulogised as the quentessence of feminine virtue, only makes her submissive. Women can be themselves only when they have a purpose, a direction. Education brings about a freer definition of self and identity empowers it. Each of these novelists believes that no power can help us avoid disasters. The only "possibility is to face the fact that these are part of the human condition and therefore inevitable." 18 These novelists present life as it is and emphasise that the liberation must come from within. They advocate that we need to have a world where nobody is inferior or superior. Like Simone de Beauvoir they believe that the fact that we are human is much more than being men and women. An optimistic finale of the later novels of Desai, Deshpande and Mukherjee suggests a plausible future where men and women are valued equally, where they become complementary to each other. A world devoid of cramping childhood experiences and gender discrimination ensures unsullied dignity and individuality to woman which enable her to emerge out of the problematics of alienation.
Notes


5 Deborah Cameron, Feminism and Linguistic Theory (London: Macmillan, 1985) 7.

6 Indira Nitayanandam, Three Great Indian Women Novelists (New Delhi: Creative, 2000) 50.


10 Nitayanandam 93.


15 Pathania 72

16 Dharkar 68.
