

# **CHAPTER - V**

## CONCLUSION

The study of Deshpande's treatment of the theme of alienation and affirmation in her novels suggests that it is not wholly correct and justifiable to put her oeuvre into the straight jacket of feminist theories. The examination of this theme shows that the experiences of disappointments, dissensions, loneliness, meaninglessness and conflict between mind and body, between social conformity and individual aspirations are common to all, both men and women. She shows that all human beings irrespective of class, caste, religion, language, age and social status are vulnerable to these realities of human experience. If she shows men and women of middle class, like Saru, Smita, Jaya, Urmi, Madhu and Vasu, divided against themselves often feeling entrapped in apathetic and antagonistic society around them, there are also those of the lower stratum such as Shakutai, Sulu, Tara and Jeeja who equally feel the pain of being dispossessed of their human identity. Depiction of the sense of bewilderment and helplessness of old uncle and Anant Kaka in *Roots and Shadows* shows the kind of alienation old men may have to encounter due to economic dependency. An acute feeling of loneliness and lostness in the life of Saru's mother is the result of her sense of insecurity, egotism and absence of communication with her daughter and even with her husband. Deshpande's treatment of childhood experiences is also equally insightful in this respect. The delineation of the feelings of loneliness and withdrawal into silence of children like Rati in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Rahul in *That Long Silence*, Mandira in *The Binding Vine* and Munni in *Small Remedies*, reveals how insensitivity of parents can adversely affect the psyche and behavioural patterns of boys and girls, even in their formative years. If Rati has no feelings of relatedness to her mother because the later is too much enmeshed in her own problems, Rahul withdraws into himself and stops communication with his parents altogether because of the excessive and oppressive expectations of his father. Old and young, men and women, educated and uneducated, all have been shown by Deshpande passing through the experiences of disillusionment and feelings of separation between their conscious and unconscious, self and society, their ideals and actualities in their life in varying forms and degrees. Her interest, clearly, is in depicting the nature of human experience which transcends the social, economic, gender and age divisions.

Deshpande's treatment of woman's life – her ambitions, self-image, conflicts, disenchantments and despairs in personal, familial and social life – is only her way, as a novelist, to explore and dramatize the true human nature of these experiences. Since woman is the subaltern, the other in the patriarchal set up, she tends to represent powerfully the predicament of all those who are underprivileged and oppressed in the power game, including those of male sex. The human tendency to dominate, control and subjugate others, by use of force or manipulation, appears to be, according to her, the root cause of disrupting and shattering one's sense of wholeness and one's feeling of being in harmony with self and the environment. One of the most pervasive forms of this struggle to gain and perpetuate power over others is perceptible in the institution of patriarchy. Deshpande's fiction is, in fact, a penetrative critique of this system which seems to be at work in all the areas of life of her men and women with equally discordant and disjunctive consequences for both. Through her focus on the institution of family and various human relationships and roles within its ambit, Deshpande brings out how men and women suffer feelings of alienation due to the pressures of patriarchal prescription and proscriptions of gender based roles and attitudes.

This control of patriarchy over the mind and psyche of the individuals and the process of their being forced into roles and images set for them, begins in early childhood, sowing the seeds of alienation. The privileging of the male child over the female one not only creates the feelings of antagonism in the psyche of Saru against her own brother Dhruva, but also pushes her away from her parents, especially her mother. Feelings of hostility against the mother cause in her an abhorrence for her own femininity and her body, which is like her mother's. But, at the same time, she is also haunted by the painful consciousness of having 'wronged' her mother by marrying against her wishes. Similarly, Mohan in *That Long Silence* suffers from a life-long sense of insecurity due to his deprived and poverty-ridden childhood. It is this feeling of insecurity which creates in him an urge to earn money, even through illegitimate means, causing a split not only between him and his wife but also within his own psyche. His overwhelming desire to have a very submissive and obedient wife, who endorses even his wrong doings, is indicative of the guilt in his heart. The excessive demands, which he makes upon his son

Rahul, to perform well at school so that he may have a sound and secure career, causes alienation between the two.

Deshpande appears to be particularly interested in exposing how both men and women get alienated from their own selves when forced into certain roles, laid down for them by the impersonal social system. Imposition of certain duties, responsibilities and functions by social expectations forces a kind of divorce between ambitions, desires and impulses as individuals on the one hand and what they actually have to do or pretend to do on the other. It makes the life of some of the characters in her fiction mechanical and monotonous. Jaya in *That Long Silence* tries to do all that is expected of a woman as a good wife. But the unending monotony of household chores, her efforts to be always pleasing and gratifying to her husband in everything and even her struggles to prove herself a good mother, get on her nerves so much that she is turned into a weak, helpless woman, which she never was before her marriage. Male characters, too, in her fiction reveal how the social expectations of certain roles become cause of a split between their inner authentic self as individuals and the roles which they are forced to play as men. Submission of Padmakar to the patriarchal authority, by marrying a girl of his father's choice, creates a permanent chasm between him and all the other members of his family, including his wife. He is a doctor who feels completely at odds – emotionally, intellectually and culturally – with his wife, who is too traditional and domestic to talk about anything but prices and servants.

Deshpande also shows that the failure of men to discharge their socially appointed roles, as fathers and husbands, can also lead to serious consequences for themselves and for their relations. When Manohar loses his face as a husband by failing to be the earner of bread and butter for the family, he plunges into a psychological crisis. He becomes a split personality, who looks normal during the day but turns into a ruthless brute at night, hurting his wife in bed, trying to assert his manliness. Gopal, in *A Matter of Time*, is another man who plunges in the vortex of guilt and loneliness when he fails to live up to the image of a man in his profession and also as a husband and father in the family. He, ultimately, runs away from all familial and social responsibilities. Father of Devi in *In the Country of Deceit* also slips into despair and then into the abyss of nothingness when he fails to materialize his dreams of giving a good house to his wife and children.

The role of patriarchy, as a potent source of alienation, also manifests itself in the area of sexual life of Deshpande's men and women. Her interest is not limited to revealing her women's abhorrence to their bodily functions; she goes deeper and also probes into the causes responsible for alienating women from their own bodies. Saru begins to feel revulsion for her female body when she is given the impression that she is not clean during the period of menstruation. She is forbidden by her mother from entering kitchen and puja-room. She is treated like a pariah who should not touch anything for four days a month. For Indu, entry into the world of womanhood becomes very unsettling particularly because she is a motherless girl and has no one to initiate her into this phase of her life. Her kakis are rather crude when they thrust the knowledge of her womanhood on her and tell that she could now have her own babies. Jaya, too, sees this function of her body not only painful but also the cause of restrictions and shame. She even tries to control and avert it by taking pills but fails.

Deshpande's women protagonists, particularly those in the novels of first phase, tend to see their bodies as adversaries to their own sense of self, yearning for freedom and dignity. This gets intensified when they realize that they are used as mere objects of sex by their men. This commodification of their bodies hurts their mind and souls, throwing them into a bottomless abyss of alienation. Saru develops feelings of disgust and hatred for her body when it is taken by force, at night, by Manohar to hurt and humiliate her. Sex for her becomes a dirty word, a torture, destroying her self-respect. Jaya, too, feels disenchanted when she finds that it is not love but sex which dominates and controls the man-woman relationship in marriage. It doesn't take her long to realize that her husband can approach her only through her body. Sex for her, therefore, becomes only a boring and mechanical activity to be gone through compulsively every night for the sake of her husband, in order to keep their marriage going.

The reduction of woman's body to a kind of commodity, meant for man's consumption, causing pain, humiliation and even hatred for self, manifests itself in traumatizing form of rape, both within and outside marriage. Deshpande shows that an unwilling surrender of body to man generates feelings of utter helplessness and worthlessness in a woman. But when it is taken by force it shatters her very being to the core, alienating her completely from society, family and even her own self. Feelings of

hopelessness and nothingness tend to engulf the psyche of such victim. Fear of social stigma and rejection further intensify the horrors of the experience.

Deshpande has depicted the devastating effects of rape on the psyche of women through a number of her characters. In *Roots and Shadows*, for example, Akka goes through the piercing pain of forced sex at the hands of her husband when she is only thirteen. She knows nothing about sex and is not even ready physically or mentally for this relationship when she is given in marriage to a man who is a sex hungry brute. She cries, protests and tries to run away from this torture. But her ruthless mother-in-law does not spare her and she is forced to surrender to her husband's carnality. Like Akka, Mira in *The Binding Vine* is also subjected to rape inside marriage when she is forced to marry a man who is obsessed with her body. Repeated invasions of her body by her husband create in her an intense disliking not only for the act of sex but also for the man she is married to.

The novelist shows that rape outside marriage is all the more annihilating to a woman especially because of the fear of social ignominy. The victim of rape is treated as a pariah, a fallen woman, unworthy of being accepted in marriage. Moreover, it is she who is accused of being responsible for her plight, creating in her tormenting feelings of guilt. Kalpana in *The Binding Vine* is a young girl with her own ambitions and a desire to assert her individuality. She resists the advances of her uncle, Prabhakar, who is all set to possess her body. He, ultimately, rapes and mutilates her so ruthlessly that she loses her consciousness and has to be carried to the hospital. Ironically, even her mother accuses her of inviting this tragedy on the whole family by having her own ways and defying the restrictive norms set for women by society.

Her novels reveal that Deshpande has treated woman's feelings of alienation from her body in all its subtle complexities. Her fiction depicts its various shades and nuances, hinting at intricacies of this phenomenon. She suggests that woman's feelings of estrangement from her body are often the result of her experiences in the male dominated society which seeks to dispossess woman of her own body and sexuality. This process of dispossession is not always overt and simple. Besides subjecting her to unwilling or forced sex she is also made to turn a deaf ear to the voice of her body, suppressing all its needs and demands. By a complex of social, cultural and economic factors she is

encouraged to cast herself in the man-made mould of an ideal woman. This inevitably results in the suppression of her natural human qualities, including the demands of her sexuality. Deshpande finds that a woman without her own desires of sex appeals to male ego. Passion in her is seen by man as a threat to his masculinity. Indu's experience with Jayant in *Roots and Shadows* is a classic illustration of this forced suppression of woman's sexuality. Jayant is a typical representative of patriarchal male psyche and desires his wife to be absolutely passive in sex with him. He feels shocked and turns away from her when he finds passion in Indu. The result is that in order to maintain her relationship and to keep him in good humour, Indu has to pretend to be passive and unresponsive while in nuptial bed with him. She is forced to deny herself the pleasures of sex and even the joy of being together. It only deepens the feelings of loneliness and emptiness in Indu's life.

One of the ways, man manipulates woman's sexuality to his ends and desexes her, is by instilling in her the notion that flesh is sinful. For example, the myth of the fall of man suggests that it was Eve who tempted Adam and became the cause of man's alienation from God. This implies that her sensuality became the cause of man's estrangement from his Home and his spiritual heights. In patriarchal hierarchical binaries man and woman are therefore, viewed as representing culture and nature, soul and body respectively. When carried to puritanic extremes, her body becomes a synonym for sex and desires, which she must control or suppress for being acceptable to man. When this notion of sex as something sinful hardens into conviction it has often serious physical and psychological repercussions for the individual, disturbing her harmony with her natural self and with the world around. This often generates, in woman, a feeling of guilt about her sexual desires which, therefore, she tries to conceal, deny or suppress. Deshpande, through the example of Vasu in *Moving on*, sheds insightful light on this aspect of woman's psyche and behaviour. Though she loves her husband deeply, she cannot bring herself to experience and express her passion for him. Her frigidity, and therefore, a failure to respond to his passions, has been shown to be the major cause of the distance and dissonance between the two. She is so much obsessed with the feelings of sex as sinful that for her the uncovered body of Mr. Bones is obscene and an offence to her Victorian sensibility.

Deshpande's treatment of this type of alienation is not limited to her women alone. She does provide useful glimpses into the life of men who also fall victims to the feelings of emptiness, loneliness and disharmony because of the chasm between their images of self as men and what they actually do or get in their sexual relationships. It is gratifying and flattering to male virility and ego, conditioned by patriarchy, to possess a chaste woman. That's why, fidelity of woman is glorified as a highly valuable feminine virtue. Any deviation by woman or even a sign of it can prove devastating to masculine pride causing complete rupture and alienation between the two. It can even plunge man into a kind of psychological crisis characterized by feelings of unease with himself and his situations. A man, who is cheated by his wife, is also haunted by consciousness of social stigma and of being the object of ridicule by others. It is this complex state of alienation from self and others which is projected by Deshpande through the character of Som in *Small Remedies*. When he learns from his wife, Madhu, that she had pre-marital sex with her father's friend, he is driven distraught, possessed by a kind of madness. The revelation changes him utterly from a warm, affectionate man into a destructive savage, hating his wife and himself. It completely snaps communication between the two, separating them by an impregnable wall of silence.

The alienation of Shyam in *Moving On* is triggered by the feelings of guilt – first, because he fails, as husband, to provide a house to his wife and then for betraying her by indulging in sex with her younger sister, Malu. Failure of Shyam to fulfil Manjari's nagging demands for house and money for her child hurts his sense of manliness as a protector and provider to his wife and child, creating a state of vacuum and loneliness in his inner life, thus pushing him, in moments of despair, into the arms of Malu, resulting in her pregnancy. This compounds and complicates his problems with himself as well as with Manjari. Unable to face her and his own guilt-ridden conscience, he commits suicide by drowning in the sea, an ultimate expression of alienation from life itself.

Shashi Deshpande's fiction underlines, in this way, how sex can become a potent source of multiple forms of alienations for both men and women. What is particularly striking is the way she shows a pattern of cause and effect relationship in her treatment of this theme. She points out, particularly, the importance of the process of socialization in constructing and defining sexual roles and images not only of women but also those of

men. If description of the functions of female body as impure and corrupting, and its expropriation by man puts her at odds with her own sexuality, the assimilation of the notions of sex as sinful and, therefore, undesirable in a woman tend to desex and denaturalize her, throwing her out of tune with the very source of pleasure, harmony and vitality of life. Deshpande shows that sex can act as an equally powerful alienating agent even in the case of men when either they fail to live upto the image of a virile male or feel sexually cheated by their wives. Sexual digressions on their part and the consequent ruptures in relations with their wives on the one hand and the string of guilt-ridden consciousness on the other can derive them even to the point of self-annihilation. Her incisive treatment of this phenomenon of human experience is, thus, an evidence of her penetrative insight, sympathetic understanding and realistic rendering of the psyche of both men and women, shaped by their social and cultural context.

It also emerges from this study that her efforts are not restricted to the depiction of men and women afflicted with feelings of discontentment, boredom, monotony, loathing for self, anger against others, helplessness and despair. She goes further and offers a diagnosis of what ails human relationships in modern day Indian society. But one of the main areas of her interest lies in probing and projecting, through her characters, varying forms of response which they show in the face of their situations. Though there are no two characters who respond to their predicament in exactly the same way, there can be traced certain broad patterns in the manners they deal with the alienating realities in their lives. There are a number of characters who, broadly speaking, seem to have submitted to their lot. They have internalized the response of submission so completely that they appear to have accepted their situations as something given, and unalterable. They, therefore, appear to be doing nothing meaningful to change or overcome their conditions. Smita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Atya and old uncle in *Roots and Shadows* and Jaya's mother in *That Long Silence* are some of the examples of those who resign themselves to their lot. But there are also those men and women who fail to withstand the pressures of their experiences of being at odds with themselves and with others. As a result of this, such men and women tend to get broken and succumb to the pressures of life. Naren in *Roots and Shadwos*, Kusum in *That Long Silence*, Sulu in *The Binding Vine*, Shyam and Malu in *Moving On* and Devi's father in *In the Country of*

*Deceit* are some of the characters who tend to surrender to their situations. If Malu loses the balance of her mind then Kusum, Sulu and Shyam surrender completely and even commit suicide. Unable to cope with pressures of their life in a graceful manner, some of her characters tend to be even aggressive in different ways and degrees. Saru's mother and Manu in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Akka in *Roots and Shadows*, other-ajji in *That Long Silence*, Som in *Small Remedies* and Roshni in *In the Country of Deceit* are some of those who manifest this tendency in their responses to their life. If Saru's mother, Akka and other-ajji's aggressive tendencies manifest themselves in the way they seek to dominate and wield power over others, Manu and Som become sadists, indulging in sexual aggression against their wives.

Yet another type of attitude is visible in the way Mira in *The Binding Vine* and Vasu in *Moving On* confront the circumstances of their life. Both of them are sensitive, thinking and creative women. Mira is a victim of her husband's inordinate carnal hunger. Though forced sex in loveless marriage creates in her feelings of revulsion for her husband and the sexual act, she is unable to revolt against this oppression and exploitation. But she gives vent to her frustrations through her creative act of writing poetry. For Vasu too, her writing of short stories appears to have a therapeutic effect. She is unable to bring passions in her response to her husband's love because of her puritanic aversion to desires of the flesh. It is in her short stories that she seems to interrogate her own self. Conflicts in her personality and her yearning to be herself, find expression through her creative writing. Both of these women, thus, preserve their authentic individual identities and resist getting sucked up into anonymity.

The range and variety of different responses, which Deshpande's men and women bring to bear to their personal, social and human predicaments, impart a certain depth and breadth to her art, which has not been duly recognized by her critics so far. One finds that all of these attitudes and responses are juxtaposed and contrasted with each other in her novels, generating a substructure of dramatic tension between opposites beneath the seemingly simple and even lyrical structure imbued with a single attitude or emotion of a single character. This is clearly evident when the reader perceives a pattern of contrast between all these characters and the protagonists of her novels. These characters, with their limited responses, serve to accent by contrast the greater strength, maturity and

viability of the outlook and behaviour of the central characters in encountering the alienating realities of their existence. If the responses of mindless submission, grudging surrender, self-annihilation and aggression fill the reader's mind with a kind of gloom and pessimism, the response of the protagonists, evincing their greater ability to understand the complexities of life in a more critical and balanced manner accompanied by their determination to make life possible and triumph over its challenges, infuse a strong note of affirmation into her art.

This also goes to suggest that her view of life is characterized by her knowledge and understanding of its intricacies and vast possibilities. This makes her world of fiction look inclusive, real and, therefore, convincing to the reader. It is noticeable that she has not delineated even her protagonists in an uncritical manner, and thus keeps them fully within human proportions. They have been portrayed as complex figures, capable of taking hard look at their society and at themselves in their struggles to overcome not only the challenges posed by circumstances but also by their personal failures. They, thus, display an ability to learn from their experiences and develop a more viable and positive attitude towards life. This pattern of growth and development in their personalities and outlook is evident in the case of each of her protagonists.

Though a certain pattern of similarities is perceptible in the journey of her central characters towards affirmation, they all appear as individuals distinguished by their peculiar experiences and varying forms and degrees of affirmation in their approach to life. Therefore, a broad pattern of development is noticeable in her vision of life from her first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* to the last one, *In the Country of Deceit*. Her first three novels, for example, are peopled with a large number of men and women suffering from feelings of alienation, in varying ways and levels of intensity, but they all offer a foil to the protagonists – Saru, Indu and Jaya – who struggle through highly unsettling and alienating experiences and arrive at a stage of greater awareness of their relations and resolutions to overcome them. Saru ultimately resolves not to look back but to confront life with a sense of acceptance and the strength of will. Indu and Jaya also reject the attitude of suppression of self and surrender to the forces that demand abject conformity. They move towards a firm resolution that they will live an authentic life of their own volition without rejecting the bonds of human relationships and responsibilities. This

assertion of their will and resolution, however, is visible only at the level of their thought process. Moreover, they still appear to be preoccupied mainly with the pressures in their personal and familial life. But the novels of the second phase – *The Binding Vine*, *A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies* – project the note of affirmation in the form of concrete action and participation in the life of others. They go beyond personal and familial concerns, in order to realize their humanity, by helping those who are in despair. They also display a greater sense of sisterhood, self-confidence and courage in confronting their oppressive and constricting circumstances. Urmi transcends her personal grief and reaches out to Shakutai in the hour of her crisis when her daughter is raped. She infuses a new spirit in Shakutai to face the tragedy boldly and even uses press for the cause of helping female victims like Kalpana. Women's resilience, their invisible power of will to face inimical forces collectively, is exemplified by Deshpande through the figures of Kalyani, Sumi and Aru in *A Matter of Time*. All of them display a remarkable capacity to withstand the devastating pressures of life in a spirit of firm resolution and human dignity. The dynamism evinced by Sumi and even her mother Kalyani, makes them truly admirable figures. The writer affirms human potential to survive and achieve a moral victory in life through these women characters in the novel. Leela and Madhu in *Small Remedies* also stand out as sensitive, mature and resolute women with enlarged human sympathies. Leela seeks the fulfilment of her human self by her sympathetic and active participation in the life of the poor, the sick and the exploited. All these important characters in the novels of this phase, thus, display larger horizons of concerns, deeper sympathies and greater capacity to act than the protagonists of the earlier novels. The fact that there is a large number of characters representing a more affirmative approach towards life than in the novels of earlier phase further goes to indicate that the vision of life projected through these works is reflective of the writer's increasing faith in the values of life.

This pattern of growth, in her affirmative vision of life and human capacity to survive with dignity, reaches a new dimension in her novels, *Moving On* and *In the Country of Deceit*. Here, the protagonists, Manjari and Devi, are more confident and at peace with themselves than their earlier counterparts. They are more attuned to the language of their body and seek its fulfilment at their own will and terms. They evince

remarkable courage and control over their situation by facing alone, without any male support, constant threats from the land mafia pressing them to sell out their parental house and property. There appears to be a particular harmony between their instinctive and rational self in their decisions related to their personal life and relationships. *Moving On* stands out for presenting a number of male characters, for the first time, who are more complex and more affirmative in their attitudes and behaviour. If Manjari's grandfather stood for egalitarian and humanistic values and practiced them in his own life, her father (Baba) emerges as a man of powerful passions, strong will and reason, who affirms the value of human relationships and the urge to survive. Devi and Kusuma carry forward this note of affirmation of human relationships and the human spirit and potential to survive. This indicates a further widening and deepening of the novelist's faith in human capacity for survival and the value of all that life offers.

The treatment of the theme of alienation and affirmation in Deshpande's novels is, thus, characterized by broad human interests and concerns. It reveals her profound understanding of human psyche, realities of traditional patriarchal society and the complexities of human life. It also shows that she has a noticeable capacity to delineate a wider range and variety of characters, both men and women, depicting cause and effect pattern in their behavior, making her canvas and treatment significantly comprehensive and realistic. The pattern of juxtaposition and contrast between varying forms of the experience of alienation and different response of which the characters bear to bring to them impart to the novels a complex and dramatic sub-structure beneath the apparently simple surface of her fictional narratives. The fact that her novels display a constant pattern of growth in her vision of life is a distinguishing feature of her mind and art.