CHAPTER V

WOMEN LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

Literary and cultural representations are of great value as signifiers of roles, status and social processes that distinguish a society or characterize a particular social formation/category, during different periods. This chapter undertakes a study of the representations made of women by women novelists chiefly through women characters in order to arrive at conclusions regarding their experience in and contributions to society, in the context of different situations. The conclusions reflect the ethos of the Indian society in general and the socio-psychological status of women in particular and simultaneously probe the culture of fiction as promoted by women. The novelists to be studied will be in a chronological order, from Nayantara Sahgal, Attia Hosain, Santha Rama Rau, Kamala Markandaya Anita Desai, and Shashi Deshpande. The selection of these particular novelists is based on their importance in terms of representing different aspects of the female literary tradition. Sahgal and Hosain signify the East West Contact, Markandaya, and Rama Rau reflect a Indian consciousness moulded by the adoption of another culture after marriage. Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande represent the growth and development of a feminist consciousness and experimentation with an appropriate idiom for defining, the essentially "female", developed or undeveloped under norms of patriarchy and exclusion. The novelists under study are distinctive, also because they are
contemporaries, ideologically different, bi-lingual with different regional background, combining to construct a new literary tradition against the scenario of Indian Literature. As exponents of the potential of a new genre, they also represent experimentation with technique, form and a medium which lends itself to their consciousness, used flexibly for the reconstruction of social reality. Besides, what sets these writers apart is the fact that they write as women and as such impart to the genre a related perspective defined in terms that are being recognized as different from male writers. The experiences of womanhood as projected by women writers are vested with a higher degree of verisimilitude as reported by a cross section of women readers. This, in turn, adds greater value to the study of women novelists and their work.

The focal points of reference and analysis will comprise the following aspects:

1 Sexual inequalities within households
   a) Role stereotyping
   b) Sexual division of labour
2 Invisible/Visible contribution to men's occupations.
3 Marriage
4 Education
5 Employment
6 Social Imagery - How a woman determines her class, vis-a-vis husband/father/self
Conclusions derived from the above mentioned aspects, regarding status of women.

An accounting of women's experiences based on descriptions, narrations and dialogues is a significant medium of understanding women's position within the social structure. The above mentioned aspects used for summing up representations of women in fiction, have served as important variables. In a sociological study of literary representation of women and society, these aspects are considered as important social variables for gaining insights into institutional arrangements customary or normative in a given society at a particular juncture of time. These variables have also been discerned as shifting from time to time, dependent on the ethos of the society, and/or the economic need of the family or society at a given time. For instance, during wartime, more and more women seek employment for the survival of their families outside their homes, but are restored to domestic duties, once the men return from their warfares. However, sociological studies² have pointed out that the tougher the conditions for survival, the lower the status of women. This also finds reflection in the novels establishing that women are more greatly deprived of essentials under conditions of scarcity. The sufferings of women and the injustices meted to them in real life situations, are infused with pathos and sensitivity that women writers can impart to such situations by virtue of their own womanhood. Documentation of facts by sociologists and
subsequent transmutation of reality by writers\(^3\) conveys a multifaceted picture of a given situation, highlighted through a specific perspective. A study of experiences of womanhood through the perception of women writers evolves a focus delineating the personalities of Indian women and the situations from which they seldom find an escape, because they are at the receiving end of the system. Women's personal revolts against the system are few and limited to a brief transition from within the domestic confines to perhaps, the courtyard outside, followed by a retreat.\(^4\) The most distinct and pervasive motif that characterizes lives of women is their subservience to a male order, manifested in the persons of father, husband and son and/or in the form of patriarchal authority outside the domestic fold.

This chapter will take up works of different women writers individually, first, to be followed by an overview of what the writings reveal in the context of variables defined for the formulation of conclusions regarding the position of women in society.

(i)

**ATTIA HOSAIN (b 1913)**

Like most women novelists of her time, Attia Hosain's work reflects a strong autobiographical element. The personal viewpoint and experience of the writer, as it impinges on the consciousness of the writer is reflected through the narrator
protagonist of her novel, Laila, who illustrates the position of a Muslim woman severed from the world outside because of her life confined to the Zenana of an aristocratic Muslim household. If Laila is passive to the socio-political activities of her time, the explanation is hinged to the severe limitations of her physical movement. Her awareness of change outside the home is brought about through the viewpoints and debate of male members of her household. Through Laila, the writer reflects the movement towards reconciliation between the development of a woman as an individual and the demands of the society manifested through a family-cum-household which has conferred upon the woman a series of family-centred duties. The focus on self development of a woman seeking a personal destiny is shown to be arduous, because, as is the case with Laila, emotions and sentiments are not easy to transcend, owing to socialization into the ideology that makes familial duties imperative. The urge for self actualization through processes beyond the family household syndrome, again builds up a tension specific to women of the period in contrast to men. The English educated class of women seems trapped in a dilemma for which the solution enhances the degree of alienation from the self and social expectations. 

*Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) focuses on the claustrophobic situation of a Muslim Girl as it impinges on women Laila's personal aspirations conflict with the ethos of a traditional family which experiences problems of identity and the trauma of choices. However, because of her own socialization which induces
little or no exposure to the world outside, Laila is only a passive onlooker, but the ethos of change that permeates her Muslim home creates within her an urge to develop as an individual, bringing about a shift from her ascribed social destiny to a search for her personal destiny.

As a Muslim woman writer, Attia Hosain is attuned specifically to the problems of Muslim women living in traditional religious centred patriarchal units. Laila’s urge to seek a personal destiny is a reflection of severe limitations imposed on the mobility of women. The ethos of religio-centred family which perpetuates, patriarchal norms serves to restrict the availability options, available to women, apart from disseminating to them culturally approved norms. Laila’s struggle is a personal struggle against restrictive norms.

Laila represents also another crisis that women of her class and time, faced –a crisis built on the tension between the westernized ideology of elite women and their traditional moorings. Laila’s point of view emerges as an aspect of special appeal to women readers who could identify themselves with the growing conflicts of so called modernized or transitional women. Change, when it occurs in society affects men reshaping their ideologies and idealism, whereas, women remain, either passive recipients of change or are affected negatively, since they are not involved in the mainstream of change.
Hosain's concern is with presenting the conditions of Muslim women and in order to gain a wider understanding of the range of problems that women cope with, some of Hosain's short stories may be included in this survey. What distinguishes them apart from their internalization of a distinctly Muslim culture of a household divided rigidly along male and female enclaves, is their experience of humiliation, injustice and exploitation because of socially sanctioned practices like child labour and child marriage. It is important to note the absence of happy endings in Hosain's work or the image of fortunate women. This observation acquires special significance, in the context of Attia Hosain's work which is mainly about women. Protest when articulated by women is of note, but it is reduced to a spent force, because society, through its functional institutions represented in the forms of Family, Household, Marriage and Motherhood, rewards and encourages conformity and penalizes deviations from ascribed roles. Laila's development towards self actualization encounters disillusionment because men are endowed with greater scope for self actualization and this differential creates the exploitation of which educated elite women, become increasingly more conscious.

In *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, the writer/narrator expresses her protest against the remnants of the middle ages and religious fanaticism, through Laila who cannot reconcile with the fact that a woman of the house is still confined to Zenana. The patriarchal head of the family, exercises control by bullying his
household. The fate of women is in his hands, and he gives them away at his own whim. Laila, does not consent to be a subordinate person; she refuses to marry without love. Her conditional acceptance of marriage sums up the degree of transition - not from marriage to non-marriage but a shift from marriage under social pressure to marriage from personal choice. However, marriage, as the ultimate instrument for self actualization remains un-displaced from the point of view of the writer/narrator and society. Through, Laila, the writer also expresses a woman's search for happiness through marriage and a feminist interpretation of the text renders it as representing the efforts of a woman to seek change from feudal traditions of female seclusion and confinement and an approved marriage.

It is important to note here that the writer herself belonged to an elite family of Taluqdar s and by virtue of this status had proximity and access to westernized centres of political power and education. She also occupies an important position as a woman writer in the category of writers under study here, because of her conditioning as a Muslim woman intellectual aware of polarized ideologies - religious, national as well as gender. A society which had remained static, began to show signs of undergoing flux, and gradually the consciousness of woman's subservience began to take shape. As a woman of her position, (the daughter of a Taluqdar family) Attia was the first woman on record to have graduated in 1933 from the University of Lucknow.
As Protagonist, Laila depicts the viewpoint of the writer by embodying the yearnings and confusion of a young girl growing up under circumstances of regeneration and realignment. Like the writer, she exercised her choice in marriage, but found that there was a clearly discernible limit to which a woman could move. Hosain's short stories are evidence of women's encounter with contradictions between traditions and modernity without clearly defining what is better. Anita Desai's account of Hosain's work states, "They show her appreciation of the warmth, supportiveness, laughter and emotional richness to be found in the joint family as well as an acknowledgment of how often the joint family could become a prison and a punishment". 7

Hosain's concept of womanhood was tinted by the many shades of a growing nationalist culture that sought to converge in the restructuring of a model Indian woman. An enhanced consciousness of the dignity and value of women as basic to the self dignity of a nation, articulated by Mahatma Gandhi, began a critical rather a difficult quest for establishing the role status of women. In this context, Attia Hosain is a precursor in creating a culture of compromise for women - a compromise between social norms and self realization.

The novel also presents the socially accepted association of education with Westernization and becomes an instrument of awareness. It is important to note that men in the novel attempt to reinforce feudal structures and ideology through which they
have established themselves, whereas women characters, whenever hedged in speak out against the norms and customary male attitudes. Reacting against a male allegation involving her honour, a growing girl voices her feelings, "A slu? A wanton? and who are you to say it, who would have made me one had I let you"?

Emotional interdependence among women hypocrisy and male dominance are some typical features of the society into which women of a large muslim family have been socialized. It is significant that urge for change is directed against compelled marriages and various forms of controls imposed on the sexuality of women. This education with its correlated Westernization is criticized. "Child, put away that book. These insect letters will eat away your eyes".

"But, Bua, "I said, hugging her, "These books will be garlands of gold round my neck".

The Zenana which secludes women from men socializes women into a culture which reinforces their emotional and physical ties to the domestic unit curbing their movement and regulating their energy. It is this culture of confinement that women of Laila's generation rebel against by articulating their choices wherever they an. Through Laila, the writer reveals also the importance of a fight for one's personal independence as a woman before being driven into social commitments in the larger society, and the claustrophobia of traditional life, as it affects the
changing perspectives of women who are products of Western education. Attia Hosain's major novel provides a representative picture of elite urban women of the 1930's - a time when new identities were being formulated.

**SANTHA RAMA RAO (b 1923)**

As a writer, Santha Rama Rau represents a distinct class of Indian English women writers in terms of the process of acculturation which generated a tension between the consciousness of a socially perceived woman and an individual reflecting upon ascribed gender roles. Articulating the impact of bi-culturalism as an inevitable "pull" force, especially on women of the elite strata, Santha says, "One of the curious, but rather saddening aspects of colonialism in Asia was, that those of us who managed to get an education at all were largely educated in the language and culture of our foreign rulers. While we learned "A" is for Apple (in a part of the world where apples don't grow) and while we were lulled to sleep by parents (as I was) with long recitations from Shakespeare or Tennyson, we never had a chance to learn our own classics. The sense of alienation which is experienced in more covert terms by women is the underlying thread of Remember the House, 1956 a novel thematically significant because it presents the Indian situation of the Spring of 1947. However, what gains greater significance from the point of view of stereotyped images of women is the motif of
Mother India, which symbolizes the country of one's birth as home, and the mother as the nurturing, caring figure, restoring health to those who have been wrenched from her.

When Indira returns to her motherland, the sense of belonging to a culture with which she can identify herself provides a relief, which makes it easy for her to accept her culture. The same culture which appears so strange when assessed through the perspective of the American woman, Alix. However, the theme of 'East is East and West is West' goes beyond differential cultural responses, because through Indira, the writer also conveys the experience of a double trauma for a woman, as it is generated through marriage coupled with expatriation.

The importance of Rama Rau in the development of the tradition of women writers lies in the fact that she was one of the earliest novelists who reflected the critical awareness of an Indian woman writer, disseminating her consciousness through the responses of the women characters of her novels. She is also significant because she was able to initiate the infusion of an Indian consciousness through a foreign medium in her work. Of Santha's work, Nayantara Sahgal has observed, that East of Home, 1950 enables one to see Asia as a whole. "But its main value lies in the fact that an Asian writes about Asia". Moreover, the identification with Mother India which became a predominant pattern of characterization vis-a-vis, women in the early novels
reflects the unarticulated experience of fragmentation and psychological alienation for women of the time. As products of the new system of English Education women were relegated to polarized choices between roles of "doormats" versus "dolls", reared to the rejection of their mothers' images but unconsciously unable to do so because of an inherent, integral identification between mothers and daughters over their common lot. The experience of a migrant woman writer as reflected in the portrayals of her women lend an added dimension to the understanding of women and society, because it reflects the oppression of women through gender and racial discrimination. It would be pertinent to add, here, that social reforms of the nineteenth century which aimed almost vehemently at redeeming the status of women, were initiated by the observation of British administrators that customs in India vis-a-vis women were barbaric. As a precursor of women characters, who are products of western education Indira represents the increasing "inner" awareness of a woman's problem of identity, which is highlighted through a conflict between social and self perception. This position reflects the writer's personal quest for identity, as she becomes increasingly conscious of the diverse "pulls" from Indian and Western cultures. Her alienation works on two levels - the personal and the social i.e. on the level of marriage and on the level of adjusting to the culture of the western society. Writing at a juncture when the culture of western identity for Indians was disseminated through uncrystallized notions of
modernity and tradition, the writer projects through her fictive women: an effort to arrive at a satisfactory compromise between two ways of life. The life of "independent" femininity and the life of subjugated wife performing a sacred duty through marriage.

The development of women protagonists follow a course of quest for their identity. The travails involved bring the protagonists face to face with nebulous answers, the importance of which is contained in this very lack of clarity. The writer herself is positioned in an interface between Westernization and Indianisation. Home to India, 1942 while focusing on individual problems of a woman, projects the social designs of an elite strata vis-a-vis its women members. Internalizing the norms of a western social order and subsequently pressured into submission by the traditional Indian Hindu order generates alienated identities which render women helpless in the face of having no access to individual choices. But, the solution to this condition is not found in what the writer views as the social raciness of western life in which the rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities of being a daughter are at variance from Indian ideals, but by making a compromise.

Santha Ram Rau represents specifically the position of an Indian writer who was caught between the East West encounter, and as a woman tried to strike a balance between the two, though with a growing consciousness of the values of Indianness. This was a
trend, characteristic of the times, which manifested itself through the consciousness of writers and their fictive characters. The trend is more conspicuous in the work of women writers of the 1950's because of the Nationalist appeals made by Mahatma Gandhi to reject the stereotypes emanating from the Western society so as to check their growth on the Indian soil. Santha Ram Rau, then depicts, through literary forms of, survey, travelogue and novel an attitude of necessary compromise as part of the quest for identity. Through Indira the novel also represents the process of socialization of an Indian woman's identity — an identity which is the hallmark of a wider movement restoring and reasserting an Indian culture. By imbibing the values of Indian culture, Indira acquires understanding of the values of resignation, the strength of womanhood and the strength of a nation's own culture. Indira says, "I think I know the terms in which my life must be lived that is something" and Remember the House becomes microcosmic India, with its institutions of family and religion. Early novels like Remember the House may be read as the efforts of women, who are products of a hybrid culture to develop an Indian identity of acceptance and transcendence.

KAMALA MARKANDAYA (b 1924)

What Kamala Markandaya has brought forth through the Indian English novel is the representation of struggling women, bearing the onus of making their families survive against odds, and their
ability adjust. On the other side, she also represents the outcast woman, marginalized because of overstepping the limits of sexuality imposed by marriage. Though rooted in Indian Culture, Kamala internalized another culture through marriage and this reflected in the choice of her protagonists, who move from Indian rural women to urbanized women who are influenced by the allure of the cult of westernization till, finally, the protagonist herself becomes an English woman. This reflects Markandaya's concern with and consciousness of her immediate social reality.

Markandaya's concern with women characters finds its earliest manifestation in the depiction of Rukmani17 who bears the brunt of being a woman from various sources. In Nectar in a Sieve 1854, a novel, which depict the sufferings of the landless, the novelist consciously uses a woman protagonist to show the extent to which sufferings tend to devolve upon a woman because of her multiple roles and responsibilities. As a woman and more so, as a peasant woman, she plays a central role in the household and whatever happens to any member of the family, affects Rukmani directly. Through Rukmani, the writer also highlights the typically Indian customs of child marriage, dowry and the longing for sons, which every Indian woman has internalized because of the ritual importance ascribed to sons. The attitude of acceptance and the ability to absorb the greatest of odds have been shown as deeply entrenched characteristics of Indian women, for Rukmani believes that a woman has to bend like the grass in the direction of the wind if she has to survive. Adjusting to
the demands of a larger whole beyond the self, rather than opposing or even questioning any change which is perpetrated and imposed becomes the immediate reality of a woman's environment. The need for adjustment especially in the lives of women spells out the theme of the novel. Rukmani's life is projected as a prototype of the lives of rural women who in actual fact comprise the poorest of the poor and any change which involves a shift from the feudal to the capitalist structure renders them poorer and more helpless. But, for Rukmani, the family for which she sacrifices and slogs, remains a paradoxical source of heartbreak and support. Even when the family begins to disintegrate, Rukmani accepts the process as something inevitable and instead of trying to exercise control submits in quiet acceptance. Similarly, in the face of odds wrought by Nature's fury, in the form of flood and drought, it is Rukmani who rises to the occasion by tending to the basic needs of the family, as also the demands of work in the fields. "Nectar in a Sieve" bears testimony to the multiple roles that a woman performs, her resourcefulness and reason yet in situations that involve major decisions affecting the whole family, decisions are taken almost unilaterally by adult males. In this context, the decision to migrate to the city was solely Nathan's (The husband) decision, which eventually proved detrimental, leading to humiliation, exploitation and finally to his death. Though Rukmani's passive acceptance dominates the novel throughout, yet there is an
underlying note that questions this acceptance, in a subtle way, without however, providing any alternatives.

However, the presentation of a woman as bearing the brunt of poverty as also the social expectations that she is called upon to conform to, is so overwhelming that one begins to question these forms which assign to women the obligation of producing male heirs. Rukmani’s sense of guilt at not being able to provide male progeny for her husband is aroused only, when her husband reflects his unhappiness and sense of unrealized dreams, when after the first daughter, Rukmani undergoes a phase of temporary infertility. If Rukmani imposes upon herself the task of treating herself and then, mothering six sons, she is doing so only because of social pressures which idealize a woman’s capacity for bearing sons. Rukmani never questions the demands of her burgeoning family but rather, expends herself almost singularly in fending for the survival of her children. The husband’s role towards the survival needs of the family becomes conspicuous when the contribution of each is compared. However, the difference in their contribution represents socially acceptable differences between male female responsibilities towards the family. A feminist reading of the text brings out clearly the bias that operates against women in a poor family living off the land. Rukmani emerges as the sustainer of the family, economizing and providing for every need — a person who is in a way used by the husband, and through him by the society.
for generating and maintaining a family. Rukmani's role in the novel underlines and thus reinforces a woman's responsibility towards her family and society. She has compromised with her personal choices, learnt to adapt and adjust not only because of the demands made upon her by poverty but more so because she is a woman who had internalized and imbibed the social values which expect women to conform.

The image of the conforming compromising woman as socially desirable which may be equated with being desirable from a male perspective, is brought out by the contrast which has been provided by juxtaposing Rukmani with Kunthi (the other woman) who is portrayed as an antithesis of orthodox sexual morality. A woman like Kunthi, who steps beyond the controls imposed on sexuality through marriage, finally meets a bitter end. This juxtapositioning of the good woman with the bad woman is not merely to draw lines between a good woman and bad woman, but rather, to point out the contradictions which are inherent in society which also dictate male behaviour. The novel shows how society comes down with a heavy hand on women who indulge in sexual liaisons for personal satisfaction, as Kunthi does, even though her marriage remains unconsummated because of her husband.

The question that arises is whether Kunthi is justified in her search for sexual gratification. Though the writer does not provide any direct answers, she does however, pose the issue of sexual morality by making Rukmani's husband confess, his own marital infidelity. At the level of this novel, sexual morality
is not the central focus, but criticism is evinced by readers against the double standards that operate in a way which make women culpable and allow men the freedom to act according to instinct. Questions around this issue are present, only in undertones, because the thematic focus of the work is the suffering woman, overburdened with familial and social responsibilities. The emphasis on unprotesting resignation of a woman to her sufferings is not a justification of it but rather a technique which evokes sympathy. The message conveyed is that, "There is no grandeur in want or in endurance", but this message is articulated by a Western character. Though his advice does not redeem Rukmani's personal sufferings as a poverty stricken woman, his cynicism serves to highlight the extent to which women become victims of their blind conformity to social norms.

The large family with which Rukmani burdens herself for the sake of giving birth to a son, only adds to her problems of overriding hunger and basic needs. However, of the two women who are contrasted because of their individual attitudes to marriage, Rukmani tends to be glorified, whereas Kunthi is condemned for her waywardness. This also represents in an important way how society cherishes the virtues of womanhood as idealized in mythological characters like Sita, who are rooted in the subconscious, as yardsticks for determining the morality of women. It is for this reason that Rukmani adheres to her point
of view regarding the social responsibilities of a woman who is destined to shoulder such responsibilities. Rukmani represents a traditional view of women and believes that such a view ensures stability which is so essential for life itself, and as a woman she looks upon herself as instrumental to this end. What Rukmani establishes is that her biologically determined status has called upon her to carry out activities and tasks indispensable for society.

It may be noted here, that Kamala's Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve is one of the literary texts by a woman with which most respondents are familiar. When asked about their views of Rukmani, most of them sympathized with her and believed that there was little else that she could do since she has been portrayed as a responsible woman whose primary duties are towards her husband his desires and the needs of his family. If Kunthi is portrayed as more of an individual she evokes less sympathy and falls far short of the ideal woman.

Interpretations of the novel and subsequent responses to it bring out the overt and covert dimensions of a literary text. On the one hand, the text re-establishes traditional stereotypes while, on the other hand it raises questions on the extent of conformity to those very images and experiences. Moreover, the need to question stereotypes is brought out effectively in Ira's sacrificial prostitution when she justifies her action saying, "Tonight and tomorrow and every night so long as there is
The sub plot serves to make a distinction between two types of prostitution represented by Kunthi and Ira - one for self gratification is condemned whereas the other for the sake of another is commended because it involves replication of a mother's act which has widespread social approval. The novel highlights the biological determination of a woman's status through Rukmani but it does so without romanticizing it and consequently allows the novel to work in a dynamic way.

Since, *Nectar in a Sieve* serves as an important point of reference for showing the relation between women novelists and their impact on women readers, largely, because it is studied as a text by most respondents, it would be fruitful to make a comparison with an equally familiar text *The Dark Room* by R.K. Narayan for a comparative male perspective.

*The Dark Room*, 1938 focuses on the experience of a traditional Indian wife and mother and a non-traditional woman who seeks an alternative mode of survival by working and living for herself. The impressions created in the minds of the readers are those of 'good' versus 'bad', of 'stability' versus 'instability' vis-a-vis the social order. One represents the status quo while the other represents a subversive model. If Savitri feels marginalized, even though she is central to the household unit, her feelings take on the form of hysteria and therefore, walking out of the house renders her, a pitiable character. She is thus interpreted as a person who has escaped...
from what she cannot cope with rather than somebody who is capable of taking a firm stand. If she is made to feel redundant in the confrontation between husband and wife, it is because Savitri has been reduced to a commodity acquired by the man she is married to. Her position highlights the inevitable status that a woman occupies in a patriarchal system of marriage. Shantha Bai, on the other hand has already made her choice by stepping out of marriage and seeking alternative means of survival. However, she is presented as a commodity of another kind a commodity that is awaiting possession. The message transmitted through the novel is that marriage despite direct oppression, is safer for a woman, because it has a greater degree of sanctity than any other mode of existence. Other women of the Colony where Savitri lives and where Shantha Bai has come to work (i.e. she has actually not been given a distinct identity), reaffirm the writer's view and serve to socialize readers of the text into accepting norms of a patriarchal system where a wife subserves the needs of the larger whole. Analysis of the two texts, both equally well known by respondents, one by a woman and the other by a male writer have important bearings on the male/female perceptions of writers. Both texts have a household as the pivot around which the drama of life, unfolds itself - a play in which roles are clearly ascribed, and yet the representations of women in the novel evince different responses from readers. This can be attributed to distinct perceptions, sensitivity and consciousness that have gone into creating women
characters. Markandaya's women, Rukmani and Ira evince sympathy without romanticizing the weaknesses of women, and thus a need for women to question what society expects of them strikes the readers as the crux of the novel.

'Change' as the theme of Kamala Markandaya's novel is expressed overtly in chapter after chapter, because it deals with change that Industrialization has ushered in, but it expresses covertly the need for change in the self perception of women, by focusing on the unalleviated suffering of a woman who is a victim of a complete absence of choices. The degree of victimization assumes greater proportions for a woman as compared to a man in similar circumstances because of her biological status which experiences greater oppression and exploitation in the context of patriarchal social norms.

What is significant in relation to the present study is that differences in male female responses assumed to be natural, as perceived by a male writer, who as in the case of The Dark Room creates a juxtaposition between two types of women those who make themselves subservient to marriage and those who reject marriage by equating the former with the ideal type and the latter with the marginal type. On the other hand, a woman writer as in the case of Nectar in a Sieve, does not create any black and white juxtapositions, even though she portrays three types of women. In her novel, society has assumed that women are at the receiving end, and if women experience unlimited sorrow and suffering, 'it
is because of their social conditioning - A conditioning that has, over time, become normative and didactic, reinforced through patriarchal systems of marriage and inheritance. Men expect it and women accept it - in society, as well as through literary representations, but the situations and women characters created by women writers arouse a concern which has a specific appeal to the readers of these texts.

NAYANTARA SAH GAL: (b 1927)

The philosophy that underlines the work of Nayantara Sahgal is that of Gandhian liberalism as also a striving for independence reflected in some of the women characters, reflecting autobiographical overtones. Nayantara's own life as a growing girl was infused with the hectic activity of a nation striving for freedom. In contrast to most girls of her age, Nayantara experienced the rewards of education and exposure of life beyond the domestic confines. Her exposure to co-education, Christian culture and hostel school life combined to develop personality traits which helped the writer to adjust to the demands of American higher education. Her stay in the U.S.A. resulted in widening her experiences. Yet, when she returned to India, the culture into which she had been socialized, motivated her into thinking of marriage to a person who would be temperamentally suitable. The inherent values, imbied by her therefore, did not undergo any change, though she could exercise her choice for a partner which was a new phenomenon, or rather a
renewed phenomenon, surfacing, again due to an exposure to Westernization. Despite the freedom of choice in deciding upon her marriage partner, Nayantara discovered the inequalities inherent in marriage, through first hand experience. This autobiographical element and reflection on marriage in general finds expression through her writings: "For the first time I came across the shocking assumption of inequality. A man's ego and ambition, I learned must be served first. In case of conflict, the man's will and desires must prevail. ... I was uneasy and restless adjusting to the demands of a personality and environment whose goals and texture were different from anything I have known or been comfortable with".28

The introspective narration by the author is indicative of the sexually determined hierarchical order in a marriage. Despite a 'chosen' world of marriage, the irony that comes home to the reader through the writer's reflection is that every effort at compromising amounts to self denial, a condition which is not experienced by the male the husband. The overtones suggest a marital experience peculiar not merely to the narrator but extensive enough to include a more general situation. Reference to the male ego represents the condition of male supremacy and female subservience and the condition is very much a part of the social normative order. However, the emphasis on dissatisfaction and isolation experienced by married protagonists takes on special social implication when expressed by the writer.
The separation that follows an oppressive marriage - a separation initiated by a female protagonist reflects also a relatively new situation determined by urban cum class factors which make the separation possible, allowing for a solution to women's marital problems arising from lack of adjustment. While analyzing women characters of Nayantara's novels, it must be noted that they are urban, upper class representatives of that part of society which is generally considered to be more advanced, liberal and educated. In this context, this section of the society would also be politically more enlightened and socially more ambitious. Moreover, women are likely to be formally more educated than their counterparts in other classes. Apart from her class background, Nayantara was strongly influenced by the Gandhian values of respect for tradition, individuality and morality. Thus, Nayantara's women develop from compromising females to strong women who seek a more meaningful life. Nayantara also reflects the need for equality of opportunity between men and women as was brought home by Gandhi yet, Nayantara's women are only partly true to life, though their struggle is typical, as is revealed by women's replies to queries regarding their preference of marital status.

The claustrophobia of unequal relationships as manifested in the viewpoint of women's self assessment is presented vividly, yet the relationship are viewed through a male perspective. Nayantara's own experience of a male dominated world of politics reflects itself vividly though perhaps unconsciously. Even as an
exponent of Gandhian ideology, Nayantara uses men to represent various stances vis-a-vis Gandhism. Moreover, such reflections indicate also the limitations of Nayantara's own experience in the realm of public affairs to which she was exposed by virtue of her family circumstances as also the norms that she had imbibed. Her religious bent of mind, and the value that tradition holds for her in her personal life governs her attitude towards marriage and family, till her personal experience of marriage saw some change in her attitude towards divorce and man-woman relationships. The teachings of the Bhagwat Gita operate through a dualism inherent in the social structure. The male represents the active principle or life of action whereas the woman represents the principle of selfless performance of one's duties. The writer's traditional viewpoint is reflected in the types of women and their roles which remain circumscribed by the duties imposed on them through their domestic jobs. The kind of freedom Nayantara envisages for her women characters is not the transcendence from roles as mothers and wives, but rather their ability to discover themselves as individuals. Their choices are limited and their preference for arranged marriages reflects their disinclination for change, acquiring a security which ensures simple happiness. Their wooden, stereotyped acceptance evokes the following observation. "Their sphere was sexual and their job pro-creation. They were dependents not individuals". Again, they are viewed as a "subdued sex, creatures not yet emerged from the Chrysalis, for whom the adventure of self
expression had not yet begun". Such an observation reflects the male concern with the woman's lot, rather than women's own perception of their condition. Though women had created their own forum for articulation of their emotions and ideas, political initiative for translating these ideas into social change was taken by men. The role of social reformers in the late nineteenth century towards this end has been duly taken note of. Feminist readings of such histories have pointed to the conspicuous absence of reference to women's effort in articulating and working for social change. Nayantara's novels recapture the Gandhian favour and even enter into debates over ideology, but such debates and dialogues belong to the realm of men, since women are more concerned about matters affecting their domestic lives. The change from tradition that sets apart the themes and concerns in these novels, especially with regard to change affecting the lives of women is that marriage is discussed from the point of view of advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of marriages. Arranged marriage is extensively weighed against love marriage and the point of view endorsing arranged marriage on the grounds of the security that it provides emerges as the dominating ideology. However, marriage provides happiness to a woman only if it can be accepted in totality, without raising any questions regarding the injustice involved. From the point of view of women, happiness is co-related with marriage and therefore, it becomes central to their existence. In subsequent novels, women protagonists like Nita and Rashmi
probe into the essence of their being to discover their individuality but the search is within the parameters of marital or sexual relationships. When Rashmi feels that total marital fulfilment is evasive, she takes the decision to divorce, and this decision itself represents an ideological stance, because of the reaction it provokes.

"What reason under heaven could sever the marriage bond? Women stayed married, had since time immemorial stayed married, under every conceivable circumstances, to brutal insensitive husbands, to lunatics and lovers". The Hindu orthodox viewpoint on marriage is thus demolished by Rashmi's decision to divorce, indicating at the same time the stirrings of new tensions and changing social conditions. The traditional institution of marriage is, however, irreplaceable, and change, if any, has come about to point out that marriage need not be a stifling, emotional death trap, since divorce is possible and permissible even though it carries a social stigma against which women have to wage a personal war involving humiliation and bitterness. A divorced woman's humiliation is purely due to the dominating male perspective, which may be summed up as "one man loyalty unto death" and as a male protagonist puts it, "(society represented) an order that clearly demarcated the roles of men and women, (and any deviation) breached, trampled and mocked that order." The male viewpoint seems opposed to changes in the traditional morality governing a woman's attitude to marriage.
Subdued womanhood is an ideal, desired and imposed by men, and with subsequent novels Nayantara's women begin to show signs of awareness of this state of things by sensing resentment and seeking expression of their individuality through mundane decisions affecting everyday life. Simrit finds herself, "reduced to a cog in a machine",\(^{37}\) in her husband's world of ambition and money where natural communication is concerned. Nayantara's novels are replete with images and indicators of an overwhelmingly male dominated marriages in which women are silent and subservient, bereft of any identity except for that which is determined by her husband's social and economic status. As a result, Simrit feels isolated after her divorce because the world, women occupy is a husband centred world. Thus, their sexual lives remain unfulfilled because women protagonists reflect sex as a service performed "an act with a beginning and an end".\(^{38}\) The concern with marriage becomes central to the novel of Nayantara, because marriage is projected as a stable institution which should be of mutual satisfaction and dignity to the partners rather than a domain in which the husband by virtue of his 'maleness' uses it to promote his image and interests in the world outside. However, divorce is not the solution to a marriage of unequal marital relations - rather it is a violent act. Nayantara's position reflects the socially prevalent attitude, to marriage and divorce. The bias in favour of arranged marriages finds justification in the protagonists'-cum-the narrator/ writer's attitude to divorce. Moreover, voicing
personal responses to marriage does indicate the need for a change in the conventional approach to marriage. The change involves both man and woman but it is the man more than the woman, whose view needs to undergo a change. The answer to a more egalitarian relationship within marriage is through communication—a factor which is conspicuously absent. Most of the conversations are among men or among women or, what is more significant, they are of an introspective nature, especially where women are concerned. It is through introspection that women gradually move towards an awareness of their emotional needs, within the luxurious settings of their urban, upper class homes. In these settings, sex takes on moral overtones and this is followed by an attempt to dissolve rigid concepts like chastity and morality governing premarital or extramarital sex. The individual freedom of a woman, as enacted by women characters, leads to the need for a freedom from injustice within marriage and a reaction against any assault on their self dignity. The novels reaffirm the unchallenged position of marriage as a social institution in the upper class, westernized Indian society. A similar attitude to marriage is reflected in the views of women who were interviewed. Marriage occupied a pivotal place with an emphasis on compatibility and reciprocity. This, however, did not affect in any radical way the stereotyped role divisions regarding rights and duties within the household.

Nayantara believed in providing role models for women in society, and she has been able to provide identification with
certain perspectives, which have become available to her readers. The differences that emerge between men and women, in the novels are wide ranging but the most important hinge on the factor of social imagery. Men are able to identify themselves with larger issues transcending the home and family, whereas women gain their identities through the men they have married. It is perhaps for this reason that they are complacent where their choice of marriage partners is concerned, and succumb to marriages arranged by their families. Though Nayantara's women find themselves limited and curbed in their attempt at self expression they hardly express resentment in any positive way. As is a typical feature of women in society, they tend to accept their lot. Speaking of what the writer herself has tried to project through her women characters, Nayantara observes:

"I try to create the virtuous woman - the modern Sita, if you like, my women are strivers and aspirers toward freedom, toward goodness, toward a compassionate world. Their virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit, a kind of untouched innocence and integrity. I think there is this quality in the Indian women." This quality of Indianess equated with marital ties is a prototype which has acquired social sanctity and has become an inherent feature of social reality. Inequality in the personal status between husband and wife, becomes a covert indicator of the ironies involved in arranged marriages which, however, remain acceptable, even desirable. There is only one
woman character of a total ten central women characters who is a working woman. This, despite the fact that in the sixties and seventies, women had entered higher education and job oriented courses, but without the motivation or support to establish careers for themselves. Education was merely to be used as on embellishment, which had little or no value in women's roles as wives, daughters in law and mothers. Despite Nayantara's own liberal upbringing, amidst political strife and nationalist consciousness, the most autobiographical of her novels reveal the typically traditional longings of a growing girl who seeks fulfilment of the self through marriage. Marriage seems to have been vested with the highest degree of importance and priority. Though references are made to the nationalist struggle and the fact that women in large numbers involved themselves in the campaign, yet the focus in Nayantara's novels steers clearly away from this aspect of women's activity. Nayantara's women are at their most active when involved with various aspects of being wives. Education itself is reduced to an asset, as long as it furthers the acquisition of a desirable match. Women from the upper classes were going in for education beyond the school level because of the popularity it had gained as a symbol of social mobility and modernity. Higher Education, which was essentially western education was equated with liberalism a desirable world view. This, however, did not change the social equation between husband and wife because arranged marriages were structured along strict role divisions and positions of inferior and superior
status as ascribed to wives and husbands respectively. Women characters of Nayantara’s novels highlight the ascribed roles and positions of wives in a household by reflecting the frustrations of women reduced to a subservient status as mere appendages to their husbands. Yet, the dissolution of marriage, is a trauma for women because their marginal existence has disempowered them, affecting their social and psychological state in negative ways. Since the odds against women living out of matrimony are too heavy, women are thus regulated into marriage, which in Nayantara’s words has subtly reduced women from "persons to possessions". The writer is always extremely aware of the role that the artist/writer has in society. She states, "It is the artist’s job, particularly the writer’s job to show the way".41

If marriage emerges as a fulcrum, on which the themes of Nayantara’s novels rest, it is because in the Indian society, it has become an irreplaceable institution, in order to make the patriarchal system viable. Its prevalence is linked also with the psychological acceptance by women through patterns of socialization at various stages: The process of redefining oneself as a woman is initiated by the woman herself - as an individual first - and it is this process which finds expression in Sahgal’s work, and characters.

ANITA DESAI (b 1937)

This writer occupies a central position by converging different threads of the female literary tradition as it existed
in India and imbibing it with the stylistics of a western form through an individual Indian consciousness. As a result, the experiences of women in her novels build up a schizophrenia in them, which threatens their survival. This illustrates the typically urbanized, educated woman in search of better options than those provided by patriarchal social arrangements. Such arrangements are not confronted directly, but the system is constantly questioned at the psychological plane. The urban culture in which Desai's educated women find themselves leads to psychological tensions created by a gradual erosion of a woman's identity and individuality. The realization is painful and the alternatives provided are complex. The high strung women in the novels of Desai reflect the dilemma of women in real social situations and present a critical awareness of their situation. The identification between women readers and women character was easy to arrive at because the consciousness is raised and the possibility of alternatives is not non existent. However, the social psychological moorings of women are so binding that acceptance overrides any form of escape and it is within the system that women through introspective ponderings take on the quest for an identity which evolves through self education and the inclination and ability to make choices. Women of Desai's novels depict also, like women characters of other novelists a gradually increasing awareness of the system in which they operate under compulsions structured on biological differences. The differences are manifested in the Active/Passive,
personalities of men and women characters, and are consolidated as norms controlling their behaviour, activities and choices.

As a writer, Desai addressed herself to various issues and questions pertaining to the literary tradition, the medium of writing and above all the subjective awareness of Indian women. Women of her novels resent their inability to perform and those at a higher level of consciousness initiate a search into the meaning of life and find answers that suggest that as individuals, women can discover something greater than marriage alone.

Before reading into the texts for an understanding of the experience of educated urban women, it would be significant to take into account the writer’s own view on her position. Though the writer is at home in Hindi, Bengali, German, and English, she choose to write in English through an idiom which can be traced to the influence exercised by Virginia Wolf when the Latter was "rediscovered" by western feminists, as representing a feminist consciousness. Her choice of English as a medium of writing and an adaptation of the Stream of consciousness through which Desai presents the psychological aspects of her characters adds a new dimension to the literary tradition of women’s writings, in India. This enables readers and the writer to comprehend the totality of being. Her style has provided another tool to investigate existing reality when Desai’s women respond to the demands of their lives through different levels of consciousness.

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It is the level of consciousness that determines the degree of alienation and suggests, a mode for transcending alienation. Most women in Desai’s novels tend to succumb to the pressures exerted by social norms, and there are some who are crushed by these pressures, while there are others who search for alternatives. The context in which these characters act, in response to their conditioning, reflects a recognizable milieu. The ethos of such a milieu creates the spring boards for the transition of women but at the same time deters them because the motifs of idealized womanhood persist forcefully. The social experience of women operating in this ethos leads to a gradual disintegration of individuality which a system of Westernized formal education professes to build. Those who work between home and the salary-market, share a far greater burden they ever imagined, yet they are unable to resort to viable alternatives beyond marriage. This establishes a co-relation between the level of consciousness and a quest for alternatives. For women of a higher level of consciousness the alternatives are visible and though formidable, vested with greater scope for a search of the real self.

Thus, women of Desai’s novels represent experience which is common to the experience of Indian womanhood, that is defined through traditional norms, and yet untraditional. These women are easily identified with the educated urban class of women. What
makes them even more representative is that some of them are urged towards the need for change.

Unlike Western Feminist Novelists, like Doris Lessing and Margaret Atwood, with whom Desai is often compared, Desai's identification with the woman's question, has its roots in Indian society, where women view themselves as nurturers and procreators. But the portrayal of socially ideal stereotype does not lend itself to an interpretation which could build a case for the perpetuation of roles at the cost of individual desires and development. The acceptance of traditional institutions like marriage and the family is pervasive and overwhelming and in both cases it is women who are subjugated to the needs of these institutions, in order to sustain them. But, within these very institutions, consciousness raising through means of self education is possible, even though accessible in very limited ways, because consciousness raising depends again on alternative patterns of socialization infused with specific ideological norms. Thus, the first generation of women after freedom exposed to education and westernization are even more inextricably subserving the needs of patriarchal families, in which wives have acquired greater objectification. They are not confined to the domestic units; they are visible outside, but that is because they are made to serve a social function, in the way that Western ideology through imperialism has illustrated.
That the culture of "Sahibs" and 'Memsahibs" has infiltrated the urban elite or upper middle class of the Indian society, is one of the most distinctive features of the social environment in which the second generation women characters of Desai's novels develop and make their choices.45 The traditional mother figure is obliterated by the mother whose creative role is co-related with reproduction whereas she functions as a wife, whose duties extend beyond the domestic unit, to the social club, filling up space for a bridge partner, and thereby imparting, sanctity and social respect to her husband. The mother in Clear light of Day is reduced to the functions of reproduction and ornamentation by virtue of the westernized cult which treats women on par with men, but only as far as they are visible functionaries. The novel suggests that such equations of women have denied them their right to an identity and individuality, and make them survive under static conditions under which they perform only as extensions of the ego of their male counterparts. In Clear light of Day, the mother figure is not obliterated but replaced by housekeeper whose femininity does not necessarily seek traditional forms of expression, for instance through marriage or motherhood. Spinsters or widows are called upon to fill these positions. The displacement of the mother by the housekeeper as is the case in Clear light of Day46 diffuses rigid role types and explains the development of a positive character like Bim, who believes that there is more to life than just getting married. Another explanation for Bim's development into an individualized
person is because she witnesses the traditional stereotypes associated with a woman, re-enacted in Tara, her younger sister, whose development is limited by the feminine self view that she has imbibed. The twin concepts of marriage and motherhood assume importance even for a woman of the second generation, superceding the importance of meaningful relationships. It is through the device of representing ideologies at variance with each other, that Desai points out how marriage is the most conducive means, of denying women a chance for developing their individuality.

The marriage centred ideology of the society that Anita Desai portrays in her novels, reflects more than anything else the travesty that it has made of man-woman relationships. Socially, man woman relationships are vested with sanctity only when they are expressed in conjugal terms. It becomes a social duty which eliminates choices or at least reduces the scope for free choices, more especially, but less significantly in the case of women. In search of a partner, men acquire an instrument for self perpetuation rather than a person with whom they can co-relate. Women on the other hand, do not opt for marriage but they merely wait for it because their self perception has been socially conditioned as a result of which marriage becomes an inextricable part of the self actualization process which can be traced in a woman.

It is not merely a coincidence that women characters of Desai’s novels possess common attributes where their social
background is concerned. The cult of westernization as mentioned earlier, is dominant, because these women belong to the upper class, where the opportunity of self actualization through factors, other than motherhood is available. However, at the altar of marriage, the gains of education are not considered redundant but rather become assets through embellishment, and service, and thus become instrumental in the self actualization process of their husbands. The rewards that men get in the form of social recognition are percolated to their wives in the form of tangible artifacts - jewellery clothes and other concrete symbols of social position. This builds the self esteem of women, without the realization that they are reduced to or equated with the objects or symbols through which they are "classified". However, that there is an alternative pattern of self actualization is brought out by some characters and that is precisely what makes the work of Anita Desai exercise a dynamic influence on its readers. Moreover, what makes Desai's women positive is because they show that alternatives to prevailing wife-mother syndrome are necessary, for the search of a life which is more meaningful. Desai's prose becomes a way of probing the psyche of the educated, urban women, in order to explore the traumas and tensions which make up an individual and when viewed from a sociological perspective may sum up the trend which characterizes a whole class of women in transition.
The women of Desai's novels live on two different planes of existence - the real and the fantastic and because of the latter factor, they may be described as neurotic women, representing traits which could be considered socially irrelevant. However, that would amount to ignoring the plane of psychological experience which is structured on the social existence of women whose responses seldom find desired articulation. The neurosis which sets in due to an absence of identification and lack of articulation is less a symptom of self destruction and more a symptom of unilaterally imposed social norms. Adjustment and acceptance on the part of women are taken for granted by men. The gap between the assumed identity and the real identity keeps widening as the male-female relationship through marriage becomes more openly functional.

Maya 47 in *Cry the Peacock*, 1966 looks for meaning in life, through her marital relationship but experiences only the onslaught of a prescriptive husband. Her childless state is symbolic of her unrealized individuality. The fear of insecurity built up during her childhood grows with her into her married life. Maya's life represents the disillusionments she experiences as a woman, engendered by the cult of marrying the "right" man and denying oneself, as a woman the desire and the need to articulate and act. Her criminal act is symbolic of realizing the means to end her fears. It is Maya's subjective awareness of artificially forged relations in marriage, that
frustrates her and the writer highlights through Maya how the subjective self of a woman lured into the trappings of an ideal middle class marriage remains marginalized, because of an overwhelming social pressure delineating the limited functional role of a woman. Maya becomes the quintessence of the sterile lives of women who have been subjected to subservient and passive roles because of prescriptive social values of their class. Her fears paralyze her and in the absence of human warmth and understanding in her marriage, Maya remains passive and when she acts, her action becomes an aberration. The feminist in Desai states the psycho-social dilemma of Indian women who are in the process of developing a consciousness of their own femininity and individuality. The external context defined by the patriarchal figure in the form of father or husband deters her from becoming a rebel but does not save her from becoming a neurotic.

It has been observed that women characters of Desai's novels situated in upper middle class homes are given to introspections and fantasizing which become their interpretations of social reality as it impinges on them as individuals. On one level these women seem to be removed from reality, because they are capable of escaping from it through their cocoon-like attitudes and lives, but on another level, their lives also signify the inanimate equations to which they have been reduced, brought out especially through images which became symbolic. The interpretation and understanding of symbols acquires special importance in the context of Desai's novels because symbols point
to the narrow limits into which women have been squeezed, and the
process which begins in childhood continues mechanically,
unquestioningly, unless a woman takes it upon herself to exercise
a choice, which again is feasible if she is able to wean
herself from the normative dependence on male support,
manifested through his earnings and provisions.

Sita in *Where shall we go this summer?*, 1975 on one plane
depicts the typical situation of educated middle class Indian
women who marry for social reasons, as a result of which their
personal choices are relegated to the desire of getting married.
On another plane, Sita symbolizes the urge of a woman who become
conscious of the lack of control she has over her body. Her
desire to retain her pregnancy without delivering the child is an
expression against natural and cultural factors which restrain
women from manifesting their personal tendencies. In a bid to
escape from the mechanical expectations imposed upon her. Sita
returns to the village island of her childhood, but there too,
the demands on conformity, of being subservient to the dominant
patriarchal ideology disillusion her. As a woman, she is forced
to strike a compromise with her circumstances and she has no
alternative but to follow her husband in his footsteps back to
the family, the household and the city of which she is expected
to be an integral part. The act of following her husband back to
the role and position, she is assigned to, for being a woman in a
society which prescribes the limits of a woman's freedom,
highlights the disjunction between what a woman desires and what she is expected to conform to. Sita's awareness of this state is manifested by the ennui into which her married life has drifted. If she has developed a consciousness which begins to question the very mechanics of life which Sita despises, her effort to transcend that life remains ineffective. Outside marriage too there is no space for a woman to conduct her life the way she desires. In her desire to re-live her life in her own way, Sita escapes into a world of fantasy, only to return to reality with the realization that compromise is essential for her sanity and any deviation can only have a psychological existence. To hold her child undelivered is her way of questioning the cultural order which is being imposed upon her, and her inability to do so reflects her helplessness in a world hostile to the self expressions of women. However, Sita emerges as a woman who has expressed an inner need to become an individual. Her failure does not negate her personality but reaffirms the nature of social reality in which she is expected to survive.

Women characters of Desai's novels represent the responses of women of the urbanized middle class strata to their social and domestic conditions. Their lack of motivation in steering away from marriage reflects the social trends as they prevail in this section of society. Those who look for meaning beyond marriage have developed a higher level of consciousness, besides which, their motivation is strengthened because they can support themselves. While the personal experiences of most women in the
novels force them to succumb to the pressures of early marriage, socially suitable marital partners, there are others who articulate a rejection of these pressures by turning inwards for sustenance.

Nanda Kaul's life in *Fire on the Mountain*, depicts the oppressive and inane life to which she as wife of a public figure, is forced to submit and carry on ungrudgingly, without the right to complain because of the internalised commitment to domestic duties. The total disempowerment of a married woman reflects itself when the dutiful wife silently accepts her husband's right to extra marital affairs, and continues with the demands of serving 'rounds of tea'. However, at the psychological level, her dissatisfaction remains contained, only because she resolves to break away from the rounds of duties, once she is rendered totally redundant as a mother wife, that is both physically and emotionally. Through Nanda Kaul; the writer is again depicting and representing the juxtaposition between social pressures and personal desires by highlighting through image and symbol the dilemma in which women find themselves, because they have not sought any alternatives to marriage. However, the novel does more than just define women's limitations within marriage. It highlights the grim realities for those who have opted out of marriage, to serve a cause larger than their socially controlled selves. They are subjected to onslaughts which threaten the identity of single women, like Ila, who is
both, a woman and a missionary. Ila's rape symbolizes negative social attitudes towards women whose self actualization transcend confines of the domestic household. Women in Fire on the Mountain illustrate the range of their exploitation as also the socially acceptable and socially unacceptable processes of self actualization. The tensions born out of a confrontation between the 'ideal' and 'real' experiences of women are manifested in the twelve year old grand daughter, Raka.

In Voices in the City Monisha and Amla present juxtaposed responses to social and family pressures which alienate women from their real selves. If the former submits and finds it meaningless to exist on those terms, the latter delineates for herself the choice of an alternative which provides greater maneuverability of individual impulses and choices. The novel also reveals the facade of a harmonious patriarchal household, where consensus is maintained through submission to male authority with deference accorded to the elders. Maladjustment between spouses is expressed in ill effects on the children of the family. Alienation within the family is reflected as an integral part of a family structured on sex-based role divisions, through which the male is elevated to a position of dominance in decision making processes and spending power within the family. To a large extent, men can override their alienation by liberating themselves from familial ties and overcoming social pressures whereas women remain trapped in their multiple roles.
because of inflexible social pressures which define women through their identification with the domestic world.

The women of Desai's novels significantly typify the situation of educated middle class urban women, raising important questions impinging on those social institution which comprise the sum total of women to a state of "being married", even when the patriarchal ethos of the most widely prevalent form of marriage, viz. arranged marriages derives its basis for survival on the oppression of wives by husbands, or more generally women by men. Yet, there also emerges a distinct form of rationalization of rejection of stereotyped choices available to women. But society is hostile to articulated rejections of the kind represented through women who try to make a choice, however, waveringly or hesitantly.

Representations of women in Desai's novels serve to highlight the mix of feudal attitudes and a heightened consciousness acquired through formal education which initiates a search for the real identity of a woman. Yet, there is also the representation of women who consciously conform to pattern of existence which institutionalize their roles and positions as biological inferiors, to be utilized for the perpetuation of male members of society. Whatever forms of emancipation they acquire are limited to a heightened consciousness of their bodies as being distinct from males. The tension between the identification of women with mind or body becomes high strung

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through their psychological insights of the social reality of which they are a part. It is this high strung state which raises questions and looks for answers beyond those which are available and normative. Their experiences as daughters, wives, mothers and daughters-in-law, in male dependent families reflect a sterility which makes life for them inane and alien. The picture of society as it emerges through the experience of women in the novels of Desai is that it is a society not of men and women but of men and men made women.

SHASHI DESHPANDE (b 1938)

The relation between the novel as a genre of writing and the woman writer is brought out in Shashi Deshpande's statement on herself as a writer. She says, "I realize that I write what I write because I have to. Because it is within me. It's one point of view, a world from within the woman and that I think is my contribution to Indian writing": 53 As a writer Deshpande has clearly defined for herself the task that she is about - a presentation of the problems of women which are specific to them, arising out of social conditions which are not of their making. As such, Deshpande has a distinct position of being a sociological novelist in a conscious way. The autobiographical element is not as pervasive as it is in other novels of women, because her work is structured through insights into common problems that impinge upon women through a typical pattern. The "problem motif" begins with the fact of girlhood, develops with

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womanhood through marriage and culminates in an overriding sense of alienation unless the woman has sufficient confidence and inner moral strength to break away from the socially imposed image of ideal womanhood—which in society and in literary representations has become oppressive. Western education and urban living have increased her roles, within limited choices, without vesting her with the freedom to break away from social expectations. The conflicts that invade the mind of a traditional bride, whose mind, is invisible behind the bridal trappings are the conflicts that are projected as common to Indian brides. It is such personalized experiences that Deshpande is sensitive to. Her women characters articulate feelings, in ways that show them in different light. As women, they evoke sympathy and empathy from other women (the readers) who find it possible to identify themselves with the literary images of women. The transition that typically middle class Indian women experience finds a realistic representation in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. Women characters reflect an urge among middle class housewives to find themselves, to create space for themselves in order to grow. In this context they represent the middle class urban housewives who try to look for meaning beyond the confines of their domestic duties. Definite careers remain unattainable and their occupations outside their homes do not provide a relief, but rather another dimension of oppression. As women, they are subjected to greater exploitation and less
capable of resisting the forms of oppression. The middle class educated housewife typifies a passivity, anxiety and confusion which makes her an example of the "era of transition" which sociologists have recognized and the traits of passivity and anxiety are its distinguishing features. Their psychology is largely wedded to tradition. They have started recognizing the need for change, but at the same time they continue to cling to old values instilled in them. Of her own characters, Deshpande says: "My characters take their own ways, I've heard people say, we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are." 55

Deshpande's relationship with her women characters is an expression of her own sensitivity to women in society. Their experience show that women are made to live within prescribed relationships which bring about an idealization of motherhood and consequently the necessity of being a wife. In her writings the portrayal of society is through the perspective of a woman who becomes the protagonist.

An important aspect of Deshpande's major works 56 is that her novels become clearly women's novels, portraying consciously the problems of a specific class of women - A class from which successful, professional women have emerged. They can clinically dissect customs and traditions, can generate economic independence, yet remain emotionally dependent. A specific problem pertaining to the development of middle-class women is
the conventional man-woman relationship of the Indian society, where male female equality in real terms does not exist. The basic experience of womanhood which forms an overarching theme in the novels of Deshpande is the frustration of being caught between the modern trends and traditional practices. A woman's (Sartia's) professional success as a doctor complicates her relationship with her husband and as a woman she is expected to marginalize her own potential as a socially productive human being for the sake of her husband. The sanctity given to marriage is not easy to dispel. However, Sarita takes a definite stand. Indu emerges as a confused woman, looking for direction and meaning in a society where traditional values and western norms are incompatible and generate retrogressive stereotypes of women - closely linked with the cult of commodification of women. The confusion which Deshpande's women experience is a result of male social attitudes which condition their self perception. Men perceive themselves as authoritative heads of their families, recognizing the woman as central only to a household whereas her work outside is considered supplementary. As a result, a woman's self perception becomes conditioned and she seeks emotional props through husband, father or son. The reaction to middle class marriage is articulated by Indu when she realizes, "I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self... And then I realized this was an illusion".
That long silence portrays, Jaya as the representation of the silent, surrendering middle class housewife who is totally disempowered. Her name changes from Jaya to Suhasini, when she gets married and becomes her husband's property. She also becomes more submissive and longs to be called an ideal wife because she does not see any other way to live. In order to understand her own identity, Jaya begins to compare herself to other women and discovers that the only person, compared to whom, she is better, is an insane person.

It is observed that women characters of Deshpande depict the real situation in society, where women, whether they are educated, professional or housewives are suppressed through imposed traditions. The characters present vividly, emotional and physical problems, that impinge upon the middle-class educated housewives in ways which makes these characters representative of social reality. Though most of the educated working women continue to give preference to marriage and their family life but the urge to be economically independent develops gradually.

Deshpande's women reflect also a bitter experience Where the mother daughter relationship is concerned, indicating a definite shift in the consciousness of the second generation women. The bitterness is attributed not so much to a lack of sensitivity on the part of mothers, but rather to an awareness of lack of supportive systems for daughters who through education are
seeking different means of self expression. The bitterness in
the mother-daughter relationship is expressive of the conflict
between tradition and change, a conflict that is characteristic
of social life, but the mother-daughter estrangements in The Dark
Molds no terror, represents a trend which is at variance with the
traditional mother-daughter relationship. It is a model to
which women novelists who are Deshpande's contemporaries have
conformed to. This is because the experience of frustrations
among Deshpande's women finds greater articulation which reflects
various levels and forms of oppression - within and outside the
family. The ultimate image of the educated wife borders on a
fragmented model which is held together by the hope for
developing a whole identity expressed through more dynamic role
sets rather than those which have been her lot because they have
been socially ordained.

Women in Deshpande's novels represent, more than other women
characters the experience of transition from an ascribed identity
to an attempt at acquired identity, but the male prescribed
social values become painfully obstructive. Society emerges as
patriarchal and male dominated, where wives are afraid of their
husbands, remaining passive and demure. Daughters experience
discrimination compared to sons and the concepts and customs
imposing segregation for women are invoked and thrust upon women
of the younger generation. Through all this, marriage in the
traditional sense is depicted as a hollow, commercial
arrangement. Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, defines it as, "What was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue". 61 In *That long silence*, Jaya, identifies a married couple with a pair of bullocks yoked together". 62 In, *The Dark holds no Terror*, Saru's mother warns, "You will never be happy with him. A man of a different caste, different community... what will you two have in common? "63

Marriage is thus portrayed as an expedient alliance, which is without emotional and spiritual oneness. Moreover, the sharply defined attitude to marriage displays the helpless dependence of women upon their husbands. Even economic independence does not resolve a woman's dependence on her husband and Indu expresses, "But marriage ... it makes one so dependent. I don't know about men but...." The experiences through marriage reflect how women protagonists remain appendages to men. They question the social mores, but they conform to their roles of wives and mothers first. The frustration of educated middle-class women finds a realistic though unresolved representation in the novels of Deshpande.

(ii)

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERARY PICTURE OF INDIAN WOMANHOOD**

Women novelists selected for the purpose of investigating re-presented experiences of Indian women, in a milieu
characterized by gender divisions share some common factors which may be used as the basis for identifying them as: (a) Product of specific socialization patterns and (b) Agents of socialization. As products of the new system of British formal education, the novelists indicate the range of mobility and emancipation possible to women within the strata of an emerging class either because of its nexus with the power at the centre or because of its identification with the rulers, through marriage and subsequent migration. However, as agents of socialization through their novels, the writers have performed the twin tasks of depiction, and through techniques of juxtaposition and introspection called into question the depiction of stereotypes which are reinforced through the ideology of a patriarchal family. The portrayals of women become effective tools, in developing a consciousness of the social perceptions about women, so as to evince a reconstructed response toward their self image, and seek alternative processes of self actualization.

The transition from "doormats" and "dolls" serving matrimonial functions, to women seeking personal destinies is a common concern which finds expression either through situation or through character. It is in this way that women novelists may be identified as a class of producers of literary images, and are being assessed for their role in exercising a distinct social influence on their readers, moulding their consciousness in a discernible manner.
The Indian English Novel and The Indian Household: The marriage cum family centred ideology of Indian society represented through the central preoccupations of Indian women, finds also a central place in the thematic content of the novels under study. The household symbolizes the interplay of human emotions, as also the development and destruction of relationships, through love, hatred, marriage, childbirth and death. It is a site for both progressive and retrogressive tendencies in that it is the convergence of values which men bring to it from their interactions in the larger society outside and which women tend to internalize. It is therefore, significant how women protagonists of the novels under study are severed, almost cushioned from the mainstream activities shaped and determined largely by men.

The Indian household depicted in the novels appear almost as a world apart - a world of women and children, of cooking and food odours, of animosities and interactions among women but obtrusively a household which revolves around male dominance and female subservience. Meal Menus are planned according to the likes and dislikes of husbands or other male members, suggesting their greater right to choice subsistence because of their interactions with the world outside - the world of trade, warfare, education or service to the government. Besides this, there are only glimpses that women receive of the world outside through either discussions among male members of the household or when
women are used as whetting stones for articulation of personalized views or frustrations. Within the household, women are thus acquiring knowledge and information about external activities as they are projected through male responses. Women are therefore operating on two planes - the physical plane in making the household a regenerative unit and this is also the active, visible life of women. On the other plane, the mental plane, women remain passive recipients, but not necessarily inert. While their consciousness is determined by the experiences that men convey to them directly or indirectly there is also an inherent understanding of the mechanism of survival, engendered through a direct involvement in keeping the household alive. Hence, women during the nationalist movement, despite their home centred lives played an indispensable role in providing directions to husbands and sons.67 Women protagonists in the early novels68 though physically uninvolved in the social political processes of the country, are yet sensitive to the changes that are percolated through these activities, in various ways.

The Household thus represents the meeting ground for male female principles of Active/Passive positions vis-a-vis the world outside the home and the world within the home. However, this polarization is not necessarily static as conceived strictly on feminist theoretical understanding of men and women in society, but operates functionally in terms of male female influences upon one another. The "push" and "pull" factor as an essential
principle of change gets reflected in what women, confined to their homes are drawn into and exposed to, and how by articulating encouragement or discouragement determine to a great extent, the decisions that men may be inclined to take.

The literary transfiguration of the Household appears on one level as representing, a dynamic unit of society while on another level, it is the epitome of gendered social reality, where work and roles are strictly determined, contributing to the hierarchical separation in terms of time and space in the context of male female activities. Thus in terms of time women protagonists are depicted as utilizing it on housekeeping, kitchen centred or religious centred activities. In the former activities, the involvement is either direct or indirect, through hired help, and subservience to the male head. In the case of these novels the dominance of the male head, is illustrated in women's protracted efforts in ensuring that whatever has been provided is returned to the 'Provider' by way of cooked meals and suitable clothes, to his satisfaction. Apart from time spent on the well being of her husband, married women protagonists are expending as much time in raising their families, a duty which is socially ascribed to the mother. In order to live up to the ideal image of womanhood, women characters spend their time also on physical adornment for the pleasure of their husbands and spiritual meditation, fasts and other religious activities, not for personal redemption but for the success and salvation of the
whole family. The traditional household is seen as an integral unit of society both from the Vedic and Post colonial ideology and is replicated as the core of domestic and social life – an institution which requires all the time that a woman has in order to keep it alive.

In terms of space, the novels reflect gendered differentials, with men dominating larger areas as also the action centred areas – where visitors are accommodated, space for work – the study and unencroached sleeping space, ensuring physical rest as also a greater right to subsistence. Women characters occupy limited space and even though they remain free from male encroachment, for instance, the kitchen, yet they belong to women only in a functionally interrelated sense. Women's right to space within a Household is defined, therefore, in terms of the utility it has for the rest of the family.

The "Productive" and "Claustrophic" effects of gendered household gets represented through the responses of women characters belonging to two generations of women. The first generation of women who witnessed the emergence of post colonial images of independent women and the second generation of women who inherited the legacy of Victorian women, so central to the projected ideals of "Happily Married Wives" and "Domestic Bliss". In the extended families the household remains gendered in terms of time and space, but because there exists identification with other female members within the household subservience to the
interests of male is not the overriding factor thwarting the individual self-expression of women.

Moreover, characters portrayed thus, are not the "finished" products of an English Education, inculcating victorian ideals of being perfectly matched. Products of this ideology as they appear in all the novels are depicted as "dormats" within the household and as "dolls" outside the household. The activities and concern of the depicted household are strictly juxtaposed along male female concepts, and the depiction reflects its gendered nature at the cost of women members who have no right over anything, which they can claim as their personal possessions. Women characters are depicted as appendages of households into which they are born or into which they marry. As childless wives or their failure to produce sons, renders women even more disempowered and dispossessed. The household, both in real and represented society of the world of fiction is a symbol of women's identity - an identity which is based on self effacement, toil, sacrifice and childbirth and also a symbol of her controlled personality. The urge to escape from a patrilocal household is the articulation of some characters yet it is this very articulation that represents the elevated consciousness of women who are unwilling to conform to the legacy of the ideal, subservient married woman who is supposedly empowered through the household which is bestowed upon her. The novelists have represented the internalization of norms which define images of women and their related roles. If the household is presented as
a place which reinforces seclusion of the urban educated elite women who are struggling to conform to the ideal of the Victorian "Lady", it represents also in the novels of the seventies the "guilt", and the double burden of the married, career seeking mother. Marriage is depicted and represented as an institution which demands ritual identification of a woman with it. It defines women socially and biologically and it is through this definition that all the women attain an awareness of their regulated reproductive roles in society.

**Representation of Indian Marriage**

Like the Indian Household in the novels, the Indian marriage is represented as a social ideal juxtaposed with the individual woman's responses to it. The novels have depicted the man-woman relationship as an imposed arrangement, which, because of a gendered household and patrilocal principles of female residence creates a highly artificial situation to which a woman is forced succumb. This is because society does not sanction alternative modes of self expression for women. Moreover, the onus of perpetuation of the patrilineal family has also been attributed to women. The ideal of a suitably married woman is inculcated in girlhood and this ideal dictates the self image of the characters portrayed. Yet there is articulation of the experience of dehumanization, of objectification, which protagonists also begin to experience through a depiction of marriage as an expedient
physical alliance for men into which women are either being
pushed or are pushing themselves.

Women's motivation for marriage is depicted as well grounded
in a society which is conditioned by an ideology of marriage-cum-
family. However, the experience of women characters within
marriage reflects a lack of equation between partners,
engendering enslavement of the wife to the pursuits of the
husband. The male female principles epitomized by dual notions
like active/passive, superior/inferior respectively, find a
natural and therefore logical function through depicted
marriages. It is significant that questioning the institution of
marriage surfaces through women characters only. The
psychological experiences of male-female inequality through which
the literary marriage is defined are voiced only by women
characters and it is this attitude that women novelists of the
period under study, have succeeded in representing, underlining
and highlighting the systematic reinforcement of patriarchal
monogamous marriages, established as feminine ideals.

Moreover, the right of a husband over his wife is almost
absolute a right which is being upheld by the legal juridical
machinery. Thus if girlhood experiences discrimination,
womanhood is confined to its duties and self sacrifices to an
even greater degree, because a woman is expected to live up to
the "nationalist western Aryan" construct of womanhood -
pursued in society, depicted by women characters and represented
by women novelists in a process of acquiring a higher consciousness of their potential.

This has been the significant achievement of women novelists whose personal circumstances — growing up in westernized ethos and developing into personalities of Indianized women, because they were able to generate a perspective on the home marriage imprisoned woman, who was educated and disempowered. As part of a literary sub culture, the novel of women evolved definite statements against the cult of suitable marriages and glorified motherhood and women as producers of male heirs. Sociological accounts of women's position in the Indian society corroborate the interrelation between renewed patriarchal norms and antiwomen practices, like early marriage, female infanticide and bride burning. The process of destruction (dehumanization of women) and self destruction (suicide neurosis) is represented through the novels as a by product of the regenerated feminine ideal. This is reflected through the fortunes of women characters in the novels. As part of representation of this process, romanticizing the sufferings of women consciously like male novelists, finds no place. In this context women novelists, through their characters, are generating specific insights into the subjective aspects of being a wife. The halo built around marriage, through revived and reinforced models of patriarchal marriage is eclipsed by the projected experiences of man woman relationship through the device of introspection which brings to
the fore women's personal responses in contrast to the "taken for granted" attitudes expressed by men characters. By tuning the perspectives of women characters to their own perspectives, women novelists play a significant role in consciousness raising, not by demolishing existing patterns of marriage but by "reviewing" them through the experience of the subservient partner, i.e. the woman.

The significance of this has been brought out by the observation regarding, "the designs literature has on us, of the way it forms and controls our imaginative self images and of the regeneration of a critical voice". The image of marriage as a prison house is like a common thread weaving through the psyche of characters, investigated by the writers wherever they intervene through narrators and transfer it to the minds of readers. A quiet note of resistance to marital oppression begins to take form even though a woman's autonomy within social structures remains undeveloped in a definite way, and within such limitations, their articulation of more compatible marital relations evoke a greater degree of understanding.

The overarching literary portrayal of marriage through the novels under study reflects an adherence to classical norms because of the innate tendency to recreate what is traditional. Meenakshi Mukherji observes, "One might argue that the classical ideals no longer obtain in the Indian context. But in actual literary practice, numerous characters are found to adhere to the
classic prototypes - especially the women of fiction who persistently re-enacted the suffering, sacrificing, role of Sita or Savitri". It is this trend which could be identified as the cause for a dearth of literary role models for women who are critically aware of women characters. For them marriage becomes the summum bonum, the coveted career, the alliance between two families, not a free selection between two adult human beings. Thus, in terms of developing autonomy, fictive women remain closely identified with the classical prototypes. Rama Mehta points out, "There is recorded evidence to show that the Hindu woman was not always without rights nor constantly in subjection. There is however, greater evidence to show that the contrary was true, for many centuries her position continued to be one in which she did not have either legal or social rights to make her independent of the family into which she was born or married". This depiction of the position of women in marriage is like a common motif in the novels but when women's subjugation persists, an expression of their turmoils gains sociological significance, leading to a representation of challenging the concept of "pativrata" as a moral code. However, the patriarchal joint family system into which women marry remains steadfast. Therefore, through marriage a woman marries a whole family and imbibes the values of the community to which the family belongs. Once married she is expected to eschew all personal ambitions and goals, because she is expected to find her fulfilment within the family, not outside it. Her confinement finds co-related
supports in the forms of Zenana, Haveli, the Prayer Room, Kitchen and Courtyard/Balcony. If the protagonist goes beyond these confines, she does so without rejecting these confines in any significant way. However, she does represent an increasingly pervasive urge to restructure socially approved arrangements with their over-emphasis on the so-called natural inclinations of women.

The urge to seek new identities finds overt expression, "Come what will, I have launched my frail bark upon the waters". However, History and change are epitomized in the literary accounts of marriage through the attitudes of different women characters. One of the representative voices that may become more audible is reflected here. "...I hope you will not think it enough merely to be young, to be able to read any book you choose to read, to ride on a bus amongst silly young men, to go to a concert at night. With such opportunities at hand, you must surely want something greater than pleasure alone or the security of marriage alone, something more rare more responsible". This representation speaks for itself in the context of another perspective on marriage. Marriage for women evolves as a sacrament, institutionalized through social pressure creating an alienation, voiced by Monisha, Simrit, Laila, Indira, Maya, Kunthi - some women characters of the novels under study. It is, an alienation which evolves specifically as the experience of women characters and not of male characters.
Marriage for men is thus depicted as the means for institutionalizing a support system for their self actualization. This brings into sharp focus the visible and invisible contributions made by women, fictive and real to masculine principles of activity and achievement. A common experience of most women characters relates to their being victims of male deceit. Though women tend to have their conclaves and secret desires, they are usually kept in the dark where sexual infidelity of their male counterparts is concerned. In a situation of confrontation, the dominant note is that sexual infidelity is a male prerogative and women are socialized into accepting marital infidelity.

The positive contribution by women novelists is in their focus on the extent of service which women perform towards sustaining the household unit without which men and their male progeny would not achieve, self actualization, which is interlinked with the social world outside the domestic unit. Through their novels women writers succeed in portraying vividly and forcefully women's definite contributions to the occupations of men. It can be said that women characters have made visible, those functions in the domestic unit which are directly contributory to the position men occupy in the social world. If men assume those functions to be an integral part of the domestic structure, most women characters especially of the second generation speculate on and gradually articulate what men take for granted because of prevailing social mores and customs.
WOMEN AND EDUCATION: The overriding picture of patriarchal family that controls the sexuality and physical movement of women in the novels under study conveys, glimpses of the ways in which formal education became an important part of the urban woman's living culture. From Laila, through Attia Hosain's description of a feudal muslim family through Nayantara Sahgal's urban elite women, to the very recent professionals of Shashi Deshpande's novels, education is a factor available to these women. This throws light on the interrelation between class and its accessibility to formal education. Moreover, there does not seem to be any pronounced contradiction between the culture of middle class world view and the nature of education received. In fact, women are socialized into roles that are deemed desirable for women in order to carry out their socially necessary roles, within domestic units. Even the poorest of the poor women portrayed by Kamala Markanadaya have acquired the basic skills of reading and writing. The accomplishments of women through education are however, reduced to ornaments which make them more attractive as prospective brides. Formal education, in the case of male characters adds to their intrinsic worth, but in the case of women characters, education is availed of for a limited and specific purpose.

However, the pursuit of education wherever it is depicted is shown as a supplementary activity unlike, in the case of men where educational pursuits are central to their destiny, besides
being an ennobling process. Any reference to the education of women is in negative terms, pointing to its lack of utility for the real station of women. There is also a correlation between Education and Westernization with its ill effects on ideal womanhood. The education of women brings into focus different views of two generations of women characters. If the older generation is critical of daughters pursuing education, the daughters themselves are enthusiastic because of the emancipation, they believe, is possible to achieve through education. But as the writers, depict, the expectations of educated women are belied, since their gains are made redundant by the fact of marriage and its stereotyped requirements.

Reflecting upon their educational achievements, most women characters of the second generation experience frustration and ennui, cramped self expression and a desire for developing a meaningful and positive identity. This implies that their education is neither productive nor satisfying within the marital relationship that women seek either spontaneously or under coercion. Even outside the sacred precincts of marriage as divorcees or separated women, education does not provide them with meaningful or dignified alternatives. It is evident, then that education for elite women has failed to be liberating or useful, and for middle class women it has become redundant. Moreover, education leading up to a profession or career for the characters is an aberration.

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The themes which are built around the idea of domestic bliss marginalize professional development because the public/active image of women is in contradiction to the domesticated private/passive image of women as part of the socio cultural constructs internalized by men and women. Consequently, Education in the case of men has become an effective medium for self actualization, whereas for women it is, at its best an embellishment pulling women back to their prison-like homes, though creating an awareness of their situation. Though education is redundant for the women characters portrayed, yet their self perception undergoes some change. They feel stifled over time, by the oppressive atmosphere of their homes because of the denials and deprivations they face especially in the context of opportunities for self development. However, as girls they are passive observers or dreamers and as women they are merely carrying out the duties performed by their mothers. The main differences lies in different styles of dressing, that of the second generation associated with the cult of westernization. Since they dress according to the custom or the fashion encouraged by men, women define themselves socially in male terms. Their social imagery or the determinants which women use for defining their class is through their fathers or husbands. Their individuality is part of a process of self-effacement, and their destines, what they posses, or do not possess is wrapped up in the more "visible", personalities of their male providers. A woman like Jaya does not even have the right to her own name.
which is changed to Suhasini after marriage - a name with which she is identified in society as somebody's wife. The complete disempowerment of women varying in degrees, as women pass through different stages of development or role sets, is evident in the language they use. The use of the first person "I" is dominant in introspections while "We" or "Our" or "us" forms are commonly used to indicate a woman's submerged identity. Thus socially Maya Simrit or Indu despite their education, their occupations outside home (in the case of the last two) are described as neurotic, divorced or misfit in terms of the society which makes value judgements through socially fixed notions of ideal womanhood. None of the women characters is ascribed a definite identity, because that contradicts the dominant male position. She has only a derived identity-derived from the male on whom she is made dependent.

There emerges through the novels under study a pattern of search for one's identity above the social identity and imagery in which women are framed. Women characters do not change the marital man woman relationships but their discontent is evident in rare instances of redefining themselves. The status of women, as it is reflected in the novels, depicts the marriage centred ideology of middle and upper classes which pushes women into arranged, suitable marriages through which they are expected to conform to their socially ascribed roles and duties. On the surface their depicted status presents a static picture, but
through the introspections of women characters, an urge for change is discernible. Individualistic actions like divorce, separation, suicide, provoke social reactions which signify the extent to which social sanctions continue to operate against the women's attempt at defining their identities on their terms. Most are rendered helpless but some few represent the level of consciousness which initiates transition - the transition from subservience and conformity to self definition and self-expression, as is evident through the representations made by the novelists under study.

(iii)

THE TASK OF REPRESENTATION: RESPONSES OF SOME NOVELISTS

In order to trace inter linkages, between women writer, Literary representations and readers, this study, obtained, through questionnaire and dialogue, an insight into the writer's perspective. The conclusions arrived at point to an explicit commitment to the cause of women. As women themselves they are sensitive to the needs of women, and their articulation of frustrations show that women readers can identify themselves with the problems that the characters face "as if they are our own". A work of art and fiction is an important cultural product in that it can make representations, though writers are not always consciously churning out images and characters who are expected to become a source of inspiration. However, a writer's integral
position in society, her own experience and interactions apart from a moral position, conditions the creation of characters. If women are imaged as passive, there is a bearing on their real position in society, and if active, there is representation of resistance.

A writer's contribution to social change may be manifested in different ways - not so much in a direct way - but by focusing on problems specific to a category of people. Emotions are common to both men and women but as women, women writers present an "insider's" perspective, not to push solutions but to trace a pattern. The writers share a common attitude regarding the impact that cultural literary representations have on receptive minds. Novels as popular forms of literature lend themselves to various interpretations - some appeal to the heart and some to the mind, so there is always an active interaction between the readers and the writers.

Another viewpoint that has emerged is that women who have become conscious of the need to realize themselves would seek relevant solutions to the problems of restraint on their movement, choice and activity. The struggle against oppressive arrangements has been a part of cultural historical development and some women have always emerged strong and victorious.

Women characters are essentially built an ideas and images, which manifest themselves through situations constructed around
situations familiar to the novelists - like the home, the neighborhood, or the family. Women work out their lives against an environment which is familiar to other women as readers, and it is through this nexus that the consciousness of readers is affected. It is through this interplay that the writer's perspective has a direct bearing on the readers.

From the dialogues, it was difficult to get into a writer's overall perspective where her novels were concerned but one did gather that the autobiographical element was inclined to condition characters, without making any replications.

In response to some common questions addressed to the novelists under study, the viewpoint presented led to the following conclusions.

1 Novels are not built in the air; they derive their material from life around, i.e. they are not purely imaginative acts.

2 The writer is seldom conscious of her readers at the time of writing, since the characters grow out of the situations which figure in the writing. They have their lives shaped by their environment. Women characters are reflexive, since there is a constant interplay between their minds and the environment to which they find themselves confined.

3 The writer does not address herself to a specific readership. Readership, gets determined by the content of
the work. The underlying criticism of patriarchal marriage which has acquired new dimensions in the post colonial society draws a specific readership.

4 The novels under study have derived a great deal from the writers' own experience of social life, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously - the personal perspective developing into a general perspective.

5 Subjective experience is transmuted to define issues, or pose questions beyond the self.

6 An awareness of gendered social reality developed as the writings progressed into an identifiable pattern. Writing itself becomes a part of self education.

7 There is no conscious projection of alternative male/female role models, but they emerge as part of the process of representation.

8 Each writer has her own sociological perspective but there emerged a convergence with regard to the social/domestic conditions in which women are placed. There is clearly a commonly felt concern with the educated, middle class/upper class housewife whose alienation is becoming self destructive. As a result, marriage and man woman relationship are central to their themes.
9 Feminist thought and theory have provided important insights into social constructs, valuable in criticism and writing.

10 Images from mythology and history impinge upon the consciousness of writers and their characters, but they are not static images or ideal types, but serve as models seeking remodification.

Work and viewpoints of these writers bear a close resemblance to Showalter's\textsuperscript{87} classification of women's literature into three major phases.

First: The prolonged period of imitation,
Second: A phase of protest against normative standards and values.
Third: A phase of self discovery—a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, beginning a search for identity.

Showalter's terms 'Feminine, Feminist' and 'Female' can be aptly applied to three different phases of the developmental aspects of work of each writer as also the pattern that is created by the work of these novelists, collectively. Women characters of these novelists may also be classified along these different aspects underlining a dynamic interplay between the writer, her women and social reality against which they are pitted.
Yet, the best answers to questions regarding the interrelation between women in fiction and women in society are provided by the novels themselves, as Nayantara Sahgal\textsuperscript{88} believes and advises. Experiences of women characters and a growing consciousness of their imposed roles in reinforced patriarchal family systems are indicative of a conscious quest for alternatives. Women respondents (in the following chapter) have testified to what the novelists have represented. A distinct literary tradition of women writers finds validity through the perspective of women protagonists, explaining that women's novels are more sympathetic to and illustrative of women. It is evident that women writers manifest essential differences from male writers, not only in their world view but in their modes of perceiving social reality.\textsuperscript{89}

REFERENCES

1 Based on results of the questionnaire, dialogue-cum interviews.


3 Writers feel that literature does not present a verbatim version of social reality but rather a transmuted form, which is determined by the writer's own perceptions and responses, converging into an interpretation. [Sourced from interviews and answers to questionnaire circulated at random among writers].

4 Anita Desai : Sita in where shall we go this summer"? Delhi, Orient Paperbacks, 1973.


7 Ibid. p x


9 Ibid. P 86

10 Santha Rama Rau, Foreword to the Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana, New York, Unwin, 1962. P 5


16 Ibid. P 126


18 The male protagonist in Nector in a Sieve, Ibid

19 Nathan's secret liaison with Kunthi, passes unnoticed, whereas Kunthi's extra-marital liaisons brand her as a 'harlot'. Social response to male-female morality is thus conditioned by gender. The writer, however, is able to evince a reflection upon this matter, which touches upon the hypocrisy involved.

20 Ibid. p 113

21 Chapter VI Social and Self perception of women respondents: An empirical study.
22. Rukmani’s daughter in *Nectar in a Sieve* abandoned by her husband for infertility, tries to save her infant brother from starvation by earning through prostitution.

23. Ibid. P 99


25. Savitri represents, the Wife mother syndrome in a family, subservient to the patriarchal head. She is also the protagonist of the novel.

26. "Do you think I am going to stay here? We are responsible for our position: We accept the food, shelter and comforts that you give and become what we are. Do you think that I will stay in your house, breathe the air of your property, drink the water here, and eat food you buy with your money? No, I will starve and die in the open, under the sky – a roof for which we need be obliged to no man". Ibid. P 75

27. Shanti Bai appears as the "Other" woman in the novel, rootless, because she has rejected marriage. Her portrayal evinces criticism.


30. Chapter VI of the thesis


32. Ibid.

33. Nayantara Sahgal: *A time to be happy*. (Except for Kusum’s marriage to Sanad, all others are arranged.


35. Ibid. P 146

36. Inder in *Storm in Chandigarh*.

37. Ibid., P 98


- A Time to be Happy (1956)
- From Fear Set Free (1962)


Maya, in Anita Desai, Cry the Peacock, Hind Pocket Books, New Delhi, 1963.
Monisha in Voices in the City, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1968. Sita in Where shall we Go this Summer?, New Delhi, Orient Paperbacks, 1975; Amla in Voices in the City, 1968; Bim, in Clear Light of Day, 1980.


A literary device developed by Virginia Woolf for taking into account the interplay between objective and subjective awareness of events and people.

Fire on the Mountain, 1977
Cry the Peacock, 1963
Clear light of Day, 1980

Reference is to Aunt Mira - the spinster maternal aunt who substitutes the mother in the household.

The protagonist for whom life has become as sterile as her marriage, because of prescriptive social values of her class which subject women to subservient and passive roles.

Most of the women characters are married into upper class homes which provide all the services that women may desire/require by way of housework or child care.

Wilted flowers, in Cry the Peacock and Dead Crows in where shall we go this Summer?

Nanda Kaul in Fire on the mountain and Bim in Clear light of Day.

Tara, Maya, Sita, Monisha
Bim, Nanda Kaul, at a later stage, Amla
Reflected in the socially approved tendency in women to bedeck and bejewel themselves for the male gaze. A tendency exploited by representations made through advertising and culture of entertainment.

Shashi Deshpande: Interview, "Meet the Author' Sahitya Akademi, 20.2.1990.

Shashi Deshpande: *Roots and Shadows*.

Shashi Deshpande at meet the Author symposium, Sahitya Akademy, 20.2.1990.


- The Dark holds no Terrors, 1980
- That Long silence, 1988

Sarita is the successful doctor in *The Dark holds no terrors*. Her decision to separate reflects her priorities as a woman conscious of her achievements.

Indu is the protagonist in *Roots and Shadows*.

Ibid. P 34

Jaya, The protagonist in *That Long Silence*.


In this context Santha Rama Rau, Attia Hosain, Kamala markanadya, may be differentiated from Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, whereas Nayantara Sahgal occupies a distinct position as the meeting point between two levels of consciousness of Western Liberalism and Indian Nationalism.

Conclusion of Chapter VI, of this thesis.

Chapter III, Survey of Sociological Studies.


See especially the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande.

By juxtaposing women characters, the novelists have presented social reality, as it impinges on women on two distinct levels - the depicted and the represented. One level voices the socially stereotyped aspirations of women, while the other contravenes through the use of symbols, or introspectively, the accepted modes of survival for women by de-identifying with the myth of happily married housewife.

Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande


Female Protagonists of the novels of Nayantara Sahgal.


See Novels of Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande.

Anita Desai: Clear Light of Day, p 167

Anita Desai: Voices in the City, p 116

Kamala Markanadaya: Nectar in a Sieve. 
Nayantara Sahgal: A Day in Shadow.

Monisha, Sita in Voices in the City and Where shall we Go this Summer? Simrit, in The Day in Shadow.

Women of Nayantara Sahgal.

Women of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande
85 In the Selections under study here, there are only Simrit (The Day in Shadow) and Saru (The Dark holds no Terrors) who have professional careers.


87 Elaine Showalter : A Literature of Their Own, Princeton University Press, 1977, P 13


89 Face to Face interviews : Shashi Deshpande - 20.2.1990, Sahitya Akademi.
Indira Goswami - 1.11.1992, Sahitya Akademi.
Quarratulain Hyder - 22.2.1990, Sahitya Akademi.