CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The feminist movement brought awakening and consciousness among the woman writers to project a new image of woman in the society. In an age of fast changing values at the global level, it has became quite necessary for woman to redefine her new role and determine the parameters, so as to become an integral part of family and society, marking a balance between feminism and convention.

From few decades, the family in India has been under a process of social change affecting man-woman relationship. Within family set up the role of husband and wife has undergone a vital change due to growing enlightenment and the movement for woman's emancipation. Indian writers in their works, present an image of woman which is totally different from the image of the past as in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, Bharati Mukherjee and Shashi Deshpande. Deshpande’s woman protagonists are bold enough to revolt against the attempts of men to marginalize them, as is revealed in her novels, The Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence, Roots and Shadows, The Binding Vine and A Matter of Time. The characters like Indu, Saru and Jaya are career conscious but traditional in their outlook and therefore face severe problems of adjustment in their families. Urmila is
however, most rebellious because she works as a lecturer in a college and financially independent. Talking to an interviewer, Deshpande says: "having a life outside the family is very important for woman." Therefore, all her woman protagonists Indu, Saru, Jaya and Urmila succeed in constructing a self through individual professional achievement. Redefining their relationship, they emerge fully developed individuals doing justice in their domestic as well as professional fields.

In her novels, these commitments of the 'new woman' are represented through certain metaphors and images. The questions of economic freedom, social status, security and such things assume a secondary role. As regards the process of development of the ideas of commitment, they first appear in a vague and indistinct form and later on they become fully established. In recent novelists like Shobha De and Namita Gokhale we find that they have deviated from this stream of development and in their novels the woman characters, if at all they could be termed 'new women', represent an entirely different value system. On the other hand the study of Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai shows that the 'new women' is not confined to the self-conscious, emancipated and educated women. One can come across such a woman in any social environment or in any class of society. Rukmani, despite her poor status and rural background anticipates the 'new woman' at many levels.
The 'new woman' not only reflects on the lot of woman but also understands and sympathises with everything that is tender, meek and suffering including the animals and birds. The sight of injured baby-monkey hurts the sensibility of young Saroja. Through it, she sympathises with the weak and suffering. The death of Maya's pet Toto triggers off a set of responses. Her attitude to the death of the pup is the metaphor of tenderness, innocence and therefore, touches the basic sympathies which lie at the core of her heart. Sita's desperate attempt to frighten away the crows who are bent upon killing a fallen eagle touchingly exemplifies her sensitive and tender response to anything that is harsh and brutal. But no such feeling is to be seen in Karuna and Anjali when the two talk about the death of two pigeons left under the latter's charge by 'Babaji'. Their gesture is one of casualness and indifference.

The 'new woman' also shows similar feelings for the unborn child. In Saroja's case the feelings of compassion for fellow-sufferers get transferred from the beasts to the unborn child. Saroja finds the idea of abortion abhorring. Over the issue of abortion the sensibilities of the two sisters, Saroja and Lalitha are hurt. They fumble for some kind of solution but there is no remorse for the act. The crux of the discussion revolves round the human aspect, i.e. a life being snuffed out and the entire experience of abortion. Sita wants the miracle
of not giving birth she even questions whether childbirth is an act of creation or a violent pain-stricken act that destroys everything what is safely contained in the womb by releasing it into a murderous world. As opposed to the view of Saroja and Lalitha on the issue of abortion, Karuna's attitude is directed towards herself. It never allows her to think of the unborn child.

Shashi Deshpande's new women have deep commitments to spiritual concerns, sharing and companionship based on understanding and sympathy, need for a sensitive approach in others towards themselves to understand their emotional and spiritual needs, attempt to understand other's point of view and the like. For Jaya meaning and fulfillment in life comes through tenderness, mutual sharing and commitment to deeper things. The fulfillment implies, appreciation of her tender, delicate feelings and emotions and a throbbing life of consciousness. Deshpande realises that her relations cannot offer either emotional or spiritual sustenance. Hence, she shuts herself from all relations and withdraws into her own shell. Her commitment is to her withdrawal. She seeks fulfillment in this sense. The house with all its associations becomes an essential and inalienable part of her personality. She begins to consider the circumscribing nature of the house as something ideal.
Physical relationship to a 'new woman' is a means to higher fulfillment. Marriage as such is not an issue with the 'new woman'. The 'new woman' neither seeks fulfillment in marriage nor through marriage. The 'new women' have deep commitments to certain ideals and since their male - counterparts lack in commitments to such ideals, it becomes a cause of tension. But the cause of tension is not marriage or the institution of marriage as such. Husband, though the most important part of any marital relationship, just becomes a part of the people around them; her ceases to be a distinct entity. He is just an element in the larger set of people around them. For the woman, marriage also enables them to indulge in adultery. Extra - martial affairs and 'causal-flings' are not considered extra ordinary things by the 'new woman'. The traditional concept of marriage with fidelity as its cardinal principle stands discarded.

Majority of the women characters, experience a sense of revolt, they are rebels who either rebel against the shackles of male - dominated social order or are at least aware of it. Jaya, Indu, Saru, Urmi, Kalyani, Leela, Shakutai, Karuna, Anjali, Ritu, Asha Rani, Paro and Priya despite their commitment to themselves have some sort of dissatisfaction with the society and its man-made laws. Among the Indian Women novelists, Shashi Deshpande is the woman who is deeply conscious of all the inequality and injustice in the society. She has
instinctively known that it is a mercantile world and if you know the tricks of the trade you can obtain success and respectability.

The study points out that creative literature should proceed in a direction where there is an opportunity for a woman to realise herself fully. Where there is total recognition of her emotional and spiritual needs. This would demand a re-ordering of all social relationships, especially that of husband and wife. It has been seen that nearly all the women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande’s fiction, whom the study calls The New Woman, enjoy security, respectability and economic independence but there is a total absence of recognition of their deeper and hence more basic needs in their male counterparts. This would not be achieved by bringing about equality of the sexes, or by according women with more power or even by reversing the power structure as it exists in the male-dominated society, hints of which are thrown in the fiction of Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahagal & Nargis Dalal. This would require a total re-ordering of all kinds of relationships. In such a scheme of things, things like promiscuity and permissiveness would have no place and economic independence or independence of females in all respects would be a natural by-product. But all creative literature should move along these lines as its philosophic base.
Since the study seeks to emphasize the female experience, it may turn out to be a feminist critique with the final aim being to set right the lopsided value-system of patriarchy. It follows that future literature on women must augment consciousness - raising by providing "realistic insights into female personality development, self perception, interpersonal relationships and other 'private' or 'internal' forms of sexism."2

In fairness to Shashi Deshpande, it can be said that her new woman is very much located in her native traditions despite its fault lines. It does not however mean that she is blind to the happenings outside. In fact, Deshpande's new woman accepts the challenges of her predicament and emerges victorious at the end in peculiar ways. The 'Silence' becomes vocal in Deshpande's novels in ways different from those so unequivocally argued by Simone De Beauvoir and others. Deshpande's woman refrains from any politics sexual or otherwise without substantially compromising her position.
REFERENCES
