CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

For a very long time it has been a strange societal cult to relegate women as the secondary beings of our society. They have been thought to exist as an addition to the male autocracy and are required to mould their beings according to the requirements of man. The women in our society have been oppressed for so long that they have accepted their life to be controlled by a men’s whim. She had lost faith in freedom from her domestic hardships. To curb her liberty of thoughts, she had been restrained from education, imposed with hollow beliefs and made to realize that because she was feminine, she was weak and had to be submissive to the men else she would be considered as evil in her character. The women of past were birds with beautiful songs but never dared to sing in front of their cagers- the autocratic man of our society.

Our system was very consciously designed to fit the man’s perception of existence. In this world women had little or no importance, they were considered as commodities meant to be used. Women during the Victorian era were thought to be able enough only for needle work and serving the family. Anything beyond that, which could penetrate the men’s drawn boundaries of code of conduct for woman was welcomed and caused hardships to them. The women have always been thought to be weak, submissive, marginalized, dependent and delicate. Since it was the men in the family who earned and controlled the women, he even began controlling the relationships too. They manipulated and exploited a woman to meet their aspirations, supporting the individuality and uniqueness of woman’s character. The society made them blind towards their true inner beauty and power.

Women always performed their domestic duties. But later in time this duties were thought to be their destiny and this destiny then became a law in the marriage institution. Her role was considered to be secondary & subordinate. Everybody’s need became her priorities and she lost sight of her own interest. In serving others she forgot to serve herself. This was again due to the social construct of her society wherein women since childhood are taught
only to serve and never to demand. They were required to remain as a shadow of their husband after the marriage. Her life collapsed to the four walls of her domestic build up.

Many ill practices prevailed in our country in the past. Sati, polygamy, purdah system, child marriage, female infanticides are a few to name. But the New Woman has successfully relegated herself from these aimless norms and is now living a more prosperous and fulfilling life. She knows what her rights are and how to use them effectively in her benefits. New women are not born; they come out of the ordinary suffering women. The thing is they have been shaped by circumstances. They are the same women who were previously rebuffed by men. Now they have emerged as more strong confident and influential personalities. They play active role in public and political sectors, especially after the independence of the country. They spread awareness among the masses about the practices of dowry, child marriage, domestic violence, polygamy, gender discrimination at workplace, female feticide etc. Today there are rules to prevent this wrong activities and the New Woman has played a significant role in bringing these matters to surface.

The concept of New Woman came up during the suffrage movement wherein women for the first time raised their voice for equal voting rights in the society. The feminists took charge of bringing a transformation into the prevailing conditions of women. The rise of the New Woman was a result of the oppressions done to them over years by the patriarchal society.

Around the final decades of the 19th century numerous women started raising their concern and opinion over the matters that were hurdles in their development. With increase in globalization of trade worldwide, better prospects started following the women. Over time they were given access to education. Women found a means of their liberation in education and hence outperformed men in education. Education gave wings to their aspirations and allowed them to undergo a transformation from ordinary woman stuck between the domestic walls to a New Woman who could raise her opinion fearlessly. She could now take white collar jobs of teachers, clerks, bankers, corporate leaders, politicians and also took up to formal writings by taking up professions such as novel writing, journalism, play writing etc.
Men have always been claiming that they keep a constant watch over the woman so as to protect them. Women have been suspiciously watched as they are considered to be weak. But the reality is that if the men remove their watchful gaze off the women, much of the problem would be solved on its own. The dominant Indian traditions had forced the women to abandon their dreams and aspirations. But the New Woman is a completely different face of modern womanhood. She questions the male autonomy, demands freedom, self-discovers her strengths, breaks away from all dependencies and brings about an identity that is completely unique and meaningful to her. The New Woman observes the prevailing traditions of existence, protests and advocates for equal rights and opportunities and finally in introspection she discovers her true needs and breaks away from the shackles that held her from reaching her destination. She begins on a new journey of self-discovery. And in the end she turns out to be a strong, ambitious and independent character that is prepared for any challenge in life. She does not consider herself as a minority group but identifies herself as a sustaining force of society having equal capabilities as her counterpart.

Whenever anything is discussed about a woman, the most common word encountered is women empowerment. In real sense women empowerment is nothing more than providing the women with the right to make free and independent decisions in her life. It gives her the strength to break free from the religious and social cults dominant in the society. In its complete sense, a real woman empowerment cannot be made unless the women decide to self-empower themselves. A large movement has to be initiated that brings awareness among women and motivates them to build an individual identity in the society. Every woman has become creative and has generative abilities in herself. These abilities must be tapped in and utilized for women as a class. The resourceful women of the society are required to step forward and offer a helping hand to their less privileged sisters and help them move out of their suffocating living conditions.

Many women accept their sufferings as their fate and do not dare to question the society out of the fear of being an outcast. She is continuously grinded between the domestic walls and later or sooner her own aspirations become meaningless to her. She feels there are no choices and opportunities in her share of rights because she is a woman. She is afraid to go against the societal norms. But the New Woman believes in struggle for transformation. She is not afraid of the opinions of the society for her. What matters to her is her self-
fulfillment. Her quest in life is to see her life truthfully and be independent. The New Woman is well aware of the fact that women’s weakness, dependence and insecurity is not the establishment of their feminine nature but just a social construct because this is what the society tries to impose over the daughters since they begin to understand. The New Woman spreads this message to her sisters also and leads them to enlightenment.

The realization of the utter discrimination and prejudice prevalent against the women in the society made them question the prevailing autocrats. The man always considered the woman to be weak but due to the oppressive life they lived through, they too came to believe that they were weak. Her realization of her conditions gave her the strength to fight back against oppression. It is often believed that a woman can endure more pain than a man. The woman used this endurance capacity to strengthen herself and build her capability to be able to take responsibility of her own decisions in life.

Any woman in her journey of transformation from an ordinary suffering woman to a New Woman passes through three phases. The first one is the feminine wherein she evaluates the society through her perspectives and gauges her position into it. She finds her potentials and questions the patriarchal society about the injustice incurred to her womanhood. This is the phase of self-discovery. The next phase is of the feminist. In this phase she fights for her rights. She recognizes her needs and searches for all the possibilities of her completion. She tries to gather other women, form unions and organizations and raises her issues and her concerns. This is the phase when she starts to demolish the autocratic establishments to make space for an equalistic and a realistic society with equal opportunities for all. The last phase is the female. This is the phase when the woman has won the battle against her assumed dynasty of servitude. She discovers the true divinity of her womanhood. So every New Woman passes through the three phases, i.e. feminine, feminist and the female. At the end of her realization she is a New Woman and has the responsibility of holding the torch of change and enlightening the lives of her underprivileged sisters.

The New Woman is characterized by the liberty of her thoughts. She does what she feels can bring fulfillment and satisfaction to her. She is unmoved by force and pressure of her family. She chooses her own paths and discovers her real interest. The New Woman is not afraid of failing. She makes independent decisions and takes responsibility for those decisions. She does not want to be relegated in the background
instead has an increased public presence. Most importantly she is open to changes, opportunities and new methodology of living a more sustainable and satisfying life.

Education has brought about a radical change for women. Many young women in their goal of pursuing education move to the urban areas. Here they discover ample opportunities to grow and prosper in life. They decide their own clothes, friends, habits and relationships. Education gave them the freedom to dream. Education brought them job and money. They got the freedom to spend and are spared from the life confined within the domestic walls. Though the corporate world is new to the woman, she has become shrewd enough to lead her way out of the problems. She no more needs a man for her completion. She has found fulfillment in her work. With money she also earns respect from her family. She is no more a burden to her family; and extra mouth to feed, BUT a breadwinner. The urbanization of women not only makes them new women in their outlook but transforms them from within.

Earning a living gave women a greater share of equality and control in a relationship. She can now make decisions that matter to her existence. The New Woman is an image of change and growth and is a motivation to all the other women. Educated women, feminists, reformists, working women etc must come together and make a common base that redefines the female in the society. They can help in building up a more equal and opportunistic society for both the male & the female.

The New Woman has defined the sexual norms in a relationship. She no more is liberation to the male hormones. She no more submits to the male whim in sexual matters. She demands sex when she feels like. She demands not just for a physical state but for a companionship built on mutual understanding and agreement. She seeks satisfaction and emotional fulfillment in a sexual relationship. She also demands a greater transparency in sexual matters and knows about all the sexually extended problems. She takes a better care of herself and cannot again be treated as a commodity or a sexual refuge.

After realizing their true potential women have contributed in various fields. English literature is one such field. Literature is a medium that the New Women use to spread their message of empowerment and celebrate their womanhood. The print media & social media play a very important role in spreading awareness among the underprivileged women
about the real prospects of their existence. **The New Woman is focused on her goals of freedom, growth and equality.**

Time and again women have fought for their freedom and tried to make their place in the society. During the Bhakti movement, women rose above their domestic suppressions and took to religious movements outside their homes. They made religion the cause of their liberation. The most important thing to the woman was her liberation from domestic walls. Religious movements provided them a medium to earn this freedom and so women in particular participated actively in the Bhakti movement and composed literature of Gods, prayers and religion.

Their voice was suppressed again during the British rule. They were restrained from access to education and hence lost the platform to represent their liberal ideas. It was again during the freedom struggle and the reformist movements’ woman got access to education and produced work related to the freedom struggle, reform and nationalist movement. Women grabbed every opportunity of their freedom. These new classes of women who are optimistic, opportunistic and brave form the class of New Woman in our society.

Women writers wrote on various topics during the freedom struggle. During this time, there were women like Bhabhani and Jogeshwari whose writings in the 19th century questioned the patriarchal dominance of their husbands, where as the majority concentrated on the freedom struggle. With the passage of time woman writers grew more imaginative in their writings and began penning down feminist ideologies. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in her work *Sultan’s Dream* creates a woman dominated world. She creates a world that is more organized and equalistic than that which has been made by man. In her world there are no wars but only constant scientific advancement and ardent love for nature and it siblings. The development of literature provided many suffering women with the weapon to narrate their stories and hardships to the society. Writing first became a refuge to the woman and later took to the wave of liberation.

This study deals with the works of two such eminent writers, Shashi Deshpande & Himanshi Shelat, who through their short stories have tried to provide a window to the
women’s world. Deshpande has taken up the cause of domestic women. She has built a platform of universal experience. Her writings bring about a common experience of women from different sectors, states and situations and through her protagonists she evaluates and questions the recurring face of patriarchal methods.

It has been observed in her stories that her heroines are optimistic towards life. They are working, self-independent and have a positive attitude towards the life. Her protagonists do not turn about their life overnight like as seen in fairy tales. Instead, in the end of every story we find a ‘New Woman’ who is faithful to herself and aspires to bring about a change in her life. She learns to make choices and produces opinions that matter.

The New Woman in her stories began to demand. She knows very well that problems are inevitable in life but she knows how to control her behavior and attitude during such problems. She has become more aware about herself and her surrounding than ever. She doesn’t fall back to her family for the solution of problems in her life but takes a new path for herself and discovers her real potential. In search of a solution to her problems, she ends up discovering her abilities and caliber. The New Woman is not born new. She is born in the same old society but the ideology that she feeds herself with makes her new.

The ultimate difference between a New Woman and the suffering woman is that the former thinks “I can” and the later is afraid because she thinks “I can’t”. Everyone has problems and so does the New Woman. But instead of crying over them, she treats them as her opportunity to learn and move on. The New Woman has developed a beautiful ability to ‘let go’ things that do not fulfill her. She is open to changes in her life and welcomes them whole heartedly.

The ‘New Woman’ has gradually but firmly evolved from the limiting and constricting hollow traditions of the society. She grew up by imitating the traditional beliefs of the society. She then found problems in it and discovered that they were discriminating. So she protested. She was suppressed but she persisted. She advocated for her rights and eventually through introspection she discovered her real realm as a human being. The ‘New Woman’ is tired of being treated as a minority. She considers herself to be a powerful sustaining force of the society. She is strong, independent and adventurous and is ready
for all the onslaughts in her life. The ‘New Woman’ is like a bird sitting on a branch. She is not afraid or worried about the weakness of the branch because she believes in the strength of her wings. She believes in herself and her ability to fly.

The proactive ‘New Woman’ has led to demolition of many hollow traditional norms of the society like child marriage, domestic violence, dowry, abortion etc. They have not only liberated themselves but have also made the path for all other women to follow. The ‘New Woman’ believes in continuous development of her being and respects her womanhood. She is a role model for her daughter and a caring lesson for her sons. She can never again be held in bondages of fear and violence. She is free of it and knows how to fight it back. The ‘New Woman’ is self-aware of her identity and knows how important independence is to the survival of her identity.

The ‘New Woman’ is not a state, region or a time phenomenon. She is eternal. She was in the past, in the face of Mira, Sita, Draupadi and is even prevailing in the present. A ‘New Woman’ may or may not be educated, may or may not be rich, may or may not be from privileged class. She has no specific characterization. The ‘New Woman’ is a phenomenon and a phenomenal change in the ideology of woman towards her own being. She today is more aware about her womanhood, needs, desires and aspirations. She knows where she comes from but more importantly she very well knows where she wants to go. The ‘New Woman’ is robust and confident in everything she does. She has become sensitive and does not let emotions rule her mind or weaken it.

Himanshi Shelat in her writings focuses mainly over the middle class families. She has covered many sections of woman from single working woman to married ones. She in her writings has also raised concern for widows who live the life of an animal after their husbands’ death. She has drawn out the new female voice through her heroines and portrays their interior landscape to the readers. She has also focused on the psychology of our society towards the woman. She has boldly represented the plight of the prostitutes who are treated very badly in our society. She advocates them as human beings than just being a sexual commodity in the market of the society. A significant few consider the woman to be only sex objects. One can find a bold and ‘New Woman’ in her stories. She has projected the real scenario of the society and given courage to her characters to uplift themselves as an
individual. She has justified herself as a woman writer by raising the concerns of a woman in our autocratic society.

There is a vast difference between the contemporary female writers and male writers. The female writers in their work define the true idea of respecting the feminine and womanhood. She seeks her identity and searches for empowerment through her work. On the contrary, the male writers present a negative aspect of woman. They depict her as weak wives, whore, seductress etc. To them women in literature is still a supporting character as she on her back has the responsibility to support the society. All she demands is the equal distribution of responsibilities and rights in the society.

Anita Desai in an article, ‘A Secret Connivance’, concludes that ‘If literature, if art has any purpose then it is to show one, bravely and uncompromisingly, the plain face of truth. Once you have told the truth, you have broken free of society, of its prisons. You have entered the realm of freedom.’

The present Indian literature provides a window to the prevailing conditions of women in the society. The women are no longer characterized by the sati-Savitri image. They do not wish to endure anymore. **They want to become self-serving and not self-sacrificing.** The women have moved out in search of their fulfillment. They are no longer victims of the autocratic society. The female characters in modern literature assert their womanhood and defy the social code of conduct that limits them from unearthing their true caliber. Literature has provided the woman a medium of self-expression and given them the opportunity to rewrite the history of our society. She has learnt to raise opinions and make a point. And more importantly she has asserted herself so well that the world is witnessing and appreciating the rise of the ‘New Woman’. **For the ‘New Woman’, societal norms, ethics, morals and methods of living by society are secondary stuff, now for her self-fulfillment is her supreme priority.**

Many of the Hindu moral codes also denied the woman their basic rights. The *Manusmriti* is one such law which places hectic regulations and constrictions on a women’s code of conduct. These scriptures have preached that women must always remain in the custody of her father, husband and son. She should not be allowed to assert herself individually and her prime role is to provide service to man. The greater tragedy lies in the
fact that such discriminating codes were accepted and practiced in our society for a fairly long time. These ideologies were responsible in building the foundation of an autocratic patriarchal society.

The idea of woman being a commodity, secondary and serving creature must have evolved due to such hollow codes of our society. These methods have forced the woman in a matrix of traditions, religion and duty of being a submissive partner to a man or more precisely to be a loyal pet to a man. It has always been preached to the woman in society that, “Man for the field and woman for the hearth: Man for the sword and for the needle she: Man with the head and woman with the heart: Man to command and woman to obey; All else confusion.”

Man has always claimed of protecting a woman. But instead he always tried to possess a woman as if she is a commodity. They suffocated her individuality and aspirations, paralyzed her thoughts of freedom and remolded her on the socially designed draft. The woman in our society has been treated as a territory to be ruled upon. They are thought to be the weaker sex and so can be played with and then left to perish. The modern women writers have brought about a new version of the woman. This ‘New Woman’ negotiates for an equal and respectable position in the society. She has come to realize that even she can desire and at the same time deserve. She asserts her rights. The ‘New Woman’ is a good negotiator and has a very balanced personality. The ‘New Woman’ is ambitious, hardworking, intelligent, independent and a tough competitor.

The ‘New Woman’ is the new face of boldness. She is free from all pervert possessions from society and has made new realms of herself. She is a corporate leader, politician, actress, activist, environmentalist, astronaut, teacher, preacher and what not. Today the ‘New Woman’ stands at par with the man that claimed to possess her. She is the bird with a song and has the courage to sing it in front of all fearlessly. To her self-satisfaction & self-fulfillment are her first priorities. She respects her female nature and has the capacity to make changes. She has begun to view the world in a new light, with a new prospective that redefines her position in the society. She has thrown away the mantle of traditions and social jurisdiction to put on a gown of freedom.

The ‘New Woman’ is action oriented. She is fearless of any terror that may impound on her on account of her liberation in her thoughts. Malala Yusuf is one such
woman in our society. At a tender age of 16, she raised women sensitive issues of education, equality in gender etc. She was shot in the head for spreading her liberal ideas. But this did not stop her. She became a household name and a source of motivation to millions. She is now an active women’s activist and advocates for their rights. She is an independent and outspoken girl.

Our society has fixed norms for everything a woman does. The age of marriage is another element of this ideology. It becomes a matter of concern for the parents when their daughter does not get married at the appropriate age in the society. They are made to listen to a lot of curses from the family and relatives just because they are not getting married. Sometimes the family becomes so obsessed with it that they are ready to marry their daughter to any eligible groom, where the standards of eligibility are significantly reduced. Shelat’s heroine Sharda in *Saro Dahado* (The Auspicious day) undergoes the same hardships as she has crossed the age of marriage and her sister Amba is being married to a rapist. It seems that being unmarried is a greater crime than a rape. This ideology brings about the dual thought process of our society. Deshpande’s heroine Alka in ‘I Want’ describes the same plight. She is always questioned by the people who come to see her. The groom places his demands irrespective of her wishes. Her consent is not required as she is already late for marriage. Now her consent does not matter. The parents think that they have settled a matter of huge importance and significance. This is the worst mentality of people in our society where daughters are treated as commodities to be settled. Though Alka is a working woman, her eligible groom wants her to quit her job so that she is available when he returns from work. A wife is needed to entertain the man and be available. She is required to have a fluid character that can fit and please the groom.

Remaining single is thought to be one of the biggest crime a woman commits. Her activities are watched secretly and her opinion is usually not welcomed. She does not get a house to stay and work in case she has to stay away from the family as she is single and is believed to entertain man in her room. But the heroines of Deshpande and Shelat are New Women and are unmoved by what the society thinks of them. They have a goal of self-fulfillment and are not concerned of others opinion towards them. Charu in ‘Khakhari ni Khiskoli’ (Good things are appreciated by those who have experienced it), Mahabhaga in ‘Muktimastra’ (The Mantra of Freedom), Chaula in ‘Jvanika’ (The Curtain) in Shelat’s work and Shaku in ‘And Then’ in Deshpande’s work are single, working, independent and
confident woman who have portrayed their potentials to challenge the societal beliefs and present thoughts courageously.

Education has always been a topic of debate in a women’s concern. First education was prohibited to a woman and finally under the banner of globalization, urbanization and reformist movements they were allowed to pursue education. But how free and fair were they? They were allowed to read a syllabus that was programmed by a man. She even in her liberty was bound by constraints. The basic picture in our society is that the young daughters in the family are allowed to attend the schools only if they are also ready to serve their domestic chores. Their wish is of the least concern. They have to complete the household duty and then if time permits, she is allowed in the world of books but only till another work does not crop up.

Shelat in ‘Nikal’ (Abortion) portrays the life of a young girl who at her age should be playing; studying and enjoying her life without any trouble, but is burdened with household work. She aspires to play with her friends outside but cannot because she has household duties to fulfill. The problem with our society is that they teach their daughters from a very early age to abandon their childhood and to take up the greater responsibilities of a woman of cooking, fetching water, washing clothes & vessels at a very tender age. She is being made mature before the right time. An educated mother would never let her daughter fall prey to such conditions.

It has to be acknowledged by the society that education is not a service provided to woman but her right. Another astonishing teaching that conventional mothers give their daughters is that they count on how much the men eat but the woman is always served the fixed diet. It was an accepted norm in the society that more food made the boys strong and healthy whereas more food to girls made them lazy. Such perceptions have been broken by the ‘New Woman’ who provides her daughter equal opportunities as her son for personal development. The search for identity of these heroines arises from the crisis which occurs in their lives. Both Deshpande and Shelat through their work urge the society to reinvent itself and accept the ‘New Woman’ whole heartedly.

Education is the most important tool to liberation of a woman. A woman must learn to read so that she can read her own life. She must learn to write, so that she can write
her own destiny. A woman must learn to count so that she can maintain an account of her rights. Deshpande’s most of the protagonists are educated. Through her writings she has extended a message to the society that education of a woman is very essential for the welfare of the society as a whole. Through education woman can access her rights and pay attention to her personal growth. Education provides her a window to access the benefits the world has got to offer, it helps her demand and decide better. An educated woman does not fall prey to the hollow beliefs of the society. She not only leads a prosperous life but also brings up her daughter with new ideologies. She fights for her daughter’s rights and gives her teachings of self- dependence and individual identity. She protects her daughter not by covering her from toe to head but by making her face the realities of the society. She gives her strength to fight back to the oppressions done to her.

Deshpande’s heroines in ‘It was dark’, ‘My Beloved Charioteer’, ‘Why a Robin’ are the mothers who teach their daughters to be bold and fight back in life. She does not teach her daughters to be tied in the four walls of the domestic life but of breaking them and move out to the world of opportunities. She teaches her to take a stand instead of submitting to the situations. In Shelat’s ‘Badatarana Bij’ (On a rainy Night), ‘Koi Bijo Manas’ (The Other Man), ‘Barmasi’ (Periwinkle Flowers)’ we find such women characters who strengthen their daughters by teaching them that no hardship can be greater than one’s courage if one decides to fight back. Such mothers do not let their daughters live a gloomy and painful life.

The New Woman has begun to educate herself. She is fearless of all and is ready to go to any extent to find justice to her daughter. The mother of the new ideology knows that they could not move out of the vicious trap of the institution of marriage but they want their daughter to fly free above the cloud of bondages and domestic duties. Many a times women want to rise above their hectic life and they even try by asking her family, but is more often silenced then heard. Shelat in ‘Ajanyo’ (A Stranger), through her protagonist Avni has tried to show how the Indian women are silenced when they try to raise their concerns. They instead of being helped are reminded of their duties as women and wives and asked to reconcile with their fate and situations and are asked to be quite. They cannot turn to their parents too; else they would bring disgrace to the family. Even in Deshpande’s ‘My Beloved Charioteer’ the protagonist of the story- the mother, was very afraid of her husband and expresses her fears to her in-laws who instead of helping her asked her to submit. Even if they are a working woman they are required to work in the house too else they would be
denied their job. But the New Woman is well aware of her individuality and is ready to go to any extent to protect it. Her desires are her priorities and she makes sure that they are met and she is heard and respected in the family.

Deshpande has tried to narrate the prominent epics of our country like Mahabharata through a woman’s perspective. She has narrated the plight of the woman who in the conventional epics has been projected as ideal woman, ideal as per the man’s norms. In ‘Hear Me Sanjaya’ and ‘And What Has Been Decided?’ Deshpande has projected Kunti and Draupadi in a new light. Kunti who assumes a very quiet and unnoticed role in the epics has been shown as the one who expresses her concerns and feelings to others. She is not the ideal woman who bears all hardships imposed over her and remain quiet. She has been shown here to raise questions and make opinions. Draupadi has also shown her feelings for Arjuna openly and through the story we come to know that she had her own longings for love and affection which have been overlooked in the real stories.

Though Shelat has not brought about such epical narrations in her short stories, she very beautifully presents the attitude of women knowing witchcraft. In ‘Muktimantra’ (The Mantra of Freedom) we find that Mahabhaga transformed a parrot into a man, Abhidharma, and helped him prosper in life. Though later she is accused by his wife Muktavali of deceiving him, she does not lose her calm. In this story, Shelat has brought out some of the prominent characteristics of the New Woman through Mahabhaga. The New Woman is independent and self reliant. She does not bother of what others feel about her friendly relations with a married man because her belief in herself is more profound then the criticism of others. She holds no grudges in her heart and is free of all prejudices. She has a greater understanding of relationships. The New Woman is carefree but not careless as perceived by many.

Deshpande is well known for her advocacy of the universal experience of women. But still most of her work is related with the women of the ‘acceptable’ class. She has written about the feelings of the widows, elite woman, middle class and lower class women. But we find a limited work on the ‘dejected’ class of women which includes prostitutes and eunuchs who are usually related to the feminine. Inside the closed rooms, a prostitute may serve to be a fulfillment to a man’s lusty desires but outside those ‘dim’ rooms, she is considered a disgrace. Not only men but even the women of our society threat the prostitutes with disgust.
Shelat in her short stories has given space and presented their sorrows and grief to her readers. She has very meticulously shown that even the prostitutes are humans and deserve to lead a normal life. Many prostitutes try to move out of their conditions but are slapped back to the same conditions by the harsh and prejudiced society. In Shelat’s stories like ‘Kimmat’ (The Price), ‘Kharidi’ (The Shopping Hour), ‘Shaap’ (The Curse), Shelat brings out the unseen or rather unthought-of aspirations of a prostitute and has firmly depicted that their first identity is that of a woman. Every woman wants to earn respect in the society. No one was born a prostitute or with the desire of being one, but when denied and dejected by the society, helpless, they found a means of living by selling their body. The heroines of Shelat are inspired by the elite woman of our society, their dress and their respectful position in the society. They do not want to be treated just as the objects of pleasure but as a human being who too has feelings and desires. The realization of the need of a better living condition makes them demand it and when they try to achieve this through their effort, they are pulled back to prostitution and reminded that they have no right to lead a normal life, not at least in the present scenario of the society.

We observe in Shelat’s writings that her characters realize their aspirations but don’t turn out to be exemplary characters who can dare to act. They accept the reality and agree to live with it. Shelat’s stories on topics like prostitution bring awareness about their life but do not lead them to the acceptance in the society. Her characters Mohana in ‘Kimmat’ (The Price) and Chameli in ‘Kharidi’ (The Shopping Hour) wish to live a normal life but soon put away the thought and accept the prevailing life with its suffocating hardships. Sometimes her stories end on an ambiguous note leaving the reader to ponder over the situation.

Shelat in her writings first tries to develop an intangible connection between the readers and the characters of the story. She takes up others issues of the society like riots and tries to present its effects on different sects of the society. She also presents the situation of women during these riots and records their reactions to the situation. She has narrated stories from different social constructs and castes.

Both the authors have also brought about the bigger picture of conditions of widows in our society. The women’s life in our society is considered to be meaningless after the husband’s death. She is forced to live with the guilt that she survived even after her
husband’s death. Her individuality is suppressed and the avalanche of hardships slides on them. Shelat in ‘Andhari Galima Safed Tapka’ depicts the rigidity and brutality of the orthodox and hollow customs of our society towards the widows. They are endowed with very inhuman behavior from their own family. They are prohibited their own sight in a mirror. The widows in the story lived in ‘Bhagirathi Kalyandham’, a place for widows and were required to renounce all worldly pleasures. They could not live their beauty and had to live a secluded life. Our society has always been impartial to the women as there are no such widow ashrams for men who lose their wives. They don’t have to undergo any hardships from the society. Instead they receive compassion from the society. The worst part is men who wish to remarry never even attend the funeral of their wives. But a woman has no such liberty as of yet.

Deshpande has also produced a lot of work depicting the sufferings of a widow. To her it’s a people’s issue rather than a personal problem. In her stories ‘A Man and a Woman’, ‘Rain’, ‘The Cruelty Game’, and ‘And Then’ she has depicted the issues widows face in their own families and outside. The society considers that a widow has no place for any sort of entertainment. It can be seen in ‘The Cruelty game’ when Pramila wants to celebrate her daughter’s birthday, she is mocked by everybody as it was not even a year since her husband died. But in Pramila we find a ‘New Woman’ who continues to put a bindi on her forehead even after her husband’s death. She breaks the hollow code of societal conduct.

Remarriage of a widow is considered to be a sin in our society. It was a thunderbolt to the beliefs that a woman cannot be remarried when during the reformist movement, people began advocating widow remarriage. Radha in ‘Rain’ and Lalita in ‘A Man and a Woman’ are such new women who believe in their strength and dare to think of remarriage. They remarry and choose a new life for themselves.

She becomes her own support system. She emphasizes on her needs and goes about fulfilling them A ‘New Woman’ never curses her fate instead searches means to cure her own wounds. She is of the belief that the thoughts and opinions of the society are none of her concern and in no way helpful in her productivity. She gives herself a chance to move out of all the guilt that the ordinary woman possesses.
Working and educated women make up a greater part of the short stories of Deshpande. She has also paid a greater emphasis on the sexual needs and problems of woman. The ‘New Woman’ is aware of her social needs and spiritual needs. She does not need a man, marriage or children to mark her individuality. She has learnt to demand and raise her thoughts openly irrespective of others’ opinion towards her. The ‘New Woman’ has developed a mutual understanding between modernity and traditional ways of society. She very boldly accepts herself as she is, her physical disabilities are no more her barriers instead she has overshadowed such shortcomings with her strength and determination. We must understand that a girl cannot be released from domestic labor and the tyranny of family responsibilities unless a radical change is brought in the attitude of parents towards their children. The ‘New Woman’ is open to all ideologies and chooses the one that allows her the best use of her abilities. She does not hold the guilt of being in an extra marital affair if her husband is not able to satisfy her. To her personal fulfillment is more important than anything else in the world. She wants to be human first before being labeled as a woman.

Workplace harassment and discrimination is another scenario prevalent in the corporate world. Working women even face sexual abuse. But the ‘New Woman’ is conscious of such events around her and knows the legal procedures to tackle such problems. She does not leave her job on the accounts of being harassed and move back to her life. She does not get limited instead moves ahead with strength and determination.

The ‘New Woman’ possesses complete control over her own body and sexuality and observes it as the most basic element of personal freedom. She is the one who makes the choice of remarriage and children. She decides when to have children and to have them or not. Deshpande’s heroine in ‘Death of a Child’ makes the decision of aborting her third child as she doesn’t want to go through all the events of maternity again. She is a ‘New Woman’ who does not want to sacrifice her life in rearing children only. She wants her career to flourish and nourish.

The ‘New Woman’ does not sit crying at the failure of her marriage. Instead she makes her new plans and gives herself an ambition to fulfill. She sets up a new discourse. Deshpande in her legacy to create the true and new picture of woman presents her characters with a firm determination to progress. Deepa in ‘Travel Plans’ discovers that she has been ditched by her NRI husband, she instead of mourning over her fate takes over to her
ambition. The ‘New Woman’ is not a helpless log but an entrepreneur who makes her own opportunities.

Another beautiful and crucial aspect of our society brought about by Deshpande is the effect of a tyrannical husband on a daughter’s relationship with her mother. In the stories ‘Why a Robin?’ and ‘My Beloved Charioteer’ we observe that the daughters develop a weak & submissive image of their mothers. This hinders the growth of their relationship. Hence the ‘New Woman’ first tries to develop a command over her family. This is possible only when she is educated, independent and working. She herself would have to create the urge and urgency to lead in life & society.

It can also be seen from the work of both Shelat & Deshpande that the life of a New Woman though appreciated and admired is not easy. At every step she faces a challenge to be won. Many a times she has to make tough decisions. The world of a professional woman on an outer picture seems to be in a lime light but inside, as brought out by Hansa Wadkar, in her autobiography, is subjected to the same brutality and force of patriarchy like other women. In Deshpande’s story, ‘A Liberated Woman’ we find the wife though she is educated, independent, working and an eminent public figure under goes domestic cruelty. It can be concluded from the story that the women limit their own happiness. The heroine could have successfully moved out but she didn’t, it’s her mistake. So imprisoned she is, liberated though she seems. The ultimate choice of freedom, respect and love rest with the woman and she must have the courage to anticipate them. The choices that a woman takes, make her fortune, else if she is again imposed by others choices, she would become submissive and ultimately kill her own identity.

All the short stories taken in the study bring about the condition of woman in our society from different caste, region and time. They have beautifully depicted the complex emotions a woman passes through in her life time. In all the stories we find that the New Woman has grown out of the struggle of identity. She has demanded and raised opinions that matter to her. The message that education can lead to freedom has also been devised beautifully in the short stories of both Deshpande & Shelat. They have also shown concern for the groups that are considered an outcast-widows, prostitutes, eunuchs and depicted their sufferings meticulously.
The Gandhian ideology of liberation and power to the woman can be seen in Shelat’s writings. All her characters have awareness about their present conditions and aspire to lead a fulfilling life. Deshpande’s and Shelat’s work can be used to motivate millions of women to move out of their disastrous life and pursue their ambitions. The ‘New Woman’ is now a giant reality in front of our society and the patriarchal society has no choice but to accept this change. The foundation for building a society with equal opportunity and choices has already been laid. Though the journey for woman is difficult ahead, she through her unending ability to persevere shall prevail under all circumstances.

A ‘New Woman’ will help another woman to acquire the newness in life. She would serve to be the medium of the greater change that is bound to impact the society.

Speaking of society today, we find that there is a great impact of television and movies on our society. The TV shows as well as movies have begun to portray the New Woman in their creations. The serials and movies portray a woman who is courageous enough to voice her opinions for e.g. Tabu in the film Astitva, portrays the character of a housewife who is pining for her husband and in his absence falls for her music guru, the role played by Mohnish Behl. The relation is pure as it had flowered due to similar interests and opinions of Tabu and Mohnish Behl. Both are into Music and thus their relation also develops beautifully. Tabu even bears the child of Mohnish and courageously fights against her husband. Another short film Ahalya has been made where Ahalya is shown taking revenge on all the men by turning them into stone. The character portrayed by Radhika Apte brings out the emotions of Ahalya. The latest instance is the recently released movie Pink directed by Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury. ‘Pink’ a hard-hitting film raises the issue of consent as the central theme. It speaks about ‘character assassination’ which every female goes through in her life because she chose to take charge of her life. The film aggressively questions the rigid mentality which the society carries for the independent women, their clothing style, their male friends etc. It focuses more on sexual consent of women. An important message which the film puts forward is that a NO is a complete sentence in itself and does not need further explanations.

The serials too depict the lead character of women who are educated, fight for their rights and rights of other women around them, pursue careers of their choice and even are shown as successful business women. For instance Anandi in Balika Vadhu, Ishita in Ye
he Mohabatein, Sita in Siya ke Ram etc. The Sita in Siya ke Ram is always asked for her opinion by all around her. She and all her sisters have been educated by Gargi. The whole serial is made from the viewpoint of Sita. Thus we find that TV and movies have also supported in bringing a change in the outlook of the society through their female protagonists. The New Woman exists everywhere in different roles through her involvement in education, business, politics, TV and movies, and many other fields prevalent in the society.

A ‘New Woman’ is the vessel of change that has surfaced over the storm of suppression and is sailing towards the harbor of an equalistic world. She has survived the rage of society and is now leading in the ideology of the society. She is leading the future and at the same time nurturing her children with an ideology that will shape the future world. She is not just a phase but a phenomenon of transformation from crushed to creative, from suppressed to supportive, from tears to tycoon, from commodity to community and from taking orders to creating opportunities.
5.1 References


