ABSTRACT

Today, with changing times, society has become aware about many social issues and the awareness is reflected in the literature. This change is witnessed in variety of literature across the globe including all regions and languages. What women have achieved in the known history of literature can never be penned down by the greatest of the philosophers ever, but it is true that whatever is penned down about her, changes the course of her existence everywhere. Literature has played a vital role in great social changes be it the Indian Freedom Movement, French Revolution or any other remarkable change in society. But despite of this the literature written by women was undervalued and criticized. In the past, the works written by women were undervalued because of assumed superiority of male writers. During those days, women were limited to writing about their perception and experiences within the enclosed domestic setting. It was believed that women could not write on serious themes. They were also not valued because they were thought of as inferior to male writers. The authors expressed in their writings their dissatisfaction with the troubles of upper caste Hindu women trapped in tyrannical institutions such as child marriage, dowry, prohibition on women’s education, arranged marriages, enforced widowhood etc. A woman’s thoughts were constricted to her domestic arena. She could not write about the world outside her home as she never had any exposure to the world beyond her four walls. Another reason could be that in a patriarchal society male experience was considered to be much superior. On the other hand, male writers focused on more serious themes which appealed the mass and mobilized them to act (like politics, education, social reforms). Thus, their work got more priority and acceptance in the society. Nobody was interested in reading what a woman had to say. Thus women writing did not gain a momentum in the 18th century.

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. 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 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.
A “New Woman” is the vessel of change that has surfaced over the storm of suppression and is sailing towards the harbour 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.