CHAPTER VII

SUMMING UP

Through the “Socialization” of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role and status . . . the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female … aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, “Virtue”, and ineffectuality in the female . . . sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male. - Kate Millett – Sexual Politics.

Gender identity is a compulsory facet of our intuition – individual as well as collective. Internalization of gendered identities conditions one’s own cognitive and behavioural patterns, while simultaneously creating a comfort zone as far as our reactions to different genders are concerned. The difference between sex and gender is symptomatic of the difference between the physical and cognitive planes. The cognitive aspect is primarily linked with the psychoanalytical perception of self and others, which shapes our relationships with others. The impact of gendered behaviour, thus, cannot be straightforwardly measured, as it is a phenomenon which has “bodily, psychological and behavioural features (Alsop, 14).

In Indian English fiction, Shashi Deshpande stands unique as a writer of women-centric novels with the specific drive to unveil gender imbalances in society. She ventures to explore the life of Indian women with socio-cultural and psycho –
ethical paradigms of human existence. Besides presenting the concept of human identity revealed in terms of personal relationships, she has made her fictional art highly authentic and convincing. Shashi Deshpande exhibits an excessive consciousness of the centre – margin binary existing in society. As a writer, she reveals her consciousness of her own position as a woman and accepts that woman is always marginalized in male-dominated society. The resentment against the social conventions that ignore the emancipated identity of woman forms the basis of her artistic vision. She struggles to establish that to ensure balance in society, it is essential to acknowledge the identity of woman as centre. As a writer she underwent the experience of her creative writings being the subject of contempt and being dubbed as “a woman’s writing”. Deshpande confesses:

Women’s writing has become a category which is separated from the rest of literature and women writers are always spoken of in the context of other women writers, never of writers in general; their writings are interpreted in the context of women’s writing, never of literature in general. I have always wondered why if we are going to divide literature on the grounds of gender, we don’t have two categories: men’s writing and women’s writing (Deshpande: Margins.150).

This study has hopefully revealed that Indian women novelists have displayed their artistic skill for transmuting their vibrant thoughts raising them to the status of literature. Thorough a thorough analysis, the researcher has attempted to show how Shashi Deshpande emerges as a major writer of women’s fiction. The present thesis is a modest attempt to study the selected novels from *That Long Silence* to *Moving On* thematically.
The Sahitya Academy Award-winning novel *That Long Silence* speaks about a passive silent woman who maintained silence throughout her life. The silence in the novel is the silence that has been the destiny of the Indian woman down the centuries. Women are abused, beaten, expelled and raped but still they are silent. This silence is as good as death. The novel shows how Jaya, the protagonist decides to break the silence by becoming articulate. Jaya has lost her identity, her individually in the eagerness to become a good wife and mother. A stereotyped housewife initially nervous and needing male help and support all the time, she understands that she also has contributed to her victimization and that she has to fight her own battle and work out her strategy.

*The Binding Vine*, a domestic novel is narrated from a woman’s point of view. The central theme of *The Binding Vine* is love of life. The bond of love is expressed in various relationships such as bond of pregnancy, bond of parents and children, bond of love for the lost daughter, and the bond of love for other human beings. The poems of Mira, a character in the novel, depict the symbolism of *The Binding Vine*. Urmila, an independent, broad minded educated woman is bold enough to tackle her own personal problems. In the novel she fights for other women’s rights. Shashi Deshpande’s other protagonists fought their own battles and ignored society. Urmila on the other hand exhibits her interest and capacity to purge the society of its evils. The novelist depicts the agony of a wife Mira, who is the victim of marital rape. She also portrays the plight of women raped outside marriage. In both the cases women prefer to suffer in silence in the name of family honour. The solution suggested is women’s bonding, an enlightened sympathetic sisterhood of women.
A Matter of Time exhibits the novelist’s varied experiences. The author has shifted her focus from the domestic boundary towards society at large. Sumi, is different from the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande’s other novels. She is courageous. She is unperturbed when Gopal walks out of the family leaving three grown up daughters in her care. She takes up a job as teacher. She revives her creativity by writing a drama for the school competition which becomes an instant success. She liberates herself from the narrow confines of women and their problems and enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. The novel is a composite study in human relationships.

Small Remedies clearly portrays a further development of the personal experiences of the writer. Madhu, the protagonist searches for herself while analyzing the lives of two other public figures- Savitribai Indorekar, the doyen of the Gwalior Gharana and Leela, the trade union activist and a relative of Madhu.

In Moving On, Manjari, the central character, suffers tremendously in life. She loses her husband Shyam within three years of marriage, loses the love of her mother because of her love- marriage, her sister Malu betrays her by having sexual relationship with her husband. By reading the diary of her father, Manjari studies the lives of her parents and that helps her to face life boldly as she lives all alone with her children studying in Bombay living in hostels. The theme of love is explored. Her father’s love for his wife flows through the body and her Mai’s love’s is expressed through emotions and feelings. The two strains quite contrary to each other but they are supplementary too. The one can flower into the other.
This chapter ‘conclusion’ is the summing up of the arguments presented in the previous chapters dealing with victimization and the fabric of the familial and social relations through which women evolve and forge survival- strategies that help them grow to their full potential and establish their identities, besides nurturing healthy families.

The thesis begins with a brief introduction to Gender issues and discusses various aspects of feminist writing in general. The themes and techniques women usually deal with in their novels are briefly analyzed. Shashi Deshpande’s themes and techniques are briefly discussed, and the stages of development in her novel- writing are traced. Finally, the new approaches that have been adopted in Deshpande studies besides the psychological, social, domestic ones or those on man-woman relationships are outlined. Though there is always a conflict between tradition and modernity in her novels, the resolution is through religion, philosophy, and acceptance and adjustment.

In Deshpande’s literary world, there are women characters taken from almost all the sections of society. Her protagonists are doctors, writers, teachers, educated house wives, biographers, illiterates and maid servants. The depiction of women characters belonging to older as well as younger generations is also indicative of Deshpande’s range of sympathies.

Deshpande renders with sympathetic understanding the variety of sufferings a woman has to undergo in the name of family honour. She makes the social system responsible for the sufferings of women and this system includes its female members
too, who have been moulded by the patriarchal society into unconscious roles of complicity.

Deshpande keeps her narratives mostly female-centred. Her novels bring out the inner conflict of the modern, educated, middle class urban Indian woman who is trying to balance her multiple roles as a member of the family, as a professional and above all as an individual. She highlights her inferior position and subsequent degradation in a male-dominated society.

Her women protagonists are distinguished by different facets of Indian womanhood. They face a conflict between personal desires and social expectations. They are sometimes weaker at the beginning of the novel and emerge in the end as stronger women with a transformed consciousness. They are conscious of the great social inequality and injustice that act against them. They seek to assert their independent identity by bringing forth their suppressed talents. They are conscious of their physical urges as well as emotional needs. They are women who are individuals with a keen awareness of their rights and duties.

Deshpande’s novels can be read as moral indictments against patriarchy. She critiques patriarchy as a way of life, as a social structure, not as individual belief. Suppression and domination have resulted in destroying women physically and emotionally. Besides sexual aggression, beatings, scoldings, taunts, anger and restrictions on mobility and speech are some ways to control women. In her novels, events like Kusum’s madness and subsequent suicide, Jaya’s compromises as a person and writer, Mohan’s mother’s and Shakuntai’s crude attempts to bring up their children, Kalpana’s rape by her own uncle, Mira’s untimely death, Kalyani’s total
silence, Gopal’s desertion, Baba’s diary - are all examples that point to patriarchy as
the root cause for the oppression of women. These are some of the external and
obvious ways that patriarchy uses for domination. But patriarchal traditions take the
worst form when they are internalized by the women themselves. They accept
gender-defined roles without any grudge. They just cannot outgrow all the patriarchal
mentoring they have received since birth.

In Deshpande’s novels, there are women who are aware of gender bias and the
injustice done to them. Her women characters realize that the system of patriarchy,
which has been there for a long time, no longer serves the needs of the rapidly
changing society. They revolt against marginalization and question the sexual politics
and gender imbalance in society. They decide to emancipate themselves and their
potential.

Deshpande gives a pre-eminent position to marriage and marital relationships
in her novels. Her views on marriage are different from those of the radical western
feminist writers like Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, and Kate Millet.
Deshpande is not against the institution of marriage but is against the limitations of
the society which suppress a woman’s individuality and identity thus making
marriage a warrant to a prison house.

Deshpande makes strong statements on the so-called arranged marriages and
love marriages which are so unfair to women. She lays bare the hypocrisy and double
– standards practised by society. In Indian society, marriages are settled on the basis
of family status, the stars, and dowry in the absence of any feelings or sentiments. It
is marriage that matters not the boy or the girl. The woman has no choice but to submit to her parental wishes. Even romance is but a nine-day wonder.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novels there is often an oppressive silence between husband and wife. There is no communication between Jaya and Mohan either physical or verbal. In *A Matter of Time*, Kalyani and Shripati have not talked to each other for thirty years.

Another important aspect of Deshpande’s novels is the lack of proper relationship between mothers and daughters. Love and devotion to the mother is an integral part of Indian society. Mythologies and literatures, down the centuries, have always glorified the mother figure. Much has also been written about a mother’s selfless love for her children. In her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Shashi Deshpande presents the real picture. The mother gives preference to male children. The protagonist Saru has no cordial relations with her mother. In all the novels the women protagonists do not have cordial relationships with their mothers.

In all her novels, Deshpande gives importance to her protagonist’s self-assertion. They become more communicative, and help other women, devoting themselves to their professions, and realize their innermost self liberate the selves through education and keeping their pride and self-confidence intact in crises. Thus she has been successful in creating strong women characters who refuse to get crushed under the weight of their personal tragedies and face life with great courage and strength.
The protagonists fight against patriarchy to establish their individuality. They explore their talents and intelligence through hard work and constant struggle. No doubt they do face hardships in their quest for identity but in the end they emerge as independent individuals.

Another important attribute of Deshpande’s protagonists is their passion for writing and social reform. Writing becomes a means of self expression and liberation for them. It helps them to fight the patriarchal set-up, as represented in the novels, *That Long Silence, The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time And Small Remedies*.

Deshpande’s women characters are highly philosophical. The various epigraphs and quotations in the novels exhibit the author’s dependence on holy books like *the Mahabharata, the Upanishads and the Dhammapada*. Various metaphors help to clarify the ideas of the author. According to Middleton Murry, all metaphor and simile can be described as the analogy by which the human mind explores the universe and charts the non-measurable world. (Literature and Gender .16)

Deshpande’s themes however, are universally acceptable and applicable. Her characters attempt to make sense of their lives, to find a pattern in the past and a direction for the future. She also uses the first person interior monologue and the flashback techniques.

Location in the cities is another aspect of Deshpande’s novels. She has used various cities like Bombay, Bangalore, Bhavanipur, Ambegam, and Churchgate as locales.
To conclude, of all the contemporary Indian English women novelists, Shashi Deshpande is perhaps the most perceptive and consistent in exploring the inner life of Indian women, convulsed by an acute sense of helplessness in the face of the onslaughts of an unfeeling world and the resultant moral agony. In one of her interviews Deshpande told Vanamala; “I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about men or women” (11). Thus Shashi Deshpande may be called one of the Indian women novelists who deserve her stature as historian and analyst of the human mind.

There is ample scope for further research on the works of Shashi Deshpande. Her multiple volumes of short stories warrant an in-depth study.

There are also plenty of possibilities for comparative studies involving the works of Deshpande. Her works could be compared with those of Indian novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Anita Nair and Gita Hariharan.

Deshpande’s works could also be favourably compared with the works of eminent western writers like Margaret Laurence and Margaret Atwood.