Chapter V

Conclusion

This study is an endeavour to examine the impact of genderism on women’s writing. To be precise, it looks into the repercussions when the pejorative term ‘woman’ is attached to a rather dignified and power-centred term ‘writer.’ The study, which is based on two women writers, Shashi Deshpande and Margaret Laurence, also probes how they defy the marginalised status assigned to them.

The chapter, besides placing Deshpande and Laurence in a comparative framework, provides the arguments of the forgoing chapters in a nutshell. Since six novels of Deshpande are put to scrutiny an appraisal of the progressive development of her writer-characters is also attempted. An examination of the development of the writer’s self becomes pertinent here. The concomitant issues of how social obligation is vital to the growth of the writer’s self and how mentoring help writers resolve their crises are also looked into.

Deshpande and Laurence depict a newly emerging class of women who struggle to assert themselves by breaking the age-long silence imposed on them.
Equally qualified as men are, and capable of supporting themselves financially, they redefine the notions about and the parameters for women. The protagonists are modern, educated, independent women of middle age. But both the writers resist the temptation of creating glorified female heroes. Their women writer-characters are caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand, and assertiveness, individuality and independence, on the other. While revealing a woman writer’s struggle to secure self-identity and integrity, the authors also subtly expose multiple levels of oppression existent in society: sexual oppression, and class and racial oppression (in the case of Canadian society). These writer-characters encounter problems, in varying degrees, in exercising their creative talents. The patriarchal forces, both direct and indirect (the interference of the family / social conditioning) impede their growth as individual and writer. Their liberalised education and sense of individuality create an acute awareness of the unequal rights of the gendered roles they play. Conflict ensues when they attempt to burgeon as a writer, crossing the barriers set by the traditional society, and liberating themselves from the inhibiting forces of patriarchy.

The novels of Deshpande begin with a crisis in the heroine’s life. The writer-character, reaching a stalemate, reviews the fault lines on the trajectory of her personal life and career. But when Laurence’s novel begins the heroine has almost overcome her crisis; she retrospects her past to chalk out her future. Their writer-characters are in quest for identity and space for themselves. While Deshpande’s heroines succeed to rehabilitate themselves within the fold of the familial set up, Laurence’s heroine breaks out of it.
Laurence and Deshpande are divided by temporal, spatial, cultural factors. However, feminism beats as a slow and steady pulse throughout their works. Both are concerned with the lives of women, their liberty and freedom, their space for growth and expression. Laurence wrote in 1960s and 70s when the Feminist Movement was just reaching its crest. She portrays a women’s world: their perspective, experiences, concerns, etc., in her fiction. The assertion that women deserve equal opportunity for self-development throbs persistently through her Manawaka series. Deshpande started writing after the Movement spread its roots in the West, and India also began to enjoy its fruits. Her works, considering the date of publication, may be said to be in the post-feminist phase. But it is feminist consciousness that permeates Deshpande’s works that have appeared since late1970s, for the waves of feminism have lashed the Indian shores rather late. She bares the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operative within the Indian socio-cultural value system and institutions wherein her heroines are firmly rooted. These include different ideological elements that have shaped their personality pertaining to religion and culture (such as myths, legends, rituals and ceremonies) and social and psychological factors (such as woman’s subordinate status in family and society, her restricted sexuality, etc.). Her writing emerges from her rootedness in middle class Hindu society.

Deshpande is certainly a feminist writer: raising feminist consciousness to emancipate women from the oppressive practices of the patriarchal society; but hers is not the strident and militant feminism which sees the male as the sole cause of women’s oppression. She points out that the fault lies with the woman too. The silence imposed on women is partly of their own making, though society and tradition have a hand. She shows that Indian women have internalised the patriarchal injunctions. Her
novels highlight the crises consequent of gender socialization. The result of this is seen when the writer-characters struggle with the compromising forces in their attempt to find their own voice. Deshpande demystifies the ‘womanly’ roles. Her heroines realise that they have to transcend the traditional roles to be humans with self-respect and dignity. The writer-characters acknowledge their duty.

The effects of social conditioning and gender construction are quite pronounced in both Indian and Canadian (Western) societies. Deshpande elaborates the processes as she traces her characters’ childhood and their growing years when they internalise the patriarchal precepts. Though Laurence does not highlight it so, the effects of sexism are blatant in the marital life of Morag and Brooke Skelton. Morag, being an orphan and adopted child of the scavenger family, undergoes severe class discrimination. This makes her despise everything associated with Manawaka. Since Deshpande’s protagonists are educated middle class women the question of classicism does not rise there. In both the writers’ works the grown up protagonists are in conflict with their gender roles. The focus of Deshpande’s novels is on the socio-psychological world of her characters and not the historical, political, economic or religious aspects. The issue of classicism in *The Diviners* leads to racism and migration of the Scottish-Irish ancestors of Morag, and Laurence deals with the social and political history of the migrants in a limited way. However, the focus is on the protagonist Morag Gunn’s struggle as mother and writer.

With the turn of the twenty-first century an indelible trail of women writers can be found. The once muted female sounds became so blaringly loud that the androcentric world cannot ignore their presence. And the fact that creativity is not a male exclusivity has become an acknowledged fact. But to secure a berth for
themselves in the world of letters women writers had to trudge along thorny, craggy paths. They had to resist the politics of creativity and counter the masculinist schemes that smother female creativity.

Denied a legitimate space within the phallocratic culture, the woman-as-writer develops a relationship to her art beyond what society has accorded her. To gain a footing the woman writer taps the subversive property of writing, whose defensive power has been directed against her to perpetuate patriarchy. The author and the protagonist (being of the same gender) expose the dominant male bias towards women’s writing. The woman-as-writer performs a dual function. She deconstructs the distorted images generated by patriarchy. She extends the frontiers of fiction to include the new world, the new realities of the reconceptualised woman.

This act of liberation works out not for the writer-character alone but for the entire womenfolk, and for the author especially, for she obtains a clearer vision of her vocation. Thus, through this double, simultaneous process the author-as-artist problematizes her own relationship to her art. On the textual level, the protagonist becomes empowered as she is reconnected to her own ‘self’ from whom she has been culturally disconnected. On another level, the author undermines the phallogos, the cultural codes of the male-centred language that disempowered women.

The link between the writer’s life and career in the novel extends to the author also. A parallel phase of crisis, discovery, and actualisation can be traced in the life and career of the author as well. Interviews with and articles by the authors authenticate that autobiographical elements are woven into the texture of the novels. A review of their lives, especially the incidents that have gone into the making of the
writer, and other minor details that parallel the author and the writer-character’s lives, is done to examine how the authors encode their problematic career in the novels. The writer-character though not the autobiographical self of the author is her alter-ego. The fact is that the writer-character becomes a medium for the author to discover her ‘self,’ to test her ‘voice’ and ‘integrity.’ Thus, the texts become a medium for the woman writer to problematize her own relationship to art in and through the process of writing. An examination of the select novels of Shashi Deshpande and Margaret Laurence in the forgoing chapters endorses this fact.

A critique of the phallocratic misogyny of women’s writing based on the select novels is attempted in the present study. Gender construction goes a long way in silencing women writers and it leads to the politics of creativity. The patriarchal injunctions internalised at a tender age work in the most insidious and pervasive manner and inhibit women writers from expressing freely. Mira’s (Vine) case is a fine example of misogyny in the world of letters and explains for the exclusion of women writers from the mainstream. Brooke Skelton (Diviners) is critical of Morag’s writing due to a sense of insecurity. He fears that his position as professor in English language will be overthrown by a woman writer and that too, by his wife. Discouraged by his disparaging remarks Morag pursues her literary interests stealthily.

Women’s conflictual status which is an outcome of the tug between the domestic and the career roles, often force the women writers in Deshpande’s novels to compromise with their writing. Familial honour prevents them from writing and executing their social duties. When Indu does it to comply by her husband’s interest to continue with the lucrative job, Jaya compromises so that she can become an ‘ideal wife’. A progression in the change of Deshpande’s views is observable in the
characters from her first novel onwards. In *Small Remedies*, Madhu refuses to compromise with her writing even when Maya and Yogi persuade her to write a “... controversial one. Trendy. Politically correct, with a feminist slant. A book that will sell” (*Remedies* 125). In *MovingOn*, Jiji on reading Mai’s stories feels that she is dishonest in portraying the characters as they are stereotypes, readily compromising with life, unlike Mai’s “own uncompromising self” (123), which means she is deceiving herself despite being aware of the social inequities. In *Roots and Shadows* also the question of a writer’s integrity comes up. Naren is astonished at the way Indu stoops to eulogise the superfluous life of social impostors and hypocrites for a fat sum. In *That Long Silence* Kamat is astounded that Jaya can write such frivolous stuff as “Seeta”. But Mira in *The Binding Vine* refuses to compromise; she writes stealthily, and she does not disclose her inner self despite her husband’s attempt to coax out her thoughts.

Deshpande’s *MovingOn* signals a deviation: there are three writers in this novel. Apart from Vasu, a fiction writer, and Jiji, a diarist, here we have a male writer, Badri Narayan (Baba); he occupies a substantial space unlike the sketchy delineation of Deshpande’s other male characters. Badri who had written only on ‘weighty’ topics turns to diarise his life and thoughts, an act that is subjective, personal and hence not highly regarded; besides, it is originally associated with women. Badri also realises the power of the ‘personal’ in battling mortality. One discerns that the man-woman distinction blurs when exclusively personal thoughts and experiences are secretly penned down. Both Badri and Jiji pour out their intimate experiences for they want their children to know the truth in their parents’ lives.
Laurence also defends the integrity and honesty of a writer. She was attacked for using obscene words (four-letter words) in *The Diviners*. She defends her writing saying that the writer’s first responsibility is to be true to the characters s/he creates. If Christie Logan uses such words it is because he comes from the lowest strata of society. He cannot be expected to speak refined language. Laurence’s heroine Morag refuses to compromise, and goes to the extent of breaking off her marriage to protect her rights of creativity and procreativity.

Women’s writing is looked upon as a pastime. The attitude that women’s writing is worth only to be published in women’s magazines also underscores the pejorative outlook on women’s writing. Jaya’s experience of being cold shouldered by an editor and counselled to publish in women’s magazines are supportive instances. Everything associated with women is devalorised. Morag refutes the idea that women should spend time for traditional (feminine) jobs like gardening, cooking, etc.

Women writers are often slandered by linking their writing to their personal life. Many women writers realise that their gendered identity is a stumbling block to self-realisation. Owing to this some women writers withdraw from the literary scene for the sake of family honour; some others mask themselves under male identities. Deshpande’s writer-characters encode their life experiences in their writing. Laurence’s heroine also fictionalises every episode in her life. The women writers, awakened to their duties, gear up to break the spell of patriarchy on them. Their mentors turn to be eye-openers. It is worth noting here that the mentors are men outside their marriage. Morag has a female mentor (Ella Gerson) also.
Writing is a site of struggle as women attempt to deconstruct the traditional image of ‘woman.’ Writing the female body is inevitable to liberate women. Female body is being revalorised by these writers. This can be done only by writing on tabooed subjects like sexuality, rape, etc. Deshpande and Laurence’s writer-characters try to re-establish women’s rights to their body. Cixous tells women: “Write yourself, your body must be heard” (880). Woman’s body has been confiscated by the male. An analysis of Deshpande and Laurence’s female writer-characters demonstrates an increasing audacity to disclose their sexual urges and affairs which would condemn and slot them as deviants since patriarchal morality prevails over female body. The body is identified as a cultural text upon which the norms and practices of the society are inscribed.

Deshpande treats rape within and without the fold of marriage. Women’s bodies had (till recently) been defined by law as men’s property. This means marital rape is legal as the husband is only exercising his authorial power. Rape outside the fold of marriage is treated as a sort of property damage. In The Binding Vine Deshpande throws off the lid of decorum, makes the female body a direct source of female writing. The partisan attitude prevalent in the patriarchal society is highlighted when the rape victim and her family are subject to criticism and ostracism, and the culprit is not booked but goes scot-free. Blame is reserved for the woman, whether she is an active or passive participant in the sexual act. Kalpana, the rape victim in The Binding Vine, Madhu who had pre-marital sex in her girlhood in Small Remedies and the mythical figure Surpanakha — all bear this stigma. The purity of the body remains a fetish to Brooke Skelton as well. Deshpande and
Laurence deconstruct the process which has given social acceptance to various false and pejorative ideas of the female body.

Writing means different things to Deshpande’s writer-characters. Their experience of, reason for and benefits of writing, though not substantially but differ as the specific contexts in which these characters are positioned differ. Nevertheless, their life and writing are so intertwined that they impact both ways. As a result, women’s writing becomes problematized. Thus women’s writings mirror their lives as women, what had subordinated them and how writing helps them surmount the subordination.

Writing for women is an act of self-actualisation. It is an expression of their selfhood. In the course towards self-actualisation they explore and discover themselves, realise their shortcomings, and outpace the pitfalls. Their quest for self-identity is also bound with their writing.

The awareness of a writer’s obligation dawns on the writer-characters and they realise the need to wage a relentless war against social evils. Thus consciousness-raising becomes the primary duty of women writers. Women have to transcend the state of being victims through self-empowerment. Women writers with a social commitment make an effort to reform as well as retain the harmony of the heterogeneous society. The writer-characters in Deshpande’s novels, besides their personal gains of self-realisation, self-satisfaction and self-actualisation, engage in the social upliftment of women through consciousness-raising. They encourage women readers to tread and triumph along them in their act of self-discovery and self-realisation. A critical review of Deshpande’s writer-characters – Indu (Roots) to Jiji (Moving) – discloses that there is a progressive development.
Indu in *Roots and Shadows* (1983) starts her career as a short story writer. She writes on women’s issues and subscribes them to women’s magazines. Soon she feels hedged in by her sex. The smallness of women’s world, the domestic sphere, disturbs her. The range of the themes that she can write is too narrow. Moreover, the ‘good girl’ syndrome restrains her from writing on female sexuality or other tabooed topics. And if she writes on ‘broader’ issues the authenticity is questioned. Writing about the enclosed domestic space and women’s perception of their experience within it create a ghettoised feeling in women writers. Moreover, the patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience, the ‘weightier’ themes male writers deal and the ranking of their works above women’s also lower the spirit of women. Indu realises that writings on women-centred topics will find place only in a women’s magazine. This limits a woman writer’s readership. It also denotes the patriarchal world’s indifference to women’s problems. The inordinate delay sometimes in finishing a story and the apathy of the publishing industry to women’s writing are other hazards that weigh heavy on Indu. She even resorts to mask her female identity under male pseudonym to overcome the ghettoised feeling. Tired of this sort of writing, Indu takes to journalism. Her frustration only increases, for the new job, the world of journalism, is fraught with falsehood, pretension, corruption, etc.

Indu fails to have the ecstatic experience of self-actualisation. She disregards her social obligation and indulges in unethical writing. She wants to rise in arms against all inequities. But her husband points out the ineffectiveness in railing alone against a deep-rooted system. He also constantly reminds her of the need of lucre to maintain their ‘snobbish’ life style. Thus, subdued by her husband, Indu surrenders her integrity and identity, and compromises with her writing.
A turning point comes when Naren discerns some flaws in her ‘successful’ life and career. In addition to this, the perception that it is her indomitable spirit that induced Akka to make Indu, who abandoned the family ten years ago, the heir to the ancestral property prompts her to introspect. Empowered now, she plans to sell off the old sprawling ancestral home and property, and get rid of her bondage to the past. She decides to pay for Mini’s wedding, and the educational expenses of Vithal, a waif, and so forth. Money does not tantalise her anymore. She resolves to quit her ‘lucrative’ job and take to the long-cherished wish of writing fiction. Amazed at Indu’s determination, her husband offers help to publish her works.

Writing her autobiography Indu discovers herself. She sees through the camouflage of ‘success’ her fears and flaws. Thus writing is not just an act of self-actualisation; it is a process through which one exorcises the ghosts that haunt one. Indu cures herself of the self-deception she has been practising. She spares not her adulterous act in her autobiography. She bears no guilt; for writing has a purgative effect for her.

In *That Long Silence* (1989) Jaya, a short story writer and columnist, too compromises with her writing. She does not suffer from ghettoisation as Indu does. But the ‘good girl’ syndrome is active in Jaya’s writing too. Mohan, though proud of his writer-wife, imposes restrictions. He fears readers may correlate her fictional characters to their personal life. Thus for the sake of family honour Jaya turns a deaf ear to the wronged women’s wail. She ignores her ‘social’ role to become an ideal wife. She begins a column ‘Sita’ – light-hearted, innocuous stuff but detrimental to her integrity. However, Jaya cannot suppress her itch to write fiction; she does it secretly and publishes them in Kamat’s name. Ironically, these stories expose Jaya as a victim of self-internalisation. The restraint she practises in
her real life reflects in her writing too. She is frustrated that her life and career is a fiasco. Kamat’s warning (like Naren’s to Indu) helps Jaya to resolve her crisis. By writing her autobiography Jaya breaks the silence slammed on her life and career, and what was dammed in her breaks loose.

Mohan had forbid Jaya to write on sexuality and personal relationships. But her autobiography bares everything buried in her life – the discrimination and humiliation of being a woman, the discontent of their imbalanced sexual life, etc. She also writes about the plight of Mohan’s mother, his sister Vimala, her maidservants Jeeja, Tara, the garbage collector Nayana, etc. Thus she brings to light the injustice and infliction women suffer.

Apart from the delight derived from self-actualisation Jaya experiences a sense of fulfilment as she unveils the invisible lives of women. She retrieves a sense of integrity. She is able to steer life now. Earlier she was clueless. Her life was chaotic. The crisis that emerged in her life is resolved when she starts writing on her own terms.

Mira in the 1993 novel *The Binding Vine* is positioned in a period much earlier to that of Deshpande’s other writer-characters. Hence she is married of at an early age of eighteen soon after she joined college. Her dreams to study further and aspirations to become a poet are shattered. Her husband fails to build a rapport with her. He forces her to sexual acts. Mira vents her woeful life in the poems she scribbles stealthily. Writing attenuates her mind and sustains her. A victim of patriarchy though Mira is, her writing gives Urmila a sense of direction. Inspired thus, Urmila fights for the cause of a rape victim and takes a bold step to publish Mira’s poems as well.
Sumi in *A Matter of Time* (1996) falls for Gopal and marries him. Her early marriage and self-effacement into the traditional roles of wife and mother prevent her from knowing what Nature has endowed her. When constrained to earn her livelihood she takes up teaching, and while preparing for the school day programme she comes upon her talent to dramatise. She starts perceiving things from a critical and different angle. The new experiences thrill Sumi: a sense of financial freedom, the power of words and the new perspectives she achieves while dramatizing certain anecdotes. Sumi shows the audacity to deconstruct the stereotypical image of Surpanakha as a seductress. She sees Surpanakha as a symbol of female sexuality powerful to defy the masculinity of Rama and Lakshman. Sumi feels reassured, discovers her identity and individuality through her writing.

Madhu, a biographer in *Small Remedies* (2000) does not suffer from ghettoisation or any external imposition. Unlike other writer-characters she enjoyed a lot of freedom, growing up with no mother to restrict her ways. Som, her husband also does not dictate to her any terms or conditions for her writing. But she self-internalises patriarchy. She sacrifices her career to accept institutionalised motherhood. Later the writing of the biography of Savitribai Indorekar helps her to surmount her personal crisis. The therapeutic effect of writing is quite evident here. Embedded in Savitribai’s biography is her own life story. Madhu gains some valuable insights also. Writing this biography she learns that the genuineness of a work depends on the honesty and integrity of the writer. For Madhu is confused as whether she should include the scandalous exposé of the grand dame of Hindustani music not disclosed to her but which she knows well.
Writing the biography of this single-minded woman, she remembers another woman, her aunt Leela who is equally strong-willed. Madhu gets inspired by these two women who showed unflinching determination in achieving their goals. In fact, the biographies of three women are interwoven into the work, *Small Remedies*.

Madhu also has a male mentor. Chandru, a close doctor-friend of Som tries to help Madhu cope with the pain and loss of the tragic death of her only son. Convinced of the restorative power of words he urges Madhu to take the task of writing Savitribai’s biography and resume her career.

In her 2004 novel, *Moving On*, Deshpande brings in three writers – Badri Narayan (diarist), his wife Vasu (short story writer) and their daughter Jiji (diarist). It is worth noting that for the first time she creates a thoroughly developed male character who is a writer as well – who engages in diary writing which is considered the forte of women. Deshpande breaks the binaries of man-woman, public-private by depicting Badri as a diarist who affirms the significance of personal writing. Badri has written only serious stuff: that is, papers for journals, a chapter for a textbook, letters, official memos. When infected by cancer and his ‘countdown’ starts, he feels an urge to sort out his chaotic jumble of thoughts and tormenting memories. He realises what he has written so far is mere factual matter minus his individuality, an indispensable element to defeat the threat of mortality. He thus pours out everything in his diary – his experiences, views, passion, etc. – as a fist-raising gesture of defiance against complete extinction.

Badri’s experience of unveiling his inner life can be juxtaposed with Jaya’s (*Silence*). Jaya, writing her personal story, feels that words that once gushed out of
her pen (writing the Sita column) now fail her. Badri, who with a certain amount of ease did the impersonal writing, feels inhibited to write something personal. Being a man, he has been conditioned to suppress the private, emotional aspect. On the other hand, being a woman, Jaya feels sensitised to use male-centred language to reveal the drab, dreary and distressful world of the ‘Sushasinis’.

After Badri’s death Jiji who comes upon his diary hesitantly reads it. She doubts the fairness in reading an exclusively personal thing. Nevertheless she is curious. She fears a reference to some unpleasant and unforgivable episode of her life. After reading his diary she also feels the urge to unburden herself, make a clean breast and defend her life. Of all Deshpande’s writer-characters she is the boldest to write on the tabooed ‘sexuality’. The ‘good’ girl syndrome does not work on her. She reclaims her selfhood by writing the female body.

Vasu, like Mira who is recreated through her poems, comes to life through Badri and Jiji’s diary notes. She is the most traditional of the writers, depicting her heroines on patriarchal terms. But her stories are titled after her female protagonists. Her story “Blackout” marks a volte-face. She musters courage to drop the ‘good girl’ guise to strike at oppressive male-centred system. She portrays a woman who uses her feminine ingenuity to reclaim her body.

Unfortunately like Mira who has been driven into the dark by misogyny, Vasu is constrained to retreat from creativity following the vilifying remarks and the controversy that ensued from the phallocratic quarters. Though Vasu appears in her late work Deshpande depicts her as belonging to an early generation. Hence she lacks the resilience of the younger writer-characters, and is, like Mira,
intimidated by the patriarchal force. In *Moving On* the writer-characters have no mentors. But Jiji is, to a certain extent, inspired by her father to open up. This means that Deshpande’s women writer-characters are more on their own terms, enjoying more autonomy as time progresses. It is also worth noting that Laurence’s heroine Morag Gunn has quit wifehood, and has apportioned equal importance to both the creative roles – mother and writer. On the contrary, Deshpande’s writer-characters ascribe more importance to their traditional roles despite the fact that writing sustains them and assigns them self-identity.

The artistic growth of Deshpande and Laurence can be traced along the evolution of their writer-characters. Since the novels selected for study fall into the category of metafictional *künstlerroman* the various phases of the writer’s journey towards self-actualisation such as self-discovery, self-awareness, self-realisation, etc. become emphasised. The novels not only become the expression of their literary creativity but also a medium for the authors to encode their troubled relationship to art.

The true ‘self’ of the writer emerges when the writer identifies the needs of the ‘society’. This realisation confers courage and confidence to counter the curbing forces of patriarchy. Every genuine work epitomises the writer’s intense longing for her/his selfhood. The writer discovers her/his voice, and identity through the process of writing. Thus the ‘self’ emerges. Writers are sensitive to social issues also. They have a deep sense of morality. Hence they feel socially obliged to expose and reform the inequities of the society. Women writers are committed to write on the cruelties and injustices meted out to women. They raise consciousness, and revalorise womanhood. They express their social commitment and female solidarity by
instilling a sense of worth in women and inspiring them to validate their lives. But often women writers are constrained to shirk their responsibility to women in distress and society at large due to the intervention of patriarchal forces. An analysis of Deshpande and Laurence’s writer-characters makes it evident that at a certain stage of their career they are forced to compromise with their writing and disregard their duty towards society. A crisis develops as a consequence of this breach. Later, on the intervention of their mentors, the women writers overcome the predicament in their lives. They realise that morality, social obligation, self-identity, integrity, etc., are undeniable traits of a genuine writer and every authentic work is the expression of the writer’s selfhood and social concern.

Deshpande is aware of the problems of the educated middle class that she belongs to. Her writer-characters hail from the same stratum, and are educated and liberal in thinking. Nevertheless, they are constrained to write on patriarchal terms. A probe into their lives makes it clear that genderism obstructs their free expression. Deshpande problematizes this through her women writer-characters. Her main concern is the freedom of expression for women. She also portrays sympathetically the exploitation of the lower class women. Laurence problematizes the writer Morag’s life and career in her spiritual autobiography, *The Diviners*. The inseparable link between self and society is a highlight of this novel. Morag emerges as a writer when her ‘self’ acknowledges her past, and identifies with the marginalised of Manawaka.

A scrutiny of Deshpande and Laurence’s novels unfold a world that is unfriendly and uncongenial for female creativity. The writer-characters struggle to find a voice of their own. Deshpande’s writer-characters often fail to break the
traditional image imposed on them. Hence their career takes a back seat. Jaya (Silence) and Indu (Roots) strive to be an ideal wife. They create an illusory world of success. They are aware of their lapse of duty. The mentors help them out from the conflictual situation. Kamat points out Jaya’s flaws, and Naren Indu’s. Mira (Vine) is a flower that blooms in the wilderness. This budding poet is silenced by the phallocratic society. Nonetheless, she writes secretly and does not compromise. Mira’s poems inspires Urmī to champion the cause of the rape victim, Kalpana. Mira also confers on Urmī the courage to reclaim the ‘lost’ poet. Thus Mira’s self emerges through the ‘inspired’ Urmī who is now emboldened to take up social causes. Sumi discovers her ‘self’ in the process of rendering a story into a play. She plans to rewrite the story of Surpanakha from a female perspective, which means the deconstruction of the stereotyped images of women. Thus in A Matter of Time, we see the development of Sumi’s self when she relates herself to the wronged womanhood. Madhu (Remedies) writes the biography of Savitri Indorekar Bai, whose daughter was Madhu’s childhood friend. Thus Madhu’s childhood episode finds a place in Bai’s biography. Writing about the determined Bai who never compromised with her career, Madhu recalls another equally strong-willed woman, her aunt Leela. On the personal front, Leela never hesitated to fulfil her love life: she married outside her caste first, then after her husband’s death she married a Christian widower. She also continued helping her first husband’s family. On the public front, she is a true communist and worked for the welfare of the slum-dwellers. Thus Bai’s biography gets entwined with Leela’s biography and Madhu’s autobiography. Madhu is inspired by these two women who teach the importance of self and social obligation. In Moving On the development of the self is obviously noticeable in the writings of Badri, Vasu and Jiji. Vasu makes an attempt to atone for her neglect of
women’s issues in her story “Blackout”, where she unleashes an attack on the oppressive androcentric society.

Margaret Laurence’s novel *The Diviners* is peopled with the humble folk of Manawaka town like Morag Gunn, an orphaned girl, Christie and Prin Logan, the scavenger couple who are her foster parents, the ‘half-breed’ Tonnerres, etc. Her writer-protagonist, Morag in her fictional autobiography writes about the marginalised in the society. Laurence’s (Morag’s) sympathies are with them. Besides focusing on genderism the writer brings in racism and classicism. Gender issues become highlighted in Morag-Brooke relationship.

Mentoring, which plays a significant role in the lives of women writer-characters, needs to be scrutinized. It is a relationship based upon mutual trust and respect between the mentor and mentee. A mentor can help the mentee find the right direction, regain faith in her own self and boost her confidence. Mentoring allows the mentee to look more closely at herself, her issues, opportunities and aspirations. It is about becoming more self-aware, taking responsibility for her own life and steering her life in the direction she aspires. It is a powerful personal development and empowerment tool.

The mentors in the selected novels are mostly men. Where the mentors are women we notice the relationship of mentoring rising to the level of female bonding as well. The male mentors are unconventional, and have a human or androgynous approach. Hence they can think beyond the rigid, restricted, gender-biased world of patriarchy. They can empathise with the women writers and help them resolve their
cises. They point out the shortcomings in their writing. Their admonishment becomes an eye-opener.

In *Roots and Shadows* Naren, a bohemian character and distant relative of Indu becomes her mentor. Naren, who has a keen eye on her career, notices the change in her writing and reproaches her ‘soulless’ writing. Indu pours out her grievances which she cannot share with her husband Jayant. She justifies her present hypocritical stand in the corrupt world. She is constrained to compromise with her writing for her materialistic husband and the unscrupulous editor. Indu gets the moral support that she badly needs from Naren. His words provoke her to introspect. She gets better insights into her own self from which she has been fleeing. She accepts her womanhood which she loathed earlier. Naren helps her to come out of the slush of self-deception and the state of degeneration that she is slipping into. Now that she has a clear vision, she charts her life on her own terms. Seeing the resolute Indu her husband yields. He who dissuaded her from resigning now backs her.

In *That Long Silence* Jaya’s mentor is her neighbour, Kamat who like Naren is an unconventional character. Like Indu, Jaya has no inhibition in sharing her writing experiences with him. It is to be noted that though the mentors are not writers, they understand the process of creativity, and the integral relationship between self and society. Jaya’s husband, Mohan is unimaginative. He thinks that the writer’s imagination has made Jaya unrealistic and unromantic. Conditioned by patriarchy Mohan believes that if women shed their femininity they become unwomanly. Hence Jaya is constrained to repress her true emotions, the repercussion of which is reflected in her writing. Even when she writes stealthily and publishes in Kamat’s name, her
stories are rejected. Jaya shares her frustration with Kamat. He points out the drawbacks of her unexciting, uninteresting stories. She is a victim of self-internalisation. She effaces herself from the stories as she does in her real life too. Kamat underlines the importance of a writer’s integrity and identity. He admonishes her for her cowardice. Finally she gears up for a quest for her identity. Motivated by Kamat, Jaya finally decolonises herself by making realistic portrayals of all who colonised her life. She lets off steam in her fictional autobiography. Her search for her ‘self’ connects her to ‘society’.

Unlike other writer-characters Mira (*Vine*) and Vasu (*Moving*) have no mentors. Mira approaches a contemporary doyen of poetry for mentoring. But his denigrating remarks and misogynistic attitude shatter her poetic aspirations. She turns a recluse and writes stealthily, tapping her own inner strength. But Urmi who discovers and decides to publish Mira’s poems can be considered her mentor in a restricted sense. Likewise Urmi, though not a writer, obtains the moral strength and insights for an independent and meaningful life from Mira’s poems. A sort of mutual mentoring is manifest here between Mira and Urmi. Mira, a victim of marital rape, induces Urmi to help another rape victim, Kalpana. The poems of Mira generate a sense of female bonding. When Indu and Jaya write about the wail and woes of women they are also championing female solidarity.

Sumi is another writer-character who does not have a mentor. She discovers her flair for words late in her middle age, when she is involved in a school programme. She is not a professional writer, and does not encounter the pressures of the phallocratic society. Nonetheless, she feels ecstatic over her newfound talent and the unbeaten track that she pursues.
In *Small Remedies*, Madhu has no mentor as Indu and Jaya have. But Chandru, a doctor-friend of her husband, who knows about the therapeutic effect of writing, urges her to take up the assignment of writing the of Savitri Indorekar Bai’s biography. From her experience of writing Hamidbhai’s biography where she effaced herself, Madhu learns that the presence of an author is intrinsic to a work. Ruminating over the lives of the single-minded Indorekar Bai and the strong-willed Leela she learns the significance of the ‘self’ and ‘society’. These two women reach their destinations treading obstacle-strewn paths. Indorekar Bai, from an orthodox Brahmin family, is bent on becoming a musician when such career is forbidden to Brahmin women. Strange it may seem she has been helped by her father-in-law in this regard. The self is emphasised in the portrait of Indorekar Bai. In Leela’s portrait both the self and society emerge. Leela always stood stern by her convictions. Marrying outside her caste, helping her husband’s family financially even after his death, becoming a communist which was a taboo for the upper class Brahmin, helping the mill workers of the Bombay slums, marrying a Christian widower, etc., mark her out as a woman of self-identity and integrity, and a strong sense of social obligation. Madhu learns the worth of self and society from Indorekar Bai and Leela. Thus, Indorekar Bai and Leela have mentored Madhu indirectly.

As time progresses it is seen that the direct intervention of patriarchy is on the decline. Nevertheless, women writers continue to be victims of self-internalisation. In Deshpande’s works the focus shifts from ‘society’ to ‘self.’ Mentors are to an extent disappearing as well. The writers seek strength from their own inner reservoir.
Badri and Vasu (*Moving*) have no mentors. Badri writes with much confidence the journal papers and articles. But he feels diffident when he takes to personal writing for it is generally considered not a masculine forte. But the urge to transcend mortality on the wings of personal writing propels him forward. As a fiction writer Vasu has no mentor. She faces no crisis as she writes only what is acceptable to the patriarchal society (like Jaya’s ‘Sita’). Her attempt to defy the patriarchy in her story “Blackout” is disastrous. She also cautiously guards her traditional role from intrusion (especially by her career). Jiji, their daughter, inspired by father’s notes in the diary, jots down her thoughts, fears, and experiences as part of divulging her tempestuous and impetuous life to her children. Jiji writes on female sexuality as part of reclaiming female body. In *MovingOn* it is the self rather than society that gains prominence.

In Laurence’s *The Diviners* many are involved in the mentoring of the writer-character, Morag Gunn. Morag learns the rudiments of writing from Miss. Melrose, her school teacher at Manawaka. Melrose discovers Morag’s skill for writing and encourages her. Brooke Skelton, Professor of English at Winnipeg University reads her story and makes critical remarks and gives her suggestions about writing. Morag is overjoyed to have received his attention. It is worth noting that Brooke’s mentoring is not genuine. After their marriage a sort of insecurity and rivalry develop in Brooke that she may supersede him. Yet another fact is that it is Morag’s skill and language that the patriarch interferes with. In the case of Deshpande’s characters (Jaya-Mohan, Indu-Jayant) it is the privacy of the personal life (content) that becomes an issue. Christie Logan feeds Morag with the folktales of their ancestors and their migration from Scotland to Canada. Jules Skinner Tonnerre
with his love for country songs also inspires her. She also enjoys unstinted support from her friend, Ella Gerson. Thus Morag receives the benefits of mentoring in different ways and measures from many.

The thesis on the problematization of woman-as-writer has examined the exclusion, marginalisation and trivialization of women’s writing, and the various counteractive measures in women’s writing against the incapacitating patriarchal forces, as well as the intertwined course of life and career of the writer-characters and the authors as charted in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Margaret Laurence.

Though we have marched into the high techno civilized twenty-first century which has almost changed our physicality, the insignia of inferiority stamped on women aeons ago remains unobliterated. The recent ruckus triggered by the Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul is adequate to establish that the topic will not easily be passed off as irrelevant and insignificant. In the article “Lingering Prejudice” Deshpande states that the attitude of Naipaul is neither surprising nor shocking, for he is but the latest of a long line of male denigrators of women’s writing. She points out that the misogynistic attitude of the phallocratic world has hardly changed. At first it was “don’t write”, then “you can’t” and now it is “you can’t write like US!” (1+) This implies that the ‘politics of creativity’ will persist to blight the blossoming of female creativity, and women will continue to register their resistance, and consequently, women writers’ relationship to art will remain problematized.