Chapter Five

Summation

Considering the history of mankind since the dawn of the civilization man evidently has become the law maker, imposing his authority on the “Other” i.e. woman. And without woman’s knowledge there has been discrimination, classification and labelling as strong and weak, male and female, culture and nature, high and low on the two opposite poles of the same social and cultural scale. In due course this phenomenon has become institutionalized. And women have been unable to enter the symbolic order. This has taken shape as demarcation and discrimination in social system and hence it has come to be accepted that “masculine form is generic, universal or unmarked, while the feminine form is marked by a suffix or some other variant” (1) as Showalter expresses in Speaking of Gender.

Feminism recognizes the inadequacy of male-created ideologies and struggles for the spiritual, economic, social and racial equality of women. The term “feminism” involves plethora of interpretations and perspectives. However, the plurality of perspectives is used only for the purpose of challenging different cultural, philosophical and social systems that propagate and perpetuate binary and hierarchical understanding of man-woman relationship. Divyabha and Sarika Gupta rightly observe, “The perception provides feminism with its double agenda: to understand the social and psychic mechanism that constructs and perpetuates gender inequality and then to change them” (181). There have been
feminist thinkers like Beauvoir who understand man-woman relationship in terms of fundamental antagonism in this way, “The category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality – of the Self and the Other . . . Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought” (16-17). It implies that human beings define themselves against each other demanding recognition from the other. It makes their relationship reciprocal. But such reciprocity does not exist in man-woman relationship as man has always dictated terms and norms of behaviour to woman as the “Other.” In feminist struggle for rights, women are to assume subject position against men as “Object” or the “Other.” These ideas do not serve the purpose of feminist struggle as their assertion of binary opposition in man-woman relationship goes against women’s claim for equality. Among the variety of perspectives deployed to challenge this discriminatory understanding in recent years are the ideas impacted by post-modernism. The postmodern ideas intervene the thoughts related to feminist struggle against patriarchy through the questions related to authority and power as they function in social and gender difference. Postmodern ideas become a potent tool to support feminist struggle as this system of thought considers “the concept of alienated otherness (based on binary oppositions that conceal hierarchies) gives way … to that of differences that is to the assertion, not of centralized sameness, but of decentred community” (12) in the words of Linda Hutcheon. Instead of fixity and singularity of identity, these ideas highlight multiple possibilities of existence, particularly concerned with women.
In the modern era, marital relationship becomes vastly different from that of the past. In earlier times women have been bound by traditional thoughts and trained from their childhood to walk under the shadow of their fathers or their husbands. But at present this has undergone a great change and women have started asserting their freedom. Men, who expect their wives to be dependent on them and feel that women should have no alternative other than accepting the injustices done to them, cannot tolerate when women, especially their wives articulate their emotions freely. The troubles begin here in the relationship between man and woman particularly husband and wife. Problems like absurdities of the individuals, faults like short temper, excessive love of finery and pleasure and cruelty result in incongruities in nuptial relationships. Deshpande’s women show features reflecting the culture that has produced them. The man-woman relationship and their response to the society shape the culture.

Deshpande, in her works, deals with man-woman relationship with defining freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian socio-cultural value system and institutions. She has steadfastly resisted the temptation of creating strong, glorified female heroes, and has presented the Indian woman as facing the very real dilemma of having to choose between modernity and convention. In spite of being labelled as feminist, Deshpande’s feminism does not uproot the woman from her background but tries to expose the different ideological elements that shape her. These include religious and cultural elements such as myths, legends, rituals and ceremonies and social and psychological factors such
as woman’s subordinate position in the family and her restricted sexuality. Deshpande’s protagonists’ search for freedom and self-identity within marriage, as a recurring theme, is mainly dealt with in her novels. She seeks to highlight the ideology by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in society.

The protagonists in Deshpande’s fiction can be roughly categorized on the basis of various roles or situations they exist in. Her women characters are portrayed in all their myriad roles as mothers to their children, as a daughter, as a wife or as a woman in relationship with a man or simply as an individual in her own right. She concerns herself with the plight of modern woman trying to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all as a human being. In her works, Deshpande unveils the subtle process of oppression and gender differentiation that is at work in the family and the male-dominated society. She shows great sensitivity and awareness of the ways and means through which a woman is conditioned to accept her position in the society as one of subservience to men. Woman’s perception of herself in various roles is conditioned by the thought patterns handed down to her by moral, intellectual and social order which have been formed by men. As a result, they are confined to their homes, oppressed, suppressed and marginalized and denied the opportunities for fulfilment of their lives.

The first chapter, “Introduction” explains the title of the dissertation and probes into the stature of man-woman relationship as woman’s position in the family as well as in society has kept on changing all through the ages and is almost an inferior one. The chapter presents a short account of the author and her
contribution to Indian Writing in English as a writer and as an activist. It traces
the development of Indian English fiction and focuses on man-woman
relationship, the most prolific theme of Indian fiction. It also explicates the
theoretical concepts of psychoanalysis, the important tool of postmodernism, and
how it helps to unearth the deep-seated reality of the human psyche as
Deshpande’s novels eclectically employ the postmodern technique of
deconstructing patriarchal culture and customs, and reveal them to be man-made
constructs.

The second chapter, “Myths and Realities” highlights the social reality of
how men and women remain archetypal in their life because of their strongly
cemented established thoughts. Deshpande’s novels begin with an
unconventional marriage leading to the problems of alienation, accommodation
and adjustment. The conflict in her protagonists is resolved through their
desperate unconscious submission to traditional roles. Woman’s primary social
role is to be a wife and mother. Man’s primary social role is to be the family
bread-winner. This is the defining edge of all female experience that woman’s
growth or development is a complex social matter and not at all a
straight-forward natural process. The study clearly states that the socialization of
a girl for her future role as wife and mother begins in early childhood when the
prevailing social mores and norms are studiedly inculcated into her through
myth like cultural elements. The socialization of the girl child takes place
through various means. Folklore, rituals, prescriptive conduct codes and
restrictions are repeated continuously to her throughout her growing years.
Deshpande believes that childhood experiences are lasting and as a result they have a crucial role to play in the formation of a healthy personality. Her novels reverberate with childhood imagery and experiences and a close study of her novels reveals that her characters have peculiar childhood experiences and these uncommon experiences contribute largely to their inability to establish and maintain personal relationships in later life. Urmila, Sumi, Manjari and Devayani are all in one way or another, victims of childhood grooming and are critical commentaries on how the girl child is marginalized and ultimately struggles and sometimes meets failure in life because of her childhood tailoring and indoctrination. The boy/girl discrimination rocks the lives of the women of Deshpande. This discrimination towards the girl is embedded in the Hindu culture. Mukta Atrey states that the girl “is made to feel different from her male siblings, made to feel self-conscious about revealing her femininity to the male members of the family” (252).

The controlling or the management of the girl child’s sexuality is an essential aspect of her socialization. The mother figures occupy an important place in shaping the personality of their daughters. Not only the mother figures but also the other women who have already internalized patriarchal values ensure the conditioning of the female child into her social role of docile daughter, wife or mother. The sociologist, Veena Das, describes these women as “female patriarchs,” old women who may often speak on behalf of men. She writes, “In fact if women did not internalize the voices of men and speak like patriarchs themselves, the social order could not be maintained. Coercion and force can never ensure the authority of the rule as an internal voice” (4).
As the mothers are silenced and suppressed in a male-dominated social order, they remain mythical mothers. While these mothers recall their lives as a painful and traumatic experience, their daughters are knowledgeable and self-assured. Surprisingly, these mythical mothers’ daughters, who are independent, modern women and possess the advantages of education and freedom, also begin to play the second fiddle. Even Deshpande’s educated protagonists like Urmila, Vanaa and Madhu have succumbed to the prevailing notions of the ideal wife despite being highly educated and possessing a probing mind that has been trained to contest stereotypes and unethical choices.

Most of the protagonists remain mythical wives because of the ideological concept that the girl child is a temporary resident in her natal home, a burden, a liability and a responsibility to be passed on to the in-laws. These concepts in particular restrict the protagonists of Deshpande in taking a decision to come out of marriage though they are fed up with their married life. And finally, these protagonists take a decision in favour of their home. This can well be identified in the lives of Urmila, Madhu and Devayani.

Some of Deshpande’s protagonists are known for their return to their parental home after years of their married life because of the desertion of their husbands. It happens in their lives as they suffer from insecurity and they need backing both materialistically and psychologically. Certainly these things can be attained from the parental home only after the desertion of their husbands. Not only women but men are also being archetypal in their own ideas of treating women as sexual objects. Deshpande’s men and women thus remain archetypal
in one way or another as the established doctrines are deeply rooted in their psyche and they are unable to bid adieu to traditions.

When the education and their internalization force the women to know their real status, a conflict arises in their mind between tradition and modernity and it makes them restless to achieve their identity. Especially this attitude makes these women suffer a lot in their married life and is responsible for the crunches between them and their husbands. But, the piteous condition of these women is that they are continuously treated as the “Other” by men and they accept it passively for the sake of a trouble free life.

The third chapter, “Self and the Other” analyses how man has considered himself superior to woman and thereby establishing himself as “Self” and woman as the “Other” in the conventional society. There are varied ways in which the society characterizes Deshpande’s women as ideally warm, gentle, dependent and submissive and family and the work patterns make them subordinates to men and of course it does reflect in man-woman relationship especially in the husband and wife relationship. Shakutai and Sulu in *The Binding Vine* refuse to raise voice to achieve autonomy as they are uneducated. But Urmila, Sumi, Madhu, and Manjari are in search of the means to overcome oppression, develop their powers and abilities for personal fulfilment and self-actualization. Deshpande’s women are treated as the “Other” not only by men like their husbands, brothers and friends but also by women like their mothers. In the words of Dalvir Singh Gahlawat, “A woman should know that success in marriage means manipulating, sacrificing, adjustments and silently
managing her relationship with her husband in accordance with the norms dictated by the society” (77).

Deshpande is determined in her conviction that a woman can’t be absolutely free, sacrificing the innate urges of womanhood. The involvement in professional life and economic independence can bring a partial contentment in the life of a woman but it cannot be the ultimate reality. In the fictional world of Deshpande, quest for identity in spite of being an affirmative force, is not an absolute reality and results in a balancing act. This argument has been strongly projected through the lives of Urmila and Vanaa in *The Binding Vine*. Deshpande’s men are also deported to the status of “Other” by women. It can be well identified in Savitribai’s treatment of her husband and her lover, Ghulam Saab. In their quest for identity, both Deshpande’s men and women struggle to attain happiness and they encounter conflicts and suffering during the process of their self-discovery and the resultant problems affect the husband-wife relationship.

The popular belief is that a woman’s place is in her home and that she should find fulfilment in motherhood and domesticity alone which have religiously been perpetuated all through the ages. Seeking an independent identity is considered, more often than not, only the male’s privilege. A woman is discouraged to have any identity of her own. Her identity is expected to be merged with her role as wife and mother. The traditional society does not permit woman to gratify her basic need of self-fulfilment to grow and fulfil her potential as a human being. Ketu H. Katrak voices this angst like this, “Tradition
is gendered so that the same elements of tradition, such as religious belief, education, dress codes, freedom of movement are enforced very differently on males versus females” (159).

A woman’s different characteristics are produced not as a consequence of her innate “masochism” but as a consequence of her history of economic dependency. In existential terms, her identity exists largely as being for others rather than being for herself. Actually women are given little space for self-development, and independence as a being. The lack of freedom to explore the world on their own leads women to have a close-knit relationship with the other members of the family. Their identity depends on these relationships and this role in society can be condensed into three stages viz. “triple role of daughter-in-law, wife and mother” (178) in the words of Nabar Vrinda. However, there is a growing awareness of the marginalization being perpetrated on women. Although much of the overt discrimination has been reduced and opportunities for woman have been expanded, the hierarchical system in which men are given preference is still actively functioning and the experiences of men and women continue to be different. Woman is actually “ventriloquised” in her social participation and as a result, problems remain in the life of man and woman particularly between husband and wife forever due to the indifference in the treatment of men and women in the society.

Language also plays an important role in communication between man and woman and especially between the life partners as one’s misunderstanding of the language of the other leads to problems in the relationship between them.
The nature of both the categories i.e. man and woman reflects in their language too. In the fourth chapter “Language and Logic,” Lacan’s idea that unconscious is structured like a language and Derrida’s concept of “differance” are brought in to analyse the language of men and women characters of Deshpande. As Deshpande’s novels are essentially feminine texts that critique the position of Indian women in the phallocentric orthodoxy, her women are seen as inferior and they are always on the side of passivity. Hence, in all aspects of human life, the woman-centred gynocentricism is being suppressed whereas the man-centred phallocentricism is dominating even in the matter of language as both of them have their own language. The language of domination is expressed through the words of Harish and Kishore in *The Binding Vine*, Gopal in *A Matter of Time*, Som in *Small Remedies*, and Ashok in *In the Country of Deceit*. Their care free words explicate the unconscious of these men. Harish, Kishore and Gopal occupy the position of husband and naturally they have their own dominating language. Ashok differs from the former ones that though he is merely a lover and a man who has a clandestine relationship with Devayani, speaks in the same authoritative voice as the husbands do. Actually he has no right to take authority on the life of Devayani as he is not her husband but he does so even in the matter of expressing his status to Devayani just because he is a man. So naturally, this domination and suppression are there in the language of man and woman and they lead to more problems in the relationship between husband and wife compared to the other types of relationship. But the father-daughter relationship remains trouble free as there is a good understanding between them. As she wants to revise the status of women, Deshpande uses feminine discourse which
of course contributes to the transformation of woman in the context of Indian society that these women, through this discourse, pour out their feelings to justify their lives.

Deshpande’s fiction ambivalently projects deconstruction as well as reconstruction of gender roles as her women protagonists are constantly in search of inner space which is instrumental in the reconstruction of gender identity. Human relationships are the most mystifying and exciting for Deshpande. In these relationships it is the women’s place that is of greatest concern to the novelist because of the discrimination that women experience in relation to men.

Deshpande not only probes into the psychology of women who are victims but also analyses how men are transformed into victimizers. Thus she goes to the malady of men perpetrating violence against women. Society is structured in a way to perpetuate ideology. The persistence of this patriarchal ideology only has enabled men to assume that they have a right to maintain women in subordinate condition throughout history. And the plaintive fact is that women have also internalized and adapted this inferior position. Simone De Beauvoir argues that both men and women perpetuate patriarchy that men want to dominate women, and women accept to be dominated by men.

Deshpande advocates an ideal family set up where both men and women avail equal opportunities and privileges where cooperation, reconciliation and companionship prevail. She strongly believes that “women should not be
oppressed because they are the potential partners of men in society” (162) in the words of Pramod Kumar Singh. Deshpande sees the need to harmonize the man-woman relationship as equal partners. She believes that there is no victory in the subjugation and destruction of the female. The need is to see each other’s space, freedom of expression and love. Atrey and Kirpal too stress this by quoting Deshpande from her interview with Malini Nair, “aggressive feminism does not ring true in the Indian context and that for Indian women selfhood will only come from probing and thinking for oneself” (7). Deshpande’s ideas are echoed in the following lines from Beena Agarwal too, “The fictional world of Shashi Deshpande is not directed towards the annihilation of the existing order but it seeks a reorientation of society where a more balanced relationship might have been possible” (217).

A study of Deshpande’s novels reveals that man-woman relationship is passing through a conflict in roles and values. The conflict is due to the thing that in the patriarchal society woman is always considered as inferior and is expelled to the status of the “Other” whereas man is in the status of “Self.” The sacrifice and nobility that is expected of Deshpande’s women is a stereotype that only bogs down them in a mire of negation and suppression. When they try to strengthen their “Selves” realising their predicament after they become educated and come under the process of internalization, difficulties arise in the man-woman relationship and they automatically lead them to various encounters. Deshpande also concerns herself with the exploration of various human relationships within the family – for example mother-daughter, father-daughter,
siblings etc. But in the relationship between father-daughter, mother-son, and brother-sister, problems are very limited. But more problems arise in the relationship between man and woman as partners. In the article “Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of Her Fiction,” Mukta Atrey rightly points out, “With rare sensitivity and depth, she portrays the dilemma of the Indian woman trapped between her own aspirations as an individual and the forces of patriarchy which confine her. Deshpande’s fiction especially concentrates on the domestic situation and the man-woman relationship within marriage.”

In the changing scenario, it is quite natural that the mindset of the male also transforms into a tolerant and inclusive one, giving space for women to find their own strength. The reality is quite different, that though the changing times have put the Indian male in a very complex situation in which he is obliged to embrace the new ideas, the Indian male is unable to reject the old ones. As a result, though they realize the need of the change in their attitude towards women, they hesitate to make up their mind. In the depth of their heart, they still hold onto the accustomed beliefs of the superiority of men and subjugation of women. Thus, men and women find it difficult to overcome stereotypes and as a result both of them remain archetypes. Deshpande’s men and women are no exception to this. And it makes one perceive that problems will remain forever in their marital life unless the contrary position in the relationship between man and woman especially between husband and wife takes a new turn.

Changes are expected from women also. Women can fulfil themselves only when they are not subjugated and oppressed. Most of the women in
Deshpande’s novels are bogged down by the misfortunes of their lives. But what is sad is their silence and passive acceptance of the situation. As the man continues to remain the master of the house, the woman’s suppression often results in a terrible mental conflict for her as she is torn between social expectations and the need to realize her potential. Through these women, Deshpande reveals the suffering that goes unexpressed. She does not draw an unrealistic picture that – by speaking up these women could change their lives. She emphasises that suffering in silence has been forced on women. To achieve one’s true “Self,” one will have to break away from the tradition of enduring in silence. A woman’s feelings and needs are as important as those of others. Therefore she will have to speak in order to create a place for herself and to affirm life. In his article “Making of the New Woman in Shashi Deshpande’s Novels,” Abhilash Nayak says, “Shashi Deshpande all through the gamut of her ever expanding creative horizon always makes it a point to provide a separate space for her characters” (1).

The means of social control such as law, custom and fashion and the most influential forces of social contract such as religion and morality act not only as the most effective guides of human behaviour but also they are partial to man. Interpretation of the meaning of the values established by these means of social control is also needed to get equality and transformation in the life of women. And women must have the strength to face and break the glass ceiling of obstacles and come out to achieve their identity as well as their goal in their life. Education plays a vital role in a woman’s life because the need of reservation
and certitude to her identity is never felt as most of the evils in her life have grown out of illiteracy and ignorance. In Deshpande’s view, it is necessary for women to be embedded in family, yet independent enough to recognize their authentic selves. She envisions a world free from all the problems; which is probably a better world for not only men but also women to live in and she stresses that this world would certainly be known for good relationship between man and woman in all ways.

The present chapter while synthesizing all the preceding chapters and the arguments carried out in them presents the hypothesis that man-woman relationship need not remain enigmatic entirely. A psychoanalytic study of the character representations in the select fiction of Deshpande shows societal strictures and impediments as the major stumbling block for effecting a companionable relationship between man and woman. Myths regarding gender and sex are to be smashed and facts to be accepted. The simple fact is that most men and women have little idea who the other sex really is. This keeps them away from fulfilling out their own dreams of glorious intimate and connected relationships. Comprehending and maneuvering the nuances of language and communication becomes yet another effective tool for creating and maintaining powerful heart based relationships between spouses in married life. Man-woman relationship need not turn enigmatic entirely if established norms and restrictions are overlooked and dissolved, thereby creating an ambience of independent thinking and mutual understanding on the part of the individuals.
Deshpande’s works can further be explored applying psychoanalytic feminism as this branch of feminism is a theory of oppression, which asserts that the root of men’s compulsion to dominate women and women’s minimal resistance to subjugation lies deep within the human psyche. Psychoanalytic feminism seeks to gain insight into how the human psychic lives develop in order to understand better and change women’s oppression. The pattern of oppression is also integrated into society, thus creating and sustaining patriarchy. Through the application of psychoanalytic techniques to study differences between women and men and to trace the ways in which gender is constructed, it is possible to reorganize socialization patterns at the early stages of human life. This criticism assures that societal change can be developed through discovering the source of domination in men's psyche and subordination in women's, which largely resides unrecognized in individuals' unconscious and thereby more avenues can be opened for a friction free man-woman relationship at all levels.

It is no wonder that Deshpande should invite a comparison with the American novelist Anne Tyler who has for long professed similar fictional concerns and writings of issues related to women and thereby focusing on family relationships. Deshpande and Tyler, in spite of cultural differences and geographical locations many time zones apart, have much in common. For one thing, they are both conscious artists and they are guided by a moral vision in writing their novels. Likewise, a comparative study can be made between Deshpande and Zora Neale Hurston, an Afro-American writer as both the writers’ works explore the women’s experiences of love and suffering that
eventually lead to their struggle and quest for identity. This would be a
significant comparative study as the novels of both the writers expose the
glowing perception of women themselves as individuals capable of making
existential choices.