CHAPTER-VII
CONCLUSION

As discussed in this study, the images of womanhood are the most significant part of the design of literary works under the preview of this thesis. Also the images of womanhood are the most significant vehicle for the conveyance of the life vision or vision of society of the authors under discussion. These authors work mostly through their characters. “They do so by their very choice of characters they write about, the thoughts and feelings they give them, and the behaviour and motive they attribute to them”. (Allen 17) Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, and Arundhati Roy are committed writers. There is one thread that unites them together, i.e. they are in the line of socially conscious writers. Their concern is with the issues of social/national importance, especially with the issues related to the underprivileged ones and with those suffering under the burden of the snobbish institutions. The predicament of Indian women, the victims of characteristic Indian patriarchy, naturally comes under their purview. Their feminine sensibility, combined with their own personal traumatic experiences as women, make these women writers give voice to hitherto silent Indian women. This is done by invoking various images of women reflected through the multiplicity of women characters that they portray in their artistic works.

These writers have provided vivid pictures of resistance by their protagonists. They examine the conditioning of women and the reasons for their acceptance of patriarchal norms and subsequently, their inability to subscribe to any opposition. Despite the impact of the Western ideologies and the present socio-economic changes, it is difficult to sidetrack the strong cultural leanings of these authors which provide characteristic philosophical bent to their works. Women’s opposition to patriarchy, violence against women and rape, childhood experiences, etc. enable them to redefine their identity and survive with dignity.

It is noticed that though a woman has immense power of creation, preservation, tolerance, and recreation, all her power is exploited and sometimes, destroyed by the patriarchal system. It is quite unfortunate that since ancient times, a woman’s ability has been
underestimated and ignored despite many examples from history and from contemporary modern life revealing her great ability and power. A woman, too, is inwardly weak and fears to do anything independently. She is portrayed as a powerless and weak being even in the literary works of ancient and medieval times.

The previous two decades have witnessed the flourishing of Indian women writing in English. The authors belong mainly to the middle class and are western educated, who through their writings, express their discontentment with the plight of middle class traditional Hindu women entrapped in oppressive institutions like dowry, child marriage, prohibitions on women's education, enforced widowhood, etc. For instance, Kamala Das evolved a vigorous and heartrending feminine confessional poetry, wherein the general theme is the exploration of the man-woman relationship. While women’s poetry reveals the voice of the new woman, who is in search of her identity, the conventional male poetry often depicted women as submissive, meek, illiterate, weak, and dependent.

A large number of Indian female novelists, born after independence, made their entry into English literature and dealt with the actual state of women in the Indian society. In the area of regional fiction, writers such as Kamala Das and Arundhati Roy have placed Kerala on the fictional map while other women writers have beautifully painted the culture of other regions. Anita Desai’s works deal with a distressed woman, who is engaged in her intrinsical world, and braves the traumas of a male dominated society. Her central characters are Indians and she swaps the male-centered narrative with the female-centered one. By means of her protagonists, Desai makes an appeal for a better way of life for women.

Woman’s image has been portrayed as a blend of rejection and acceptance, rigidity and flexibility, reality and fantasy, and rebellion and compromise in the works of Shashi Deshpande. Jaya of That Long Silence, Saru of The Dark Holds No Terrors and Indu of Roots and Shadows have established themselves as independent – be it society, culture, or nature. They are also free from their guilt and fears. Their non conforming behaviour does not erupt from an external necessity but from their changed perception. The conflict
between the mother and daughter in *The Dark Holds no Terrors* is indicative of the conflict between tradition and modernity.

Thus women writers have presented women in different roles, who are always trapped in contradictory situations and strive hard for liberty, space and to prove their identity.

Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, and Arundhati Roy present women in new form revealing their inner world. These writers have immensely contributed to bring in a radical change in the image of woman. Among these writers, Anita Desai describes the frustration and the storm raging in the minds of her protagonists. Her protagonists experience the predicament of existence as an individual. *Cry, the Peacock* deals with the subject of marital relationship, and emphasizes the intense longing of a woman to be understood by her male counterpart. Similarly, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* projects the suffering of a woman due to lack of communication in marital life. The protagonist Sita (the wife of an upper middle class factory owner and a mother of four children), at the age of 40, experiences seclusion due to indifferent attitude of her family towards her. As a result, she becomes neurotic, leaves her family, and goes to Manori. A thorough self introspection makes her return home, become patient, and accept the loneliness.

Kamala Das raises her voice against the taut gender divisions. She protests against marriage as an institution since it legitimizes the cruelty on women and provides men a legitimate control over the bodies of women. Das is also a confessional poet. Her writings are considered as being obscene since she reveals the very private matters of her life including the bedroom secrets. Thus the image of woman in literature has undergone a sea change especially when women writers portray the real picture of woman - her predicament, sensibility, and problems. Their feminist approach changed the presentation of woman even with some accepted previous status of woman image. Women are essentially represented as liberated and free by thought and rebelliously face critical situations. The Indian women writers in English have moved ahead of the conventional representations of women, wherein they have been presented as idols of sacrifice; they, in

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fact, now present women, who fight for their rights and make an impassioned quest for their identity. They are, no longer, defined and characterized in terms of their victim status.

The modern writers openly flout the patriarchal norms and give a great emphasis to self assertion and establishment of identity. In fact, these writers have recognized their own brand of feminism while promoting their cause of ‘womanhood’. They represent the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman. They don’t restrict themselves to the depiction of the lives of women to one ideal. The literary works of the twenty first century provide examples of an entire range of attitudes resulting from the imposition of tradition. Some of these works even examine the family structure and the caste system as the chief elements of patriarchal social set up. Thus, the works of Indian female writers are quite important in making the society aware of the demands of women and in enabling them to express themselves.

As stated earlier, the portrayal of womanhood in Indian female writers, however, is not uniform throughout. Each writer has developed her own brand in keeping with her philosophy and vision of life. The four female writers taken for this study- Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, and Arundhati Roy have different perspectives on feminism and they analyze the female protagonists striving hard to assert their individuality and establish their identity in a male chauvinistic society. In addition to this, it can be inferred from the study that these writers have often protested against cultural and social practices that confined their freedom. In a majority of the cases, the writings are personalized and in a confessional mode, where their composition acts as a social document since they are themselves victims and also instruments of social revolution.

All the four writers viz. Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, and Arundhati Roy express the need, craving, and struggle of women for asserting their identity and freedom. They draw the attention of the society towards the real demand and life of women. They also comprehend the desires, emotions, feelings, and pains of women. That is the reason they succeed in portraying the mentality and psyche of women more realistically than
their male counterparts. Apart from this, their dealing with a varied variety of subjects contributes largely in creating awareness for the modern women all over the world. Though some of the writers under study do not claim to be feminists, their writings reveal their thorough inclination towards the well being of women.

The Indian English poetry of the 1970s and 80s is marked by a strong reaction against idealism and romanticism of its precursors. Along with an effort to establish distinctiveness and reformulate values, Kamala Das regulates the poetical features in accordance with her views on the situation thereby representing her mode of confession. Das’ works express her concern for the social consciousness of gender. She raises her voice against the neglect of a woman and rebels against the sexual colonialism and exploitation of woman. Thus she is a poetess, who has greatly succeeded in representing the agonies of human relations in the world. Her poetic excellence can be obviously witnessed in the use of diction, idiomatic usages, and images in her poems. Das has proved through her literary acumen the famous adage “where there is a will, there is a way.” Though she could not give vent to her literary genius in the day time due to her domestic engagements, the kitchen table served as the best platform to use her talent in the night.

Kamala Das is perhaps the most interesting and controversial figure in post colonial Indian English poetry, who is well known for her openness and frankness quite unusual in the Indian society. She depicts her personal observations and experiences in her poetry but all these experiences and observations hold true in case of every woman i.e. they are universal. “The Prisoner”, one of the confessional poems of Das, reveals her quest for essential woman:

As the convict studies
His prison’s geography
I study the trappings
Of your body, dear love
For I must some day find
An escape from its snare. (5-10)
The voice of Kamala Das is symbolic of the voice of every modern woman, who aspires to liberate herself from the religious orthodoxy. The readers are transported into the world of her private life, and she subtly reveals the delicate facts of her life including the bedroom secrets without any hesitation. Thus, Das’ works reveal her concern for the social consciousness of gender by representing the agonies of human relations in the world. Her strong protest against the exploitation of women and the male hegemony provides strong hope and faith to the young women of today, who can easily reject their victimization.

Another contemporary Indo-English novelist taken for the study, Shashi Deshpande, presents the dilemma of typical middle class Indian women, who are vacillating between traditional and modern roles. Being unable to resist social conventions, they are ensnared by hopes and fears, desires and despairs, hates and loves, oppression and suppression, alienation and withdrawal, male chauvinism and marital discord. The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande are the architects of their own fate and her feminism does not attribute male as the cause of all troubles; she feels the fault lies with the woman herself, who surrenders herself to the male domination. According to her, it is very often women who oppress their sisters. Many of Deshpande’s female characters are frustrated either sexually or professionally and she succeeds in portraying the image of the new Indian woman and her dilemmas, her efforts to preserve her identity as mother, wife, daughter, and as a human being in the male dominated society. Thus, Shashi Deshpande’s chief concern is with the intriguing problems of her protagonists, who have to strive hard to make a place for themselves in this cruel and callous tradition bound society. The impositions of the patriarchal society make them walk out from home and find a world of their own.

All her protagonists whether it is Indu, Saru or Jaya- are initially in a state of confusion but as the novels progress, they analyze and introspect themselves and come out as more confident and more hopeful individuals. They are in more control of themselves. An important fact about Deshpande’s protagonists is that they do not let their marriage get disintegrated - a fact that holds true in the context of middle class women even today.
her quest, Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one’s identity within marriage. Thus she makes a voyage from self alienation to self identification; from denial to contention, from reticence to self reliance; this makes her return to Manu, her husband.

And oh yes, Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I’ll be back as soon as I can. (202)

This is how she asserts her individuality, expresses her desire to face reality and not to run away from it. Saru exemplifies the struggle of the modern Indian working woman, who is striving hard to set herself free from the age old traditions.

Though the changing times have made women quite bold, the mindset of women remains unchanged. They still believe that completeness can be attained only through the husbands. Without the husband, they feel incomplete, however qualified, liberated, or independent they may be.

Deshpande’s protagonists succeed in creating private space for themselves after getting disgusted by the restrictions imposed upon them by their mothers and aunts before marriage and by their husbands after marriage. They are independent, iconoclastic beings. A characteristic feature of Deshpande is that she not only creates space for the privileged women i.e. the working class but also for poor, underprivileged women. The situations presented by Shashi Deshpande are quite universal, i.e. they hold true for all women at all times.

Due to intense exposure to adverse circumstances in a patriarchal set up, Indian women are unable to use their reason and always ‘walk behind’ their male counterparts. Women’s writings have given Indian womanhood a new connotation by representing the transformation of the conventional suppressed female into the new one, who is striving hard to establish her identity.
Another prominent writer under study, Anita Desai projects the inner conflict of her female protagonists and their sincere efforts in establishing their self identity. The protagonists of Anita Desai truly reflect the predicament of the Indian women who always adjust and compromise to lead a peaceful life thereby lending a practical touch to Indian feminism. Compromises play an important role in the works of Anita Desai - a situation true in the context of every modern woman. In order to pacify their inner turmoil, Desai’s female characters take recourse to nature and assert their identity. Besides providing refuge from the routine modern world of technology, nature also guides them in securing their identity as an individual.

Anita Desai’s evaluation of the male domination has been conducted through the deep rooted code of social imagination with regard to the desired image of the woman ‘the Sati-Savitri-parampara’. Desai’s novels examine the neurotic explosions arising from their sexual oppression. Her works not only question the existing patriarchal set up through women’s consciousness but also raise questions on the psychological and intellectual dimensions of Indian male consciousness. The expectations that Maya of Cry, the Peacock had at marriage are not fulfilled and as a result, she becomes fuzzy. She finds Gautama, her husband, as a man in whom “understanding was scant, love was meager.” (93) With the passage of time, her restlessness increases and she broods over her emptiness at heart.

…….I had yearned for the contact that goes deeper than flesh - that of thought – and longed to transmit to him the laughter that gurgled up in my throat as I saw a goat nuzzle, secretly, a basket of sliced melons in the bazaar while the vendor’s back was turned, or the profound thrill that lit a bonfire in the pit of my stomach- when I saw the sun unfurl like a rose in the west, the west and farther west…..But those were the times when I admitted to the loneliness of the Human soul, and I would keep silent. (90)

Thus, Maya is portrayed as an extremely sensitive character, who refuses to follow the rotten customs and rituals of patriarchy.
Desai’s works are reflective of the fact that despite the increasing women’s consciousness, patriarchal oppression will continue to exist (though the intensity may be reduced) merely because of the differences in the anatomy of the males and females and owing to intellectual and psychological dimensions of Indian male consciousness.

Arundhati Roy beautifully focuses on the absurdities and prejudices of social and domestic life. She strikes hard on the dual standards of the society, where the female is protected and kept away from power while the male runs the world. Such asymmetry in a male chauvinistic society is the hallmark of her award winning novel *The God of Small Things*. Roy skilfully asserts that a woman too, is an autonomous living entity, who has immense potential to create her own path.

There is no doubt that a woman has to overcome innumerable hurdles in her frantic search for self development. Her courteous denial of the jobs asked by her family and her demand for her desired status label her ‘disobedient’, ‘unfaithful’, ‘shameless’ and so on. Such denial considers her as a black spot on the family and the society starts doubting her integrity. But despite these impediments, her inherent undying spirit provides her the courage to break the cocoon of patriarchy, demand equal status and autonomy not only in words but in actions. In this context, K. Meera Bai remarks, “It is a struggle against the hardships, neglect and dual moral standards to which women are subjected. The new woman’s demand for her rightful place, recognition and respect due to her is prompted by an inner urge to make her existence a meaningful one.” (35)

Roy’s female characters confront immense grief, knotty marital relationships, extramarital affairs and brutal punishments for violating social rules laid down by the society. While some of them surrender in front of the dominant masculine voice and accept their fate, others accept the challenges with grit and try to seek their individuality as human beings, even though they have to pay with their own lives. The insensitivity of men in treating women as soulless beings, as sub-human, as playthings, and as objects
has led to a lot of unhappiness in the families and the society thereby creating an unbalanced society.

Arundhati Roy, thus, deconstructs conventional constructs about women and conveys that a woman can be at parity with man, only if she achieves a distinctive voice of her own and surpasses the established barricades of her silence. The society exploits a woman and considers her as immoral when there is a slight digression from the usual ways of behaviour. Arundhati Roy hits at the conventional constructs and attitudes like phallocentrism - that lay emphasis on masculinity and has both religious and social sanction.

Thus, the women of Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and Arundhati Roy are real flesh and blood protagonists, who startle the onlookers with their relationships to their society, their surroundings, their families, their men, their children, their mental make ups and themselves. These writers have dealt with very complicated issues such as servility, sensuality, and subjugation with a sense of balance, never disrespecting the Indian traditions. Kamala Das gets into the subtle descriptions which demand a lot of grit to express it in writing. Arundhati Roy uses realism as the main theme of her novels, and is well known for her bold views as reflected in her novel.

Both Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai project the identity crisis and isolation of their female characters in a tradition bound society. They have beautifully envisioned the spirit of Indian cultures and its traditional values. The works of Anita Desai such as Where Shall We Go This Summer? and Voices in the City describe the niceties in a man-woman relationship. The Dark Holds No Terror of Shashi Deshpande and Where Shall We Go This Summer? of Anita Desai figure out the depths of female psyche by means of Sarita and Sita respectively and represent the inner conflict and the evolving self-knowledge as they tend to get away from their narrow communities. They need to search within themselves the strength to be liberated while living within the traditional framework. In the works of Anita Desai, action becomes subordinate to psychology. The main theme of her novels is marital disharmony and self alienation. The novel Cry, the
Peacock presents the causes and repercussions of the alienation of Maya and Gautama. Maya’s neurotic behaviour is due to her intense alienation. This attitude alienates them from each other and brings about a disastrous end to Maya’s and Gautama’s life. The female characters of Anita Desai are usually neurotic; they are highly sensitive and are sequestered in a visionary world. They are separated from their surroundings owing to their failure to adjust to reality. Her characters build a large spectrum and are individuals having multi dimensional facets. They usually keep themselves away from others and resist the demand of the society and turn out to be rebels.

While Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande deal with identity crisis, Arundhati Roy asserts her rights of being a woman. The call for freedom of space and the search for identity levy a heavy price. Women humour men, deceive their own selves, learn to live without them, love them, reject them, hate them. But whatever they do, they have to be aware of their sex even when they have to choose asexual roles.

Deshpande is bold enough to interrogate the restrictions that marriage imposes on women and also the control it gives to men. In the novel Small Remedies, the notion of liberty is worked out differently even when the fears may be similar. Liberty is viewed in terms of working out the areas of privacy, recognition of sexuality, and defying the impositions arising out of conventional roles, especially that of mother.

Thus, trapped in a socio-cultural milieu women suffer inwardly in the novels of both Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. Marriages fail due to lack of understanding between man and woman. While Deshpande’s protagonists are depicted as women with a new sensibility and a new impulse, they are self confident and self assertive. Desai has given a new dimension to the Indian fiction in English by shifting her focus from the objective to the subjective and from the communal to the personal.

Thus, the problems and issues pertaining to women are the chief thematic concerns in the works of Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, and Arundhati Roy. These writers depict the world of women with utmost frankness. Their writings give an insight into the
unexplored female psyche, which was earlier inaccessible. Kamala Das is probably the first Indian woman to talk openly and honestly about the natural but hidden desires of Indian women, which made her distinct from her contemporaries. Shashi Deshpande presents a very true picture of the society and explores the realities behind the silence of women. Deshpande has moved a step further of the early feminist writers (who projected the suppression of women in ordinary life). Deshpande’s writings voice the suffering and tribulations of educated women, who are forced to rely on their male counterparts for the decisions of their life. Anita Desai reveals her persistent concern with the theme of anguish, anxiety, and psychological adaption that has been necessitated by threats to the individual's identity, and relation to reality. Many characters of Anita Desai find the real world too harsh, unpleasant, difficult, and also too complex. There is severe interrogation and the protagonists are torn between their search for authentic selfhood and the limitations of the human situation. Arundhati Roy presents the ugly side of people and society as a whole. Roy has made a revolutionary attempt to make the Indian community aware of the callousness of treating women as objects. Her women are sometimes passive and sometimes aggressive.

To sum up, the female protagonists of all the writers taken up for the study demonstrate ample courage and vitality to interrogate the repressive role of religion, culture, and society but desist themselves from following the paths as suggested by their western counterparts. Instead they seek to create their own paths.