CONTEXTUALISING THE ‘FEMALE IMAGINATION’: 
A STUDY OF SHASHI DESHPANDE’S SHORT 
FICTION

(ABSTRACT)

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“The Female Imagination: can we argue that it exists as a separate entity, that the mind learns its sex? Is there something about a great novel (whether by Jane Austen or Doris Lessing) that tells us it could only have been written by a woman? What-if any-are the elements that such a novel shares with many other forms of writing by women? And what, above all, can this tell us about women in general?” (Patricia Meyer Spacks. *The Female Imagination* Front Cover).

The term “Female Imagination” expresses ways of female feelings resulting from loneliness, oppression, depression, inner turmoil and alienation that women generally feel all over the world (Patricia Meyer Spacks). Over the ages women have tolerated immense pain subjugation and tyranny controlled by patriarchy. It is the woman’s inner conflict, restlessness to voice her pain and suffering inflicted over the years that has led her desire to break away from her predicament. Woman’s awareness of her predicament and sharing of female predicament have led to a better understanding of women’s lives. Such an understanding has also led to channelizing experiments into writings such as autobiographical memoirs, short stories and novels.

These writings have proved that female imagination is unique, since women’s experiences are unique to their sex and gender. Indian women poets from classical ages like Mira Bai, Andal, Akka Mahadevi to modern Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy remain truthful to their experiences as women and the real concerns of their writings remain faithful to their female imagination. The above argument is true also of western writers like Dorothy Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Margaret Atwood, Mary Shelley, and Toni Morrison. Patricia Meyer Spacks observes how women have exploited the hidden opportunities
of an oppressive situation, turning the disadvantages of expected feminine behaviour to advantage, using passivity as means to power, taking care of others as a vehicle for control and mastery, a limited existence as a testing ground for emotional growth. In *The Female Imagination* (1975), Spacks examines the female literary tradition of the British and American women writers, to examine how great women writers across the ages have felt, perceived themselves and have imagined reality.

Spacks examines the female literary tradition of western women writers like Jane Austen, Louisa May Alcott, Ellen Glasgow, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf and so on. Similarly, Showalter’s efforts to create a female critical framework within which to study women’s works based on female experience, gave a foundation for a female literary tradition. Such efforts by western critics helped create a canon of western women’s writing that focuses on women’s unique imagination. From the above arguments on Spacks’ idea of female imagination the researcher tries to understand, explore and conceptualize the idea of female imagination, which is relevant to any text of woman’s writing.

These women writers are conscious of the difficulty their works face or they themselves face while writing. Sometimes they undergo an experience of privation. Very often the novel or fiction has been women’s deliberate choice for literary writings. Writers like Jane Austen and George Eliot and others were realizing these precise modes of feminine expression while Spacks observed the dreariness of social frustration.

The research begins with an attempt to explore the following issues surrounding ‘Female Imagination’, with the intention to develop and relate the term to women writers in general and the author meant for study. Spacks’ critique asks
the following questions on women’s texts: Is female imagination an expression of female feelings? Does female imagination indicate that it is written by women? What are the elements of female imagination-understanding woman’s self, discursive voices within her, female narrator, discursive method of creation of woman’s text, woman’s sub-text (power in passivity etc)? How have women perceived themselves, their realities and their imagined realities? What is the connection between female imagination and female literary tradition or female expression of language and that of time or feminism and female imagination? All these questions and much more will be explored to understand whether this concept of female imagination could help to understand not only women’s writings but also Indian women’s writing.

Akin to Spacks’ use of both literary and psychological analysis to explore certain patterns that recur every time in women’s works, in Indian women’s text’s particularly fictional texts of writers like Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shashi Deshpande, etc., lend themselves to literary and psychological insights in their reading of women’s lives. Although attempts to create a female literary tradition is still at its infant stage in India, the Indian women writers do reveal signs of “ways of female feeling” (Spacks 3) that are typically Indian. Anita Desai’s women who are neurotics and rebels or Kamala Markandaya’s women, who are hypersensitive characters almost bordering on the abnormal could be cited as examples. Santha Rama Rau’s Remember for the House,’ (1956), Ruth Prawar Jhabvala’s first novel ‘To whom she will’, (1955) and her later novel ‘Heat and Dust’ (1975), Kamala Markandaya’s ‘Two Virgins’ (1994), Rama Mehta’s ‘Inside the Haveli’ (1977), and Geetha Hariharan ‘The Thousand Faces of Night (1992) are some of the leading
women writers writing in English. They write about the oppressed lives of women and the psychological sufferings of frustrated homemakers.

These women’s choice to write about women distinctly echoes what Patricia Meyer Spacks says in relation to women as a subject to women’s writing: “What is a woman to do, setting out to write about women? She can imitate men in her writing, or strive for impersonality beyond sex, but finally she writes as a woman: what other way is there? Examining the problems women reveal in imaginative writing, she will necessarily uncover her own” (*The Female Imagination* 35).

Women’s suffering is aired out in her fiction, she writes about her predicament and her lot in her works and her characters portray the universal suffering that women go through. Her inner turmoil, agony, pain is reflected in her female character. She writes about the struggles and challenges that women face by portraying them in her characters. If older writers like Anita Desai bring out women’s alienation in the society, a younger writer like Kiran Desai extends this disaffection of women suffering in an alienated social, political and cultural space.

There is a common woman’s experience that women writers express that Patricia Meyer Spacks explores, which is also observed in the Indian women writer’s works as well. Spacks examines the commonality of women’s experience. It is the way woman views herself, the way she expresses her desires and her deep hidden resentments. Writing for woman is a means for freedom. It is an escape and a letting out from her suppression. Her imagination creates possibilities, which may or may not be accepted. Spacks quotes the experience of writing by a woman writer Carolina Maria De Jesus whose words are quoted in *The Female Imagination*: “When I write I think I live in a golden castle that shines in the sunlight” (315).
Akin to Spacks’ use of both literary and psychological analysis to explore certain patterns that recur every time in women’s works, in Indian women’s text’s particularly fictional texts of writers like Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shashi Deshpande, etc., lend themselves to literary and psychological insights in their reading of women’s lives.

Although the Indian novel exhibits some semblance of serious research into female representation, the Indian short story in relation to women’s depiction remains critically unexplored even today, even though short story is one of the oldest forms of literature. An examination of the Panchatantra displays various topics ranging from human relationships, psychology, philosophy, and teaches the art of overcoming difficulties by wisdom and that of survival even amidst deceit, hypocrisy and evils of life. It was composed in India around 3rd century B.C and believed to be the oldest collection of fables in India but on a sub textual reading, women characters are observed to be speechless, dumb, ignorant, conspirators and seductive; woman is seen to be a sacrificial being and her womanly role model with the need of familial love to be proven through her readiness to face trials.

Another classical tale is the Jataka tales, which are popular stories of former lives of the Buddha. Many of these stories have their parallels in Mahabharata, the Panchatantra, the Puranas, Aesop’s Fables, etc. However, women’s position in these tales seems problematic and ambiguous, with women being temptress, defiled and unholy. Even the stories written in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century are a retelling of the folktales, legends and parables; and they tend to be anecdotal, sentimental and didactic in nature.
In comparison, the ancient Indian classics have proved to be a source of inspiration for the Indian short story writers. But the short stories also show a considerable influence of the western writers. After 1920s, the Indian short story in English reached its maturity. Three outstanding writers of short story, namely Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K Narayan uphold the Indian tradition and assert the Indian ethos. Post-independence, there came a change in the vision and perception of the writers towards female depiction. Their chief concern was to build a new India while dreams and promises for a better India are portrayed in their stories; the short story writers also reveal concern for women’s and feminist issues.

In short fictional writing, there are prominent women writers who have made the short story in English an effective tool for promotion of a secularized democratic culture quite at odds with the traditional pieties expressed on older ones. Some of these women writers are R.P Jabvala, Shashi Deshpande, Gauri Deshpande, Tara Deshpande, Anjana Appachana, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shalan Savur, Prema Ramakrishnan, Manju Kak, Gita Hariharan and Arundhati Roy. The question to explore about the Indian women writers mentioned above is, whether female imagination as seen in these writers, has been critically explored or even exhausted. Hence the concern of the study is how female imagination has been depicted in short fiction.

In this respect, Shashi Deshpande’s characters show likeness to other women writers in her short stories. It is Shashi Deshpande whose literary imagination centres on woman, her life, her thoughts about her life, her ideas, visions and hopes about herself / people around her, woman’s hallucinations and so on. Shashi Deshpande’s short story collections deal with the family, society, and women from all walks of life- from grandmothers, granddaughters, mothers, daughters, wives, to
women in general. These works deal with ordinary women and their everyday lives; they are middle class and educated women, usually from Hindu religion. These women, many of whom are housewives, suffer utter rejection, failure, loneliness, isolation and sometimes guilt and jealousy.

Akin to the writers discussed earlier, but much before these writers started writing, Deshpande has revealed the female imagination in different ways through many female protagonists. Some of her protagonists like Amba are rebels, strongly conscious of a personal sense of dignity. Keen on getting married to a partner of her own privilege and choice, and unwilling to enter a loveless marriage, Amba feels crestfallen when she experiences deception in love. She is transformed into a new woman and emerges as a woman capable of thinking and questioning. She realizes her intellectual capacity, potential and her moral strength. Deshpande adheres to the qualities identified in a woman with the various ways passing from feminine to female. Other protagonists give up their careers as seen in “A Wall Is Safer,” where the title is used both literally and metaphorically. It is a physical truth and a symbol of women’s confinement. The protagonist emotionally seeks freedom and self-expression but physically she is incapable of the struggle, being comparatively weaker than the leading female character in “It Was the Nightingale” and “The Stone Women.”

From the above examples, it becomes obvious that Shashi Deshpande’s women characterize a female imagination akin to Spacks’ contention discussed earlier. Deshpande has also written on how women look at their predicaments, for example, widowhood, childbearing, motherhood, woman’s loneliness, homosexuality, female relationships, etc. stories like “Rain” and “A Man and a Woman” are about passionate young widows who remarry. “The Alien” tells the
story of a woman who prefers to socialize. “A Wall is Safer” relates the story of a woman who longs for isolation. “The Duel” projects the picture of a woman who indulges in sensuality soon after the death of her husband and that of her children in a car accident from which she alone has escaped. In “The Window” Shashi Deshpande has written about homosexuals.

While the writer’s novels have received much attention in terms of critical output and scholarship, her short stories have hardly been critically examined, except by critics like Chandra Holm, Jasbir Jain and so on. The doctoral thesis “Contextualising the ‘Female Imagination’: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s Short Fiction” aims to explore the writer’s expression of female imagination in Indian short fiction with special attention to the complete short story collections of Shashi Deshpande. The thesis will attempt to understand and interpret her short fiction, guided by interdisciplinary approaches like gynocriticism and psychology that will enable the scholar to observe the female consciousness and imagination free from their masculine or traditional definitions. Primary and secondary sources including books, articles, journals, reviews, interviews, related to Shashi Deshpande will be examined for this purpose.

The thesis is chaptered in the following manner:

Chapter I – Introduction.

Chapter II- Female Vision of Life.

Chapter III – Female Narrator and Narrative Management.

Chapter IV – Representation of Family and Relationships.

Chapter V – Woman as Philosopher.
Chapter VI - Conclusion.

Chapter I

Introduction

The first chapter “Introduction” gives a summary of Indian short fiction, introducing the life and works of Deshpande and the relevance of Patricia Meyer Spacks female imagination and its contextualization in Shashi Deshpande’s short fiction. Here the researcher introduces the author’s life and works. Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938, in Dharwar, a small town in the state of North Karnataka, in Southern India. She is the second daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist and scholar, Shriranga, who taught Sanskrit in a college. She moved to Mumbai at the age of fifteen and later graduated in Economics, before moving to Bangalore, where she earned a law degree.

After getting married, she shifted to Mumbai. During her stay in Mumbai, she decided to pursue a course in journalism. So, she got herself enrolled in Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Thereafter, she took up a job, as journalist in the magazine, “Onlooker.” She worked there for a couple of months, and as she was working in the magazine she began writing, her first short story got published. According to Shashi Deshpande herself, she did not make a conscious decision to be a writer but stumbled into one out of ennui. She has written many short stories, several novels, four children’s books, besides several perceptive essays.

Though her novels are not within the purview of this research subject, it is interesting to understand the idea of female imagination in them. Shashi Deshpande’s first novel, The Dark Holds No Terror (1980) is narrated by the
protagonist narrator, Saru a successful physician, who suffers as a victim of sexual violence in the hands of her husband, who is unable to accept that his wife is professionally more successful than him. The novel deals with woman’s confrontation of her sexual dilemma and her coming to terms with it. Deshpande’s female imagination in this novel is unique, since it represents sexual/domestic harassment in a shockingly female point of view and asserts the importance of female experience of domestic violence to be seen from the woman’s point of view of interior monologue, flashback, etc. Another interesting novel noted for its female imagination is *Roots and Shadows* (1983), where, Indu, the narrator-protagonist, a successful journalist, returns to visit her maternal home where she had once felt alienated and distanced herself from, due to her non-acceptance in the family resulting from her inter-caste marriage. Her visit following her rich tyrant aunt’s death leaves her taking the role of the matriarch and getting involved with the problems of the family and her confrontation with the ghosts of her past. The novel’s presentation of extramarital as well as marital relations from the female narrators view once again proves that Shashi Deshpande’s literary imagination goes off the trodden path of presentation.

*That Long Silence* (1989), which won the 1990’s Sahitya Akademi Award and Nanjangud Thirumalamba award, takes off from the family crisis of Jaya’s husband losing his job, leaving them to escape and take refuge in their old familial home. In a familiar environment, there begins the woman’s journey down the memory lane and her altercation with her past; *A Matter of Time* (1999) also has a failed marriage as its narrative crux. Sumi, is the dumped wife left with three daughters and Gopal the husband, a university professor who walks out of their twenty-year-old marriage, leaving his job and almost everything behind. *The
*Binding Vine* (2002) reflects the rape of Kalpana, a teenage girl from the Bombay slums, with Urmi, the protagonist getting emotionally involved in Kalpana’s problems. More significantly, the politically motivated media hype following the incident of rape indicates larger patterns of not only class and gender oppression but also an examination of the political capital of such patterns as exploited by different groups in society, government and the mass media.


Over the years and in between her novels, Deshpande has written several volumes of short stories which run a parallel course to her longer works of fiction. Of the novelists writing in English in India, she is one writer who has kept a constant flow of short stories growing, stories that serve as a ground for experimentation of themes, ideas, attitudes and narrative approaches. Five of these volumes have been published by Writers Workshop, Calcutta. Of these, *The Legacy* (1978) also happens to be her first published book. It is now prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University, USA. Three volumes, *It Was Dark, It Was the Nightingale* and *The Miracle* appeared in 1986 clearly indicating that the writing of the stories spreads over several years. The fifth volume brought out by the
Writers Workshop is *The Stone Women and Other Stories*, which came out in 2000. Her nonfiction work comprises *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*. She has also done some translations of her illustrious father Sriranga’s works into English like, *Opening scenes: Early Memoirs of a Dramatist and a Play* (translated from Kannada) and also *Nirgathi* by Gauri Deshpande (translated from Marathi).

Shashi Deshpande’s works, particularly short stories, which centre woman in their narratives, will be examined for their female imagination. For this purpose, the scholar will examine Deshpande’s texts for their female vision of life, family, relationships and view the female narrative art and the philosophy that emerges out of the short fictional narration. Since the study is based on the scholar’s assumption that the female imagination influences Deshpande’s work, the uniqueness of such a female imagination will be explored and analyzed through a study of her woman-centred texts.

Stories like “The First Lady” present the portrait of an old woman whose personality is at variance with her public image. “The Sweet Antidote” portrays a sophisticated woman who decides to share her husband with her maid-servant in the interest of domestic harmony and smooth running of her home, almost like Ibsen’s heroine in his play *Ghosts*. The story “Madhu” centres on the prejudiced attitude of a mother towards her outlandish but affectionate daughter, and her friendship with an old family friend. In “The Valley in Shadow”, the heroine, being physically handicapped, experiences an acute inferiority complex. While on a holiday with her family at a resort, she feels it more as she watches her husband and child enjoying together. “Death of a Child” takes a revolutionary stand, against the conventional norms of child-bearing and motherhood. “Why a Robin?” is the story of a mother, who feels emotionally distant from her daughter, eventually reaches out and bonds
with her at the time when the daughter attains puberty. The stories summed up above bring out a wide variety of themes that Shashi Deshpande’s stories attempt. Secondly her truthful projection of facts directs the reader to contemplate on the unusual perspective that issues forth from the female centred imagination that pervades her fictional works.

Like Deshpande many short story writers have many similarities and dissimilarities in themes, characters, and style though they respond to the same time, place and circumstance. They have two types of writing which is experimental and traditional. But in both kinds of writing the female imagination is visible. Looking at the writing scene and particularly short story writing back home in India, Cornelia Sorabji was the first Indian short story writer with impressive work to her credit; in addition to her work as social reformer and legal activist, she wrote several books, articles and short stories. One of her short stories is Love and Life behind the Purdah 1902, concerning life in the zenana, viz women’s domestic quarters, as well as other aspects of life in India under colonial rule. Female Imagination is depicted in her works in the form of the woman’s self-awareness and struggle for independence rather than for virtue. Her works portray certain patterns of self-depiction that survive change.

Similarly, Suniti Devi Sen who was the Maharani of Princely state of Koch Bihar, also a women’s rights activist at heart, is an important short story writer in the early part of the twentieth century. Her writing also establishes a female literary tradition, as she was influential in women’s reform movements during both her husband and son’s reign. Her women characters seem to be inspired by true events of her time and they are virtuous just as girls are portrayed as kali-ma. The women here seem to be struggling to find something, whether to retain the love of their lord
or to retain their place, lest it be filled by a new wife. They are under self-willed domesticity.

In the post-independent era, a new class of women writers emerged, their writing expressing a new urge to explore new sexual mores, fresh possibilities in human relations, marriage and motherhood. These qualities were not experienced in male writers of short fiction because male writers depict circumstances and situations from a male perspective; the male narrator’s grand and moral vision is distantly alienated from the individualistic female vision that many writers expressed.

As already discussed Indian women writers in their writings characterize a unique female imagination that constitutes their narratives, either in the form of their expression of women’s feelings, narration of their personal lives, women’s self-perception, or women’s yearning for her voice, or how woman views her oppression, or woman’s struggle and several other dimensions. For example, Shashi Deshpande or Anita Desai depicts a woman centred approach in their writings; their women are also suffering women, though endowed with a feminine sensibility that emerges into a feminist consciousness. Hence there emerges in her works a female vision of life.

CHAPTER II

Female Vision of Life

Women see the world differently. What they see is explained by what they notice and hold important. Woman’s vision is also her most powerful tool, since it widens the scope of her relation and environment within family. However extra-
ordinary the power of the female vision and however beneficial it has been to society, woman’s vision and its extent is difficult to measure. The researcher would like to commence the chapter here with the above notion on women.

The vision of the Indian woman can be seen to create an altogether Indian feminist perception of life, which is not open and outright rebellious against her suppression, or escape from her familial/professional responsibilities. Rather these women tend to resolve issues not through escape but by confrontation of their problem, especially domestic issues. More than a man the woman’s vision is seen to be inseparable from family and nurturing. Such a woman’s realization that after all a woman is a being, she is not just an appendage to man is indicative of a woman capable of independent thinking. These thinking women become so because of their sufferings and how they internalize their sufferings and become women who not only will behave and act according to the rules set for them but also decides that they will act according to their own norms.

This creates a new perspective of action balanced between acts of rebellion and independence and hence it is unique. This unique vision realized by these women may not be seen in all Indian women writers who have written on female rebellion against the male dominated Indian society whether the rebellion is internalized or radical or extreme. Indian women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Gita Hariharan, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Anita Nair, Nina Sibal, Namita Ghokhale, Dina Mehta, Sara Banerjee, Bapsy Sidhwa, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, Gita Mehta, Shobha De, and Jhumpa Lahiri project a certain kind of female vision of life which emerges from their writings. In tune with the above Indian women writers,
Shashi Deshpande’s works also reflect a unique approach to her women characters. Her protagonists also are depicted as women capable of independent thinking and reasoning. Deshpande’s thinking women are also found to be discontent with the cultured roles they are expected to perform within the Indian patriarchal system. These women are capable of comprehending and aware of how woman is culturally and socially oppressed. This leads her to oppression within the parameters set for her, within which she tries to lead her life without upsetting her family life and its peace.

Such a Deshpandian woman will not go against her roots, nor will she rebel against her culture or social set up and this becomes her incapacity to start any rebellion. Very often this leads her to a confused perception of how to choose between her culture, tradition and the new world. The chapter on “Female vision of life” explores the woman’s vision of life as represented in Shashi Deshpande’s short fiction, specially critiquing the following: woman’s culture, female roles in society, marriage. As a writer, Deshpande expresses genuine concern for the social problems of women in general and middle-class women. Shashi Deshpande is undoubtedly deeply connected to her culture; and at the same time does not allow her culture to ignore the everyday mundane and ordinary experiences of women. Hence her writings observe the usual and the ordinary with intelligence, insight and learning.

Her works usually centre on women’s consciousness. The “female consciousness” thus becomes as expressed in the central narrator, who is also woman, becomes the vital energy in her fictional works. Deshpande’s women will not resort to extreme rebellion but will also not passively accept her situation. This she does through her acute awareness of her multiple roles as a woman rejecting
both extreme rebellion and simply accepting her situation. Consequently, the Deshpande woman takes the middle path. As Deshpande discussed in an interview with the scholar, she mentions about the scenario of writing when she started writing her short stories which was in the 1970’s

…the world was different then. At that time the challenges women faced were different, so they only wanted to get out of the limited life, the small circle, not outside that circle. It was asking questions more than seeing a positive vision of oneself of one’s life. Women wanted to just get out of restrictions. It took women a long time to even come to the starting point of the race while men were already much ahead in the race (3)

Over the year’s women have meekly submitted and performed their duties without any questions or grudges. From what Deshpande described further the scholar could deduce the following ideas: Woman has always been a giver and a care taker. Then there comes a point in time when, while performing her duties and completing her tasks, she realizes that she is missing out on something and thus has no satisfaction even when she has completed her tasks and done her best. This calls for a self-seeking and a self-asking and probing and there is no feeling of completeness even when she has fulfilled her duties and all that is expected of her. There is an unexplained loneliness lurking beneath her. This therefore leads to a further questioning and realization. Such an experience could be interpreted thus - It is an inquiry with the self. Therefore, the root of the female vision could be examined by understanding the female environment and worldview existing in her generation. Hence Deshpande reports thus - The problem that was the most
persistent then was to ask questions, more than anything else it was asking questions from oneself of themselves of their own lives, to want to move out of restrictions. Deshpande reveals how these women try to escape from these given roles. They may escape from culture-bound roles but not from nature-bound and hence there is no route to escape, particularly from being a sexual partner. (Renganathan 139) Woman’s responsibility as a sexual partner thus is realized by Deshpande’s protagonists who view love, marriage, etc. from a newer angle, thereby allowing these explanations to enable them to assume a female approach to marital problems.

Marriage too is viewed as an indirect expression of lust and hence marriage in India is viewed as two people bought together, like animals after a lot of bargaining only to mate, reside together and to procreate in order to enable humans to move forward. Deshpande highlights that love is usually never seen in marriages and in some stories the couple gets married due to love but as the years pass by many factors come in between and the love disappears. Likewise, marriage is projected in the Indian society as the goal of a woman’s life and she has to live her whole childhood and adolescence preparing for it, but when it eventually happens she experiences a world entirely different from what she was expecting; thus, she now has to live with her suppression and responsibilities - the reality for a married Indian woman and so she is highly disillusioned.

Another significant female vision that surfaces from women’s writing is the woman’s quest for identity. The quest for identity in woman could be described thus: the longing to be accepted and to create or make a niche for oneself, to have an identity of her own achieved or created by her own capacities and capabilities, to be acknowledged for her achievements or efforts and to be a master of her own self, where she can assert or express her will, feelings, desires etc. . What is unique about
this vision is that woman generally endures great amount of pain, insult, suffering, subjugation, etc in a patriarchal society, and yet she will not allow her suffering to disrupt the happiness of her family. Though such a vision characterizes a traditional response to life, woman’s effort to voice the voiceless or voicing her silence to give her private perspective is in itself a unique attempt. Hence the female vision of life is to break the silence.

Such characteristic female worldview of life is found in many other short stories of Shashi Deshpande. The writer’s worldview emerges from her discussion on the following subject matters such as female submission, women’s silence, obedience, patience and her reluctance to disrupt her family’s harmony. Deshpande’s expression of the female vision is not rebellion in its fierce sense. A phallocentric critic might think that a woman writer’s imagination cannot go beyond family and relationships. But on the contrary Deshpande’s imagination is emphasized in her definite choice to image a woman confined to family and tradition.

The very choice of Deshpande to image a family woman reveals her emphasis on woman’s psyche and what it feels like to be a woman, a homemaker, a mother and so on. Such psychic experiences lead Shashi Deshpande’s women to quest for identity to move beyond suffering. Deshpande deliberately explores these problems through the female consciousness by making her female characters intensely introspective. Most of the stories shape Deshpande’s conviction that woman’s true existence emerges from self-affirmation that leads to self-control. There always comes a point in a woman’s life when one may revolt against the stored-up indignities. Over the years women face insults, dominion, oppression, disrespect and suppression which results in immense pent up emotions or insults.
Deshpande portrays her woman thus as voice of silence that gets transformed to voice of revolt. So, if Deshpande’s women are preservers of family and tradition, and at the same time they suffer the patriarchal oppression, which they are not ready to leave, then what is her female vision? Also, how is this vision akin to or opposed to the feminist vision? The answer lies in the following observations: her short stories delve deep into the female psyche; she outlines the woman’s quest for life and the search for her place in the complex reality of life. However, they create a female vision in voicing the voiceless lives, environments and visions of women. Her characters move from trajectory of problems to a new vision through a self-analysis of questioning themselves about the existential problems faced by a woman. Such a vision only divulges the truth that the traditional Indian society provides little scope for the independent growth of a woman. Hence, she must live through restrictions and inhibitions throughout her childhood, youth and old age. Deshpande’s vision is revealed in her exploration of moral and psychic dilemmas of her women characters along with their efforts to cope with these challenges.

Such a feminist vision expressed in Shashi Deshpande’s works is like that of the western feminists. Many western women writers give voice to their woman’s concern and they have defied and rejected the stereotyped image of the angel in the house, through their works that represent the image of a submissive housewife, mother, daughter, sister, etc. They also criticize explicitly as well as implicitly the patriarchal values. In Shashi Deshpande’s case, female writing inspired from the west helped construct bridges. Although Shashi Deshpande admits that Simone de Beauvior’s book *Second Sex* impacted her the most, and influenced her ideas, her writing is grounded to the Indian reality.
Shashi Deshpande portrays women in varied dimensions. There are women who do not want any more children, and instead prefer to die, while there are others who prefer an abortion, as they feel caged, in womanhood. She further engages her characters in a feminist discourse on the female secrets of the family, woman’s troubled sexuality, lesbianism, woman’s failed marriage, her suppressed desires, her feeling of lack of freedom being caged in a traditional society. Shashi Deshpande also brings in varied facets of women such as a dying woman who cannot remember the name of her mother who died giving birth, mother, mother-in-law, and characters from epics (Sita, Draupadi, Kunti etc).

Therefore, Deshpande’s imagination lies in giving shape to female experiences and delving on the importance of their psychic power and social passivity. Similarly, female imagination is experienced in Deshpande’s short stories in the female ‘ways of feeling’ in various life situations as observed in the story of a woman’s rape during honeymoon in “The Intrusion,” where the woman narrator feels that not only her body but also her senses, space and her personal life are under male gaze and intrusion. “The Intrusion” is the most articulate in its feminist feelings because it is more prudent, and it is also the most real and significant account of the author’s vision of woman’s position in the Indian society. In the traditional Indian society, woman’s identity is assumed to be merged with the male one. All women’s reactions are supposed to be guided and dictated without any hope for the assertion of self-identity. The female worldview that Shashi Deshpande brings out in her fiction projects pertinent issues, such as woman’s suppression, intrusion into woman’s body, woman’s sense of rejection, alienation and depression, and her ironical choice to remain within the family rather than escape from her suffering. Like in “The Intrusion” Shashi Deshpande explores marital discord and
woman’s dilemma in wedlock from the woman’s point of view in several short stories.

The story “A Wallis Safer” narrates Hema’s choice to give up new career to be a homemaker and help enhance her husband’s profession. However deep inside there is a longing in her to break free. Almost all stories of Deshpande emphasize Indian woman’s story of compromise she makes at different stages of life, with the writer’s focus here on voicing the voiceless. In “The Awakening” a young girl is suddenly brought into the mature world and asked to behave accordingly; in “I Want…” a girl gives up her wants and has to agree to marriage. Similarly, the wives in stories like “It Was the Nightingale,” “A Day Like Any Other” and “The Liberated Woman” give in to their plight, no matter however dreadful it is. This leaves the above short stories to sketch the unnamed, the least glamorous caricature – the Indian housewife – and present her worldview, a worldview that brings out the helplessness, the woman’s sacrifice at the same time not-a-sacrifice but the attitude of the smug and passive woman who prefers to choose familial life even after marital discord or the lonely housewife and her limited choices in her traditional middle class or upper middle-class society.

If Deshpande’s exploration and understanding of women’s life in modern middle-class societies described so far reveal a feminist worldview, an examination of the mythical worlds too designate that she makes a unique exploration of ancient voices of women and a feminist dwelling into the past. Her epic characters like Draupadi, Amba, Sita and Kunti, Deshpande highlight primarily women who undergo immense isolation, deprivation and severe pressure of marital life. Many stories of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana have proved that women have had no voice. Interestingly it is such women’s lives that are voiced by Deshpande who lets
these women to verbalize their inner turmoil. Amba, Kunti, Gandhari, Sita, who otherwise are viewed from male perspective.

In Deshpande’s narrative Mahabharata is viewed from Draupadis’ perspective. Another unheard woman’s voice that Shashi Deshpande ventures into Mahabharata is Gandhari in the story “Hear me, Sanjaya..” Gandhari’s act of blindfolding her eyes on learning of her husband’s blindness has been explained in different ways. The conventional explanation focuses on Gandhari’s image not associated with her husband. From the female viewpoint Shashi Deshpande perceives Gandhari’s blindfolding act as an act of anger and self-punishment that reveals her disappointment in being married to a man who is blind. Deshpande’s exploration of female vision through myths or mythical women is unique. Simone de Beauvoir observes that myths organize the welfare of men and authorize their dominance. Beauvoir says that mythology validates the curtailment of women in male-dominated society. The women in these mythical stories are usually never rebellious but obedient, submissive, meek and revealed as objects of male fantasy.

Also, passivity is used as a means of power in Shashi Deshpande. Her ‘female imagination,’ particularly emerges from a female point of view and female perspective of the Indian middle class life, with woman centred in her fictional world. Self-inquiry and self-discovery enable women to let go of their closed inner quietness with their self-probing leading to eventual self-discovery. However, the whole process of self-discovery begins with passivity that makes the woman wake up under pressure. It is a much-disciplined passivity. Another interesting dimension that Shashi Deshpande’s female narratives offer is a gradual progressive development of characters especially the protagonists from the short stories to her novels. There is an interconnectedness of themes that also provide an interlinking of
the female vision of life. The short story “A Liberated Woman” of a female doctor’s experience of sexual assault by her husband (who is intimidated by her professional success) echoes both the thematic and visionary story of Saru in Deshpande’s novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*. There is a microcosmic vision in her stories contrasted with her macrocosmic ones experienced in her novels.

Various recurrent images in the short stories focus on her journey, her suppression and her voicing out through these images and symbols. Deshpande uses certain symbols which keep appearing in various stories like the symbol of the sea expressed in “The Intrusion.” Apart from the symbols of the rain and the sea, Deshpande uses animals too. Birds express freedom in her stories and the parijaat tree is used in stories like “Travel Plans” to symbolize a curse. Hence, Deshpande’s aesthetic vision in narrating woman’s point of view is expressed significantly through her titles, images, symbols spread out in her short stories.

Deshpande uses women as story tellers to reiterate the omniscient perspective of women’s world. It reveals that the world of Shashi Deshpande’s fiction is essentially and understandably the woman’s world or the world as a woman sees it. For this purpose, she makes use of narrative techniques such as back-story, flashback, flash forward, foreshadow metaphors, similes, personifications, hyperbole, alliteration, imagery, symbolism, narrative perspective or point of view etc. The essence of which will be elaborated in the next chapter.
Chapter-III

Female Narrator and Narrative Management

Narrative in general is defined in the following way: “Narrative is the expression of actual human experience, in the form of personal stories” (Emily Thaden). Though there are different definitions of narratives, the study here makes use of narrative only in the above sense. Incidentally stories are communications that charm our intellect. They are constructed from history, culture, character and all forms of human communication. Stories as a narrative of human life is the most humane and lively form of communication. Hence the importance of narratives: “We dream in narratives, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative” (Hardy 5) A major portion of human activity is carried on by narrative statements of cases and experiences. Since each human is bound to have accumulated knowledge of the living and can relate indirectly to the tales heard from others, or personal stories witnessed or read in literary works or films, these stories or the writers’ own experiences become the foundation for their writings. For example, Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury encompasses a story told by four different narrators, thereby enabling the narrative to be told from four different points of view, the novel ending with a complex idea of truth. The diverse literary devices found in general in narratives are style/structure, theme, setting, plot and character. Several narrative techniques such as back-story are used when the author feels it important that the reader should learn something which has already happened before the real events explained in the narrative. The readers do not experience this event in the story line.
Rather, the narrator lends us this back story prior to the actual initial event that we do experience.

Thus, in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1998) his second novel which is a memory novel made up of the characters’ memory, imagination becomes the guide of the narrator. Further the flashback technique is also used here, when the anonymous narrator recalls in flashback the places and people Tridib has told him about twenty years ago. This is looking back using memory and the difference of time and space clouds as recollection changes past events into a feeling of what was lost. Similarly, some of Shashi Deshpande’s short stories use this backward storytelling in stories like “And What Has Been Decided?” “Lost Springs,” “The Legacy” etc. where, with the use of a flashback technique, the storyline goes backward to display something that happened prior to the important events of the story which has relevance to the present story. Besides the above, narrative analysis is an essential component to understand Deshpande’s narrative, where the writer narrativizes his/her narrator.

Deshpande abstains from the straightforward narration and she rather employs flashback narration. In most stories, Deshpande’s narrator is the heroine, engaged in stream-of-consciousness monologue. A crisis in the heroine’s life comprises the root of the narrative in most of her fictional work whether novel or short fiction. The narrator explains the situation in hindsight as the narrative goes back and forth in time. Deshpande’s fiction centres on woman. Most of the stories present a first-person narration, which brings the reader closer to the story. There is also an omniscient narrator, in most of the stories.

Some of the stories contain monologues or interior monologues, where the protagonist speaks to herself or sometimes to himself, while others present dialogues
and third person narration. Several stories have a narrative hook, while others follow the flashback technique, yet other stories are told in media res or (in the middle of things) and yet some others have a story within a story. “The Legacy” uses flashback techniques, and backward storytelling; also, a story like “And What Has Been Decided?” is a monologue that divulges Draupadi’s innermost thoughts. Like “The Legacy”, “Lost Springs” also uses flashback technique, where the tone of narration shifts suddenly from the past to the present and vice-versa. “A Day Like Any Other” employs a third person narration with the two women busy in a personal dialogue. “The Cruelty Game” has a narrative hook because right at the beginning, it begins with “IT’S BAD NEWS” or “How Does a writer write about himself?” Almost, all the short stories start in medias res, where the story begins in the middle of a sequence of events, and “The Story” is a story within a story, or a frame story, where one tale is told within another one. Almost all the stories end abruptly or suddenly and offer no solutions to the given situation or story and thereby leaving them open-ended. Most short stories of Shashi Deshpande have a non-linear narrative or disrupted narrative structure, where events are portrayed out of chronological order, by using the method of recall of human memory. Others are in linear narrative structures, where the narrative runs smoothly in a straight line, and it is not broken up, it is an ordering of events into a meaningful pattern.

Stories like “The Duel” are interesting, as it follows a backward storytelling, where the denouncement is shown first and explained through the plot and the ending comes as a shock. These are some of the narratives used in these short stories in comparison to yet other types of narratives like dream sequence, repetition, different characters’ point of view, multiple plot-lines converging at the end, flash forwards, pre-figuring of events that have not yet taken place, brief narration, long
narration, serial narration, and partial narration. Some of the narratives used by Deshpande in the short stories are flashbacks, different time frames, circular plotting where we are led back to the beginning and backward story telling. Deshpande narrates mostly in the first person and because of this she enables legitimacy to the experience narrated, therefore, allowing the evolution of a willing suspension of disbelief. Her short stories, and even her novels, can begin with any theme but eventually depict women. Deshpande’s stories project lives of married women (“A Liberated Woman”), mothers (“Why a Robin”), housewives (“A Day like any other”), single women (“And Then...?”) widows (“A Man and a Woman”), and husband and wife relationships (“It Was the Nightingale”). These stories revolve around women’s lives, challenges, relationships and situations. The narrative moves along with the women’s emotional, psychological, intellectual problems and their needs and conflicts, as the women emerge from their roles within a traditionalist and orthodox society (“The Legacy”).

Though Shashi Deshpande adopts various narrative styles, the authorial narrative style lends a unique touch. Shashi Deshpande may not be exemplarily different; she does not initiate something new in her projection of women. Also a unique sense of camera eye-view narration is felt in many stories because they are told in first person narration; this lends authenticity to her narration. The first-person narrator explains the woman’s challenges as an insider. Many familial happenings are observed as the narration is taken over by the first person omniscient or omnipresent narrator whose observant eye notices everything. Deshpandian female narrator’s attitude to the woman’s predicament characterizes an awakened woman’s voice in her works.

Sometimes the authorial voice and the narrative voice seem to merge
particularly, when it voices issues like marital rape. Hence Shashi Deshpande accepts that in “The Intrusion” the female voice merges into one author/narrator/character. Other than female narrations, in some stories Shashi Deshpande employs male narrators also, once again creating a distinct male narrative voice. Her location of home is dreamlike, filled with characters, and narrative voices. These voices move between female, male and various experiences that focalize interestingly. A multi voiced text is also displayed as Deshpande’s text is narrated in the form of dialogues that portray the different dimensions of the story. Moreover, they are dialogic because the stories are not yet narrated and they move about in the world of characters. Deshpande’s use of shifting narrative circumstances, also a multi perspective mode of narration is best represented in her use of a combination of both first person and third person narration. Another narrative style adopted by Shashi Deshpande is the deliberate denial and defying of the male point of view. The story “The Stone Women” relies on the fact that women have been shown and portrayed from a male point of view in literature, and in most art forms.

The female narrator also becomes the spokesperson against violence on women, narrating through different stories the plight of rape victims, including marital rape as in “It Was Dark” and “The Intrusion.” In “A Liberated Woman” the jealous husband rapes his wife every night because she earns more than him and because she is professionally more successful than him. Feminist narrative style significantly narrates the female violations in the form of violence/physical oppression. Stories like “The Homecoming,” “A Man and a Woman,” and “The Cruelty Game” expose theme of female oppression in Hindu societies. In fact, “The Homecoming” is an extreme form representation of this theme, where the husband resorts to violence on his wife with the girl’s family not intervening, as wife beating
is not uncommon in their society. Other than Shashi Deshpande’s narrative style, narrator’s trait and narrative point of view, what characterizes Shashi Deshpande’s narrative management is the narrative attention given to certain women’s issues crucial to feminist understanding of them, like woman’s identity, her suffering, confusion and guilt etc. Pain, suffering and confusion are depicted in stories like “Mirrors” and “The Duel.” In the story “The Duel” the wife’s loss of her husband and children and the subsequent pain makes her give herself to another man. “Independence Day” “The Boy” “Waste Lands” “The Valley in Shadow” “The Last Enemy” “Hear me, Sanjaya…” “The Day of the Golden Deer” “And What Has Been Decided” are some stories rooted in the story of Mahabharata. Some of these stories depict Draupadi’s internal agony. The narrative attention in a story like “Retrospective” dwells on woman’s jealousy on another woman. The narrator in Deshpande’s short stories, asks several questions pertaining to the following subjects: marriage without the woman’s consent and the man trying to have a complete right over her body; the wife not being prepared for a physical union after marriage (in the story “The Intrusion”); the decision to carry and deliver a child which should consist of the permission of the woman (“Death of a Child”); the important decision to work at home or work out should be her own more than her husband’s, in-law’s, friends or society’s (in “A Wall Is Safer”); the topic of second marriage (in “The Cruelty Game”); and the topic of guilt and divorce (in “And Then…?”) Thus, women narrators in Deshpande’s work bring out a female imagination into foreplay, the ways of female feeling are common in the stories, their suffering, their resolutions, their way of handling their problems and their search for solutions except for a few stories. Women cannot be understood as weak, may be in the case of newly married and craving for total rights over their own
bodies; maybe the decision of terminating the third pregnancy, pointing to the fact that a woman has full right to decide if she will go on with her pregnancy or not; maybe as a professional lawyer who ignores her profession and learning for the benefit of her family and children and so is adamant to remain a housewife and gratify her motherhood; maybe it is rebelling against age old customs of widowhood and propagating widow remarriage; maybe a Hindu Indian married woman who decides and actually leaves her husband for his “skunk” attitude. These various women have dared to raise “voices” in their respective circumstances that too through the narrator almost every time. Therefore, the uniqueness of the female imagination is expressed by the female narrator whose discursive voice plays an important role in the short story’s narrative management.

Thus, in Shashi Deshpande one could recognize the woman’s voice from the narrative, as expressing a distinct concern for Indian womanhood and distilling out of her thought patterns a solution acceptable only to the woman:

   It is the voice of a solitary woman in the family situation, who thinks differently, who observes and responds to the people around her and tries to improve the situation around her not with a reformatory, but through a process of allowing the experiences itself to seep in and allow memories to interlace and flash back and forth, and finally render a solution, which may be acceptable only to her.

(Renganathan ‘To Keep My Light Burning’108).

Hence it is indispensable to examine family and relationships in detail, to understand the woman and family dynamics, the subject of which will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter IV

Representation of Family and Relationships

The family is of prime importance to an individual, as it centres one’s individuality within a safe cultural haven. Family symbolizes a kind of collectivism that provides continuity to individual identity. Strangely woman’s individual identity gets merged in the family. Woman’s life revolves around her family whether before or after her marriage. After marriage she becomes the caretaker, nurturer, upholder and the unifying bond and strength of her family. Her family then does not free her from complexes and challenges concerned with individuality, specially assigning her a complex status after marriage. In India woman is at the centre of the family; domestic life starts with her. She is the custodian of the family’s wellbeing, prestige, tradition and culture. Yet she is still to find her identity with equal status in the family she is born into and given in marriage.

Similarly, family is central to Shashi Deshpande’s works that represent family and relationships and even dwell more on relationships within and without the family viz between mother-daughter, father-daughter, husband-wife, and brother-sister. In short, the woman’s relationship with others becomes central to all familial relationships, with woman acting as the catalyst to them. Very often, the woman looks within to find her strength for her problems, and she finds a solution of hope and peace for her family. Just as woman is central to the family, family too along with its relationships play an important role in shaping the life and totality of a woman. The family is shown in positive light in Deshpande’s stories and they are basically Hindu families with its joint family system. So, these families and familial relationships have Indianness to it with its positives and negatives which are
typically Indian. There is also a looking backward through representation of family in the Indian epics. The family is very often seen through the eyes of a woman who is the narrator or central figure, since she is at the centre of the family. Relationships mould and shape her individuality and identity; or in other words, her relationships within and outside her family define her roles. At the same time, her centrality to family life does not denote her superiority, since very often, woman becomes an appendage, belonging to a father, husband, brother, son etc. Hence, her relationship is not free from male dominance.

Shashi Deshpande reiterates the centrality of women in her representation of family. The family portrayed by Deshpande is a large powerful paradoxical structure that belongs to the middle and upper-class Hindu background. Relationships within and outside the family are also examined by the author through the female narrator. The family is a space replete with human beings moved by love, care, pettiness, rivalry, patriarchal dominance, materialism, ambition, idealism. Deshpande attempts to closely examine man-woman relationships within the orbit of society and family; she basically focuses on the female experiences in life, reminding us of yet another example of Jane Austen with her limited ambit and restricted knowledge of the world. Like Jane Austen, Deshpande is more preoccupied with the challenging problems and the choking surroundings of her female protagonists. It is only when these protagonists fight firmly in this vicious and hard male-dominated society, that they discover their real identity as wife, mother, daughter, and most importantly as human beings.

Similar to western women writers, Deshpande’s heroines observe the power relations in the family. Charlotte Bronte observes the relations between women and
men as importantly involved with problems of power or power relationships. Bronte also comes through unmistakably much better than George Eliot, in describing accommodative relationships between women. Charlotte Bronte’s novels display a speculative optimism not unlike George Eliot’s. Regardless of their clear point on how women suffer, both these authors appear to consider it possible for women to receive emotional and moral contentment—not without difficulty, since the only alternative to relationship is solitude which is equally unbearable. Shashi Deshpande’s writings have a great affinity with these above writers, since she also brings out the male-female power relationships and the female-female harmonious relations. In a sense, the man-woman relationship brings to one’s mind the female writer witnessing the male gaze on such a relationship. The word ‘gaze’ is getting momentum in gender studies in studying the male-female relationships. The male is treated as subject while female is treated as the object. Feminist theories view the male gaze as revealing unequal power relations between the viewed and the viewer, gazed and the gazer which suggests that a man may be imposing his unwanted (depersonalizing) gaze on woman. This view of the male gaze further finds man as voyeur viewing the woman as an object of desire. While in the case of the woman, all that she can do is to only return the gaze, when she objectifies others by the gaze. Hence in relationships of power the one who gazes directs his or her gaze even to the same gender for non-sexual reason.

Regarding what has been discussed above one finds that it is true in the case of Shashi Deshpande’s short story “The Stone Women” (2003), which portrays the male dominance through its gaze. The gaze socially and figuratively looks prominent, controlling the object of its gaze. The title “Stone Women” itself indicates female as the object of the male gaze in the images of the women etched
out in stone around the walls of the temple. This story narrated in the first person, brings out the women carved in stone as objects of gaze, first by the creator or the stone mason, and then by the art connoisseur and tells the story of a woman’s vision of the male gaze to control her. For, the male gaze, dominantly patriarchal, decides on how to shape its pleasure principle. The female point of view that Deshpande weaves about the male gaze of objectifying women is the most interesting dimension of the story. The male gaze on the female body as an indication of voyeurism is proved to the woman when she observes her husband totally lost in his gaze of the stone carvings of female figures, with the male guide accentuating the gaze. The stone carved women in the story become a feminist edifice to ostracize the power of male dominance not only in society but also in architecture, art, language, and power politics particularly through the gaze. For, they might symbolize for the male the epitome of feminine beauty, while the stone women are lifeless and stagnant. The story thereby proves how women’s awareness of and her understanding of the male gaze helps them to resist gender stereotyping; it is a lesson in words on how the woman saves the male-female relationship from becoming stagnant through her act of resisting how the male gaze would influence her thoughts, actions and feelings, by growing beyond these stereotypes and refusing to identify herself with the stone carvings of female mythological figures.

It is obvious how myths glorify women, stereotyping them into characters and frozen into stereotyped relationships. Similarly, several mythologies, folklores and epics of India present woman and her various relationships, especially her relationship with the man, importantly as wife. Women writers in India are aware of the internalization of cultural ambition that women endeavour and they seek reconciliation in relationships rather than freedom from it. Shashi Deshpande is one
of the writers depicting these possibilities in her novels as well as stories. Here, the focus is on the recreated moments from the epics and mythologies in her *Collected Stories, Vol.1 and Vol.2.*

Deshpande fictionalizes epic situations that conventionally blame or to idealize the woman for her nature through her re-viewing, re-reading and re-interpreting women. While Sita Parityaga in *Ramayana* aesthetizes Sita’s sufferings, Deshpande sketches how Sita suffers due to husband Rama giving in to societal pressure because of which she must renounce her life (“The Day of the Golden Deer”). Similarly, Deshpande weaves her story away from the conventional viewing of Draupadi’s role in the culmination of war in Mahabharata, as sprung from her negative relationship with Duryodhana (“What Has Been Decided”). Amba’s motif of revenge is justified by the writer who narrates Amba’s death as due to her lover’s denial to marry her and due to the male failure to respect her dignity (“Inner Rooms”). Equally, “The Last Enemy” explains the spiritual enhancement of Duryodhana and his relationship with his wife. Likewise, “Hear Me, Sanjaya…” depicts the story of Kunti, the unmarried mother and her struggle with the various relations in her life. Usually these sections, situations and moments from epics achieve a judgmental or moralistic vision. But the same representation of women based on epics in the fictional works of Deshpande re-evaluates and re-creates these female representations. Thus, each of these stories is unique because the writer leads our attention to an alternative perspective led by narrators who are women and narrate their experiences as real or as normal and ordinary women.

Consequently, Deshpande’s re-represented mythical female protagonists like - the conventional, exalted Sita, who wanted the golden deer (“Day of the Golden Deer”), Draupadi- the adamant woman for whom the war was said to have been
fought (“And What Has Been Decided?”), Kunti- the unwed mother (“Hear Me, Sanjaya...”) – emerge as individuals with isolated voice and unique cognizance associated with their lives. These fictional narrations’ appeal depends largely on their voicing their protagonists’ practicality and mature reasoning of their experiences. These women talk with a spiritual awareness, with their empathy towards people like Bhishma, Ravana or even the society emerging from this understanding. So, they are represented as strong mythical heroines commanding honour for their patience. In the above redefinition of mythical women, Shashi Deshpande succeeds also redefining women’s relationship with men in the epics.

Relations between men and women turn sour in some of her stories like the story “Inner Rooms” wherein Shashi Deshpande, borrowing the plot from the Mahabharata, shows the anger, humiliation, disgust and suffering of the princess of Kashi, Amba. She kills herself in despair and later is reborn as Shikhandi, the woman who finally kills Bhishma. Deshpande asserts that after being suppressed, women want a little detachment from society. During withdrawal, they question their inner psyche and try to comprehend their personality, their inner strength and their secret capability.

Deshpande’s women have various roles within the family that go to define their relationship within family; one of such roles is that of the mother. She shifts the mother from the “hallowed” altar of worship and places her among us: not a goddess but a woman facing the struggles and the realities of life. She is not the prototypical “Terrible Mother” nor is she the great hearted “Mother Earth” who cares and feeds everyone. She is simply one of the fallible humans, likely to be accused, challenged and unwanted, while alive or after death. A mother’s relation to the family cannot be exalted in the works of Deshpande they too are humans complete with errors and
flaws, sometimes rude and at other times harsh. She might be the impressive Indu or Akka or the ever-accusing Ai of Saru but she has no power to sustain or control her daughter. Deshpande also depicts rape victims in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *The Binding Vine* and short stories like “It was Dark”. For instance, Sarita thinks that she is a victim of “legalized” rape. A father rapes his three daughters which kindles Sarita to stand up against this kind of behaviour so she commits adultery with Madhav. In *The Binding Vine* Mira is also raped and so is Kalpana. Deshpande’s heroines are also outraged towards marriage in all the three novels and some short stories. The female narrator examining, evaluating, and exploring family and relationships, also analyses herself and her relationship with others. Thus, Deshpande’s fiction mirrors relationships, whether man to man or woman to woman or man to woman.

In a story like “Mirrors” Sachideva expresses “I thought of you as the woman who had stolen myself. The truth is that it was you who really gave myself back to me”(*Col V.I 85*) The above quotation expresses the woman’s inspiration gained through her friendship and sharing of experiences with another woman. Centred round the theme of defiance these women form a bond. They yearn for self-assertion and through protest begin their quest for identity. “Lucid Moments,” is yet another example; the girls connect to each other as they are out to find their identity from their mother’s lineage in unison. “The Window” has an almost similar connection, though the only difference is that there is a lesbian undertone. But there are also stories depicting women against women relations, “Wastelands,” where the atmosphere is that of a jail and the women are all out against each other. We also observe the jealousy of the woman, attempting to interfere in the affairs of a couple
travelling together. Understanding that she will not be accepted as a third person, she commits suicide out of grief and rejection.

Deshpande depicts women’s emotions felt collectively in her short stories. The humble acceptance of life, or even hiding within one’s own self suggests “passivity” that tells of pain, hardships and suffering to the extent of even the breaking down of personality. For these women, to live “within relationships” becomes extremely important; therefore, their vulnerable attitude pronounces these women to a lifetime of subjugation. Thus, Shashi Deshpande contemplates upon the dilemma of women in the society of traditional India. She creates anew the different experiments of women who have undergone strict social and patriarchal norms.

The sexual and extramarital nature of Deshpande women’s relationships is something to be noted due to recurrence. Jaya has an affair with her neighbour, Kamat, Indu with her cousin Naren, Saru has an affair with Boozie her boss, but just like the protagonist in “A Liberated Woman” a married sadist tortures his wife but she bears all of it from a jealous husband in order to protect her familial relationship. Thus, the various experiences that a woman undergoes shapes her life and thinking; for her the family and her relationships are most important and she keeps them safe and intact and in the process philosophizes about her life and predicament which shall be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter V

Woman as Philosopher

A narrator philosopher studies the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence, which he/she becomes aware of in however miniscule a world that he/she inhabits. In a fictional work specially, narrator philosophers have a writerly behaviour revealing themselves as usually dissatisfied individuals looking for a solution ‘around’ them. They prefer contemplation of the problem and their own arrival at a solution ‘within’. The hero or heroine is part of the action; as he/she arrives at a solution he/she also arrives at a philosophy, a message. So, a protagonist narrator is not just a narrator but a narrator turned philosopher interpreting his/her predicament, analysing and probing into his/her existential problems. The philosopher as a lover of life and wisdom would also live according to a certain way of life, with his/her vision to resolve the existential questions about his/her conditions. The moral framework will take precedence and importance in situations, which in turn might provide a meaningful order to the narrator philosopher’s decisions. It is then that she attunes him/herself to the light within him/herself. The mind becomes a mechanism that organises and constructs understandings by simple ideas. The narrator philosopher’s way of life will be guided by some principles; importance will be given to resolving existential questions concerning her conditions. This longing for self-expression, independence and individuality particularly in the case of the woman, is to fulfil her desire first as a human being, irrespective of her roles as mother, wife, daughter, sister etc. It further proves the female narrator philosopher’s capacity for creative energy not only as a homemaker, mother or wife, but also as a professional or philosopher or as aesthetic creator, in which is rooted her longing for self-expression.
The woman’s longing for self-expression that emerges from the creative energy proves that aesthetic creative energy is not the sole ownership of males. For, creativity turns imaginative and new ideas to reality, to perceive the world and life in a new way, to discover patterns that are hidden, to generate solutions and also to think and produce; it is also gender neutral. It is creative energy that follows a course through the consciousness of the individual and finally derives from the collective unconscious, which makes the narrator protagonist a philosopher. Since the woman narrator interprets her predicament and arrives at philosophies by her own explorations, her philosophical exploration reveals a deep understanding of human psychology on her part. Particularly relevant here is Shashi Deshpande’s idea of the writer as a thinker or shaper of opinion or philosopher. For women in Deshpande’s works, philosophising emerges from woman’s long suppressed suffering, loneliness, suppression, rejection, alienation, and subjugation etc over the years. Her inner turmoil, her experiences and pain leads her to seek and realise and therefore philosophise. Shashi Deshpande’s female narrator is also a philosopher because she not merely narrates but also explores the middle class Indian life; she further interprets projects and theorizes serious issues related to middle class women. Such a narrator philosopher studies the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence, which she becomes aware of in however miniscule a world that she inhabits. She also studies the attitude that guides women’s behaviour and presents them to the reader as they are. The female protagonists are usually dissatisfied individuals who are looking for a solution ‘around’ them. They prefer contemplation of the problem and their own arrival at a solution ‘within’. The heroine is part of the action as she arrives at a philosophy, a message. For an instance, in “The Intrusion” the heroine raped by her husband on her honeymoon
trip, looks at her rape, not only as a victimised insider, but also develops a critique or interpretation, as a kind of ‘intrusion’ to her privacy. Therefore, the woman is not just a protagonist narrator, narrating her sexual oppression but also a philosopher, interpreting her predicament. Here philosophy becomes a balancing act between oppression and woman’s awareness of her oppression. However occasionally Shashi Deshpande’s female narrator thinkers do move from negative to positive states of mind as it happens in a story like “An Antidote to Boredom.” The wife’s affair with another man gradually leads her to awareness that they have no future and she is putting the security and safety of her family at risk: this leads her to sever all ties from her extramarital relationship.

Deshpande’s choice of woman-oriented subject matters further enhances the activation of philosophical narrations. Her short stories expose the suppression of women in our society, and discuss search for selfhood and her fight against various factors that shape her. According to Simone de Beauvoir “The true woman is an artificial product that civilization makes, as formerly eunuchs were made. Her presumed ‘instincts’ for coquetry, docility are indoctrinated as in phallic pride of man” (428). The root of the philosopher-narrator lies in the woman’s dilemma of being well educated and yet being aware of her trapped situation leading the woman to face a continuous battle with herself. The woman feels inferior and these things shape her personality negatively, lower her self-esteem and leads to loss of self-confidence and she courage to reveal her frustration or anger. Also, while Shashi Deshpande uses myths in her short stories to cull out the philosophical reality from an elusive world of imagination, women in such a world find peace, whether real or unreal by looking inward. Deshpande demythologizes the archetypes like Savitri and Sita by depicting their search for self-expression and self-identity. Such a reworking
of myths that tend to provide an alternate philosophical speculation is seen in the short story “The Inner Rooms” where Amba eventually derives inner peace only because of her own effort i.e., burning herself, by which, she achieves a solution to her life of agony, caused by patriarchal principles. Thus, though victimised, Amba makes a modern mythology of her victimization, and she therefore converts her anger towards her own willed freedom. These protagonists take to self-punishment as observed by Patricia Meyer Spacks in many eighteenth-century narratives by women and the same stands true for many of Deshpande’s protagonists like Amba, because society accepts identities for women only through relationships and not through their own accomplishments. Such an imaginative re-thinking of Amba reminds one of how even for eighteen century thinkers imagination was a very important concept.

Similarly, Shashi Deshpande’s exploration of philosophic reality in her writings leads us to the idea of importance of self. The narrative exploration of the female self-perceived in self-exploration of thoughts, ideas, events, relations, people, etc. A promising search for selfhood is essential. A search for self implies an individual’s quest for identity. Here the narrator turned philosopher arrives at the truth that solution to the woman’s problem has to begin with woman’s individual analysis and probing into her existential problems. Deshpande’s creative writing adheres to ‘acute self-awareness’ and it is this that offers an ‘existential strain’ to her short stories and novels. Besides, these women respect their families as they come from such a tradition where myths and values are imbibed right from childhood with the ideas from the west concerning expression. As she explores the self she comes to realize that though she is a product of culture she did not have any contribution in its making, as her self- identity is destroyed because of patriarchy, which does not
recognize her existence or experiences. She must take a stand for her sacrifices. This sort of desire to win back her experiences as a complete woman, and this realization is needed, thus she has to struggle untiringly to achieve self-identity. It also reveals a deep understanding of human psychology on her part. Deshpande’s women form a bond and yearn for self-assertion and through protest begin their quest for identity. Interestingly, almost all of Deshpande’s short stories have a moral ending thus emphasising the idea of the female protagonist as philosopher. In Deshpande the experience and learning, whether imagined or real brings out an articulation which is creative. Deshpande holds such an experience more important as it is the knowledge gained through own experience rather than what others state or base as theories. She asks questions and probes into situations which draws her interest. Thus, she deals with compromises and conflicts, agreements and disagreements, confirmations and ironies, victories and failures so on. Many a times the assertion of the self goes far beyond the restriction of social and familial rules This matured looking into the conditions of human life and knowing that only when a woman will philosophise into her situation can she bring about solution for her home constitute a major part of Deshpande’s writing. The narrator as self is one aspect but there is also the author’s reality through which the author expresses or the authorial self.

The authorial self is often lonely too; so, her characters are at times women who do not conform to the orthodox society, traditions, idealized identities, she has her share of struggles and sufferings inner subjectivity and the writerly self of the author herself, thus the narratology of the self. She writes of restoration and yet resistance. The writer is thus a keeper of conscience as well through self-learning and self-discovery. The author unravels various domestic problems that degrade these women her concern is for these women, their roles and their circumstances.
She also depicts these many types of oppression and women’s struggle for self-identity and self-respect building a certain awareness that is new and worthy of attention. There is a search for the position of a self, new consciousness which binds the hopes of a free world with the joy of a beautiful and happy self; it is a self-conscious narrative. Many of Deshpande’s short stories have a fluidity of narration and a psychological sense of time rather than following chronology and normal sequence. Further, the realization that a woman arrives at is due to her philosophic imaginations and her experiences of pain that she undergoes due to various factors and also due to dejection which hampers the imagination and creativity of a woman. As she cannot share this with anyone it becomes a burden, and many of them eventually die in that pain. The physical and mental pain strips them of their actual identity maybe even when their name is changed after marriage. These circles of pain may never leave a woman. But eventually pain becomes a way of self-discovery that allows a woman to take some very important decisions in her life. Deshpande’s protagonists reconstruct the different facets of the experiences of women and she tries to voice their ideologies which have become mute leading to resistance. She draws the inner colours of women, and she explores female psychology and world and rebuilds suppressed experiences of these women. Resistance also means asking questions, various questions which becomes a threat to a major ideology and leads to repressing any voicing. The society looks upon resistance by women as sin such as love outside of marriage, dressing up freely, financial independence, a woman’s sexuality, and out of these confrontational narratives are formed. These women then become either victims or suffer loneliness or still adhere with the normal.
Deshpande in her short stories tries to create a balance to resolve this crisis by probing into the consciousness of these individuals, allowing them to experience the silence as silence also is one of the powerful tool of resistance and disturbance within and thereby come face to face with their inner self and hence can empower themselves, and thus understand the situation and try to solve the problem thus realising a new self and coming to self-knowledge. Deshpande’s women as mothers are thinking women, who are aware of their social predicament. Through these mothers Deshpande shows quite a dissatisfied picture of marriage and family life. Women are convinced to believe that marriage and child bearing is the final goal of a woman; this belief is prevalent in almost all the cultures in this world and this brings the subordination of women. Deshpande’s mother figures debunk the normative belief that motherhood is the woman’s goal and that it is the most satisfying experience for a woman. There are many other aspects of motherhood which are ignored and eventually a mother is also just a mere human being, with all her needs, struggles, aspirations and shortcomings.

Sometimes the mother image is also depicted in rebellious spirit, as they refuse to neither conform to normative behaviours expected of a mother nor cater to mother as goddess image. They seem to be aware that though women are ranked as goddesses ironically, they are rather treated as doormats. These women can stand for their raped daughter (“It was Dark”) or abort an unwanted child (“Death of a Child”) or even become more powerful than other women (“The Cruelty Game”). They can also stand out or continue to stage a determined fight for their right as a mother (“Why a Robin?”); the widowed mother also does the same against her son who ignores her by subtly asserting herself (“And Then”). Hence, women continue to assert themselves whether strongly or subtly, even by trying to search their identity
or name from the female line of ancestors rather than the male one (“Lucid Moments”). These women do not conform to the usual definition of a woman, mother or wife which is given by men; rather these thinking women take control of their lives and of their children’s lives and their actions are moulded by the need and requirement of the situation rather than being a meek submissive slave. They will not rebel but by philosophising or thinking they will come to a logical conclusion and solution of their problem.

Women not only form a biological space but also a philosophical space, which comes from home making and rearing up children or taking care of them and the family; they also create their inner space through their search for identity as woman, the search for meaning in their existence. There arises an unresolved problem in the self that takes over a major part of the philosophical aspect of Deshpande’s short stories. Her short stories therefore can be called as philosophically resistant to imposing the ordinary and the mundane in the name of culture and tradition. Then gradually they tend to accept life through acceptance of life as restoration and finding solace in inner harmony. What is hence suggested is that there is no quick or simple remedy to the existential problems of life and there is not much that can be done about it. What the female protagonists usually do is to then take the course of inner harmony which makes life more bearable and living and coping with the problems of life easier. This is also the autonomy of the self, these women therefore also start to proceed living their life according to their own terms and conditions, their resistance is in their silences; this silence also plays a vital role in keeping the self from eroding away, they do assert themselves but not through escape methods, but through a very balanced order.
Though undoubtedly, they suffer shame, loneliness, rejection, pain, alienation etc, they achieve an inner strength, an inner vision and the ability to be restored or to compromise with their situation and stay put. So, they do not search for their solution or strength anywhere outside but they achieve their strength to endure and remain strong from within. Deshpande’s protagonist is also the woman who asks questions on herself, her own life, people and circumstances around her. She seeks her identity beyond motherhood, being a wife, sister etc. These women are intelligent thinking women created within short stories of a single moment of that cathartic instant or moments of change.

At the end, these women will not go back to where they started, the end is the beginning; they do not go back to square one. It’s an intelligent way of dealing with crisis and knowledge breaks prisons more than locks. They ask questions and are self-conscious. These stories also reveal the changing of the ideology from internalization of male values by acknowledging bonds between the women and their self-identity to emphasis on their rights. There are also women who shoulder the responsibilities of the entire family single handed because of their abandonment by the husband. Social transitions happen in society; and the woman also explores the intimate world of a man and a woman, woman’s frustrations, challenges and suffocations in marriage. All these factors display a female bonding and ways of female feeling, where questions of the self, become important. Thus, Deshpande’s female narrator expresses thought provoking philosophical experiences in various short stories.

Many a times this philosopher narrator is disillusioned because she has a dream of a perfect marriage or happiness but she realises that family life becomes unendurable or even the unchanging boredom, monotony and pattern. Hence, the
philosopher narrator thus moves beyond what Elaine Showalter states as the female phase which constitutes self-discovery or looking inward being let free from relying on any opposition following the path of a true search for one’s identity. This introspection can be a painful process as this self-revelation may not bring out the real self; it might bring out her own flaws and what she must face. This deep self-analysis helps these women think about themselves and reach a point of self-recognition. Once they become detached they can question their inner self and seek answers. They realise that the choice is theirs and they must themselves assert their individuality; the final choice is their own, because they realise that, perhaps many a times they are themselves responsible for their own destruction. Through an understanding and analysis of the self, coupled with courage and boldness they can change their lives; for the war is their own and no one will fight for them as they have to do it themselves.

Though the female narrator philosopher realises this self-actualization and its importance, many a times in the patriarchal system there are those women who even died in silence, many mothers, daughters, wives. The despair and struggle was so intense that only silence could subdue it. They also realise that if they were to voice themselves it may be in vain and fall on deaf ears. These women have been suffering from one generation to another. They also know about their roles and strength in the traditional marriage system of India and so, not willing to come out of such patriarchal systems of suppressions, they compromise. This does not mean that they are not unhappy and suffering, they are also confused and in pain at what the patriarchal system offers them, they choose to remain silent and suffering. At the same time, they convey the message that the joy and happiness of a family lies in the roots of understanding and communication in a family. These women are thus
women who think, examine themselves, and analyse themselves in introspection. As Dorothy Kois states: “Although women could not rewrite the rules that structured their lives they were extremely creative in crafting a space from within the prevailing gender system that gave them meaning, solace and dignity” (B. Kavya. 42). Thus, the female narrator philosophises, interprets her predicaments, and arrives at a philosophy of life through her own exploration. Also, most of Deshpande’s short stories have a moral ending thus emphasising the idea of the female narrator as philosopher.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The concluding chapter presents a summation of the thesis, reviewing the arguments put forth in the previous chapters. The chapters also underline the scope and limitations of the study of Shashi Deshpande’s short fiction.

The introductory chapter attempted the relevance of ‘female imagination’ in woman’s works in general and contemporary Indian women’s writing in particular and related it to Deshpande’s short fiction, then moved on to an introduction to Shashi Deshpande’s life and works. It discussed women writers from classic ages to modern ages, observing female imagination to be unique to women’s works. Many Indian women poets from classical ages like Mira Bai, Andal, Akka Mahadevi to modern Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, who spoke of their experiences as women were observed to express a female imagination unique to women. Their writings of female imagination were seen in the context of western writers like Dorothy Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Margaret Atwood, Mary Shelley, and Toni Morrison whose writings much earlier evoked a
female imagination that inspired Patricia Spacks to critique on their writings. These modern women writers wrote about sexual abuse, cruelty and violence and at times even infanticide and serial killing, all these denoting negative female experiences. The commonality of women’s experiences and female imagination which pervades their writings, the special female self-awareness, the use of psychoanalytical concept to explore texts – all these were discussed elaborately. In the light of the above discussion, this chapter further highlighted the multifarious possibilities that imagination creates for woman and her self-depiction and viewed the difference in the male narrator’s vision of life as different from female vision of life.

The second chapter entitled “Female Vision of Life” discussed Shashi Deshpande’s woman as voicing her thoughts in a familial environment and further discussed the following issues: how passivity is used as a means of power in Deshpande’s works, her female point of view and female perspective of the Indian middle class life, her woman centred fictional world and her recreation of Indian epics and myths in relation to female characters. It observed how Deshpande woman stands distinct in her balancing acts between rebellion and independence and how her quest for an identity helps her move beyond suffering; it further critiqued Deshpande’s positive and confrontational women characters that do not resort to extreme rebellion and do not suffer passively but rather take the middle path. These women are self-seeking, self-asking and self-probing that lead to the discovery of the self. This chapter thus viewed women arriving at answers by asking questions. The author voices the voiceless; the voices of silence become the voices of revolt, and the authorial vision aims to break the silence. This chapter further discussed the resistance discourse whereby the women are seen to probe questions on marriage, sexuality, tradition, motherhood etc.
Chapter III “Female Narrator and Narrative Management” focused on Shashi Deshpande’s stories narrated by female narrators in monologues or interior monologues or third person narration which brought out a female point of view to the subjects discussed in the short stories. This chapter discussed the various narrative techniques, tools, devices and narrative management that Deshpande uses in her short stories. It also discussed the following ideas with reference to narrative management of the writer: narratives which answer queries to the narrator’s interrogation to her own self; narrator as having an insider’s view, the narration of the awakened woman’s voice; the occasional merging of the authorial voice and narrative voice; Shashi Deshpande’s narrative management and her creation of a female imagination; her short stories as not reformatory but allowing experiences to seep in and render a solution acceptable only to her.

The fourth chapter “Representation of Family and Relationships” tried to argue on woman’s view of family and relationships with the aim to understand how feminine patterns of self-depiction and depiction of relationships in familial and non-familial circumstances worked. It further engaged in the issue of how authorial preoccupation with relationships and self-depiction in her short fiction affected or enhanced her fictional imagination. It discussed the power relationships and the male gaze which objectifies woman’s body, belittles self-respect while she denies and resists male attempt to stereotype her. How she seeks reconciliation in relationships rather than freedom from it, how her inner strength and secret capability is an assertion of her identity and against insults and protests that her quest for identity stages. This chapter further discussed how woman’s freedom of a spiritual journey and her search for identity traverses her to a different plane. Hence despite suffering a neglected existence she acquires a feminist autonomy. Deshpande’s short stories as
revealed in this chapter showed how motherhood reflects not the typical good, all sacrificing mother usually understood and written about but how mothers can also be selfish, mean, rude and have needs too since they are human beings.

The fifth chapter “Woman as Philosopher” the fifth chapter discussed Deshpande’s narrator protagonist as a philosopher narrating the middle class Indian life, and interpreted, projected and theorized serious issues related to middle class women. It discussed Deshpande’s women as philosophers resolving existential questions with their philosophical explorations revealing a deep understanding of human psychology. It also opines that since the writer shapes opinions, therefore she is also a philosopher. For her protagonist arrives at a philosophy of life and derives her inner strength from successful exploitation of her circumstance, with such experience giving her inner energy and outward passivity. This chapter also argued how philosophy becomes a balancing act between oppression and woman’s awareness of her oppression. She travels from a negative to a positive state of mind realizing that the self exists for itself.

The researcher observed that most of Deshpande’s short stories have a moral ending emphasizing the role of the female protagonist as philosopher and so it is argued that only when she philosophizes does she arrive at solutions. The researcher further discussed the role of the authorial self which is also lonely, for, though there is a restoration yet there is resistance. The self is re finding oneself and the pain in these women’s lives further leads them to self-discovery and they make important decisions. This chapter argued that the philosophical detachment helps these women to suffer with dignity and strength which make their restrained resistance possible. Imagination
is also discussed as a powerful tool and so was the importance of inner space which provides autonomy of the self where the end is the beginning for self-recognition.

The final Chapter VI “Conclusion” presently sums up the contents of the chapters discussed so far, attempted to make certain critical observations and conclusion of the research, along with an attempt to wind up the research through a proper finale in the form of the following points – future possibilities of research on Shashi Deshpande and her contribution to the Indian short fiction genre.

From what has been discussed so far on the short fiction of Shashi Deshpande, the following research conclusions are worth mentioning.

The earlier writers of classical ages indicated that female imagination does not indicate only negative dimension of life, rather positive experiences like devotion, love etc get expressed through positive feelings and also if the violence of modern age demand that an individual goes through negative experiences, what better way than to release these.

Similarly, Patricia Meyer Spacks observes how women have exploited the hidden opportunities of a situation which is oppressive and she turns the disadvantages of expected feminine behaviour to advantage. Therefore, using passivity as means to power, she takes care of others as a vehicle for control and mastery, her limited existence is a testing ground for emotional growth. ‘Female Imagination’ represents women’s power which occupies the writings of western writers like Dorothy Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Margaret Atwood, Mary Shelley, and Toni Morrison. Hence modern writers, particularly women writers write about sexual abuse, cruelty and violence and also serial killing or infanticide thus denoting negative female
experiences; however, it is indeed interesting to learn how their women characters rise to the crisis or harm themselves through depression or self-destruction.

Thirdly, Indian women writing characterizes a unique female imagination that constitutes their narratives, expressions of woman’s feelings, narrating their personal lives, self-perception and yearning for woman’s voice to be heard. These writings lend themselves to female imagination also to a special female self-awareness where the struggle is for independence rather than ethics or virtue. So there lies the undercurrent of female social reality. There is a yearning for self-assertion and then protest begins their quest for empowerment. Similar to Spacks, Deshpande’s women characterize a female imagination and their problems are existential in nature.

Also, there is a commonality of the experiences of these women and the way the woman views herself and the way she expresses her desires and deep hidden resentments. This deep self-analysis helps these women think about themselves and reach a point of self-recognition. So, storytelling, narration or writing for the woman becomes means for freedom and escape and a letting out from her suppression. In some cases, female imagination is depicted as woman’s self-awareness and struggle for independence rather than virtue. These women long for self-expression which emerges from the creative energy and this proves that aesthetic energy is not the sole ownership of men. Selfhood is discovering, manifesting and finding an artistic expression especially for the female narrator philosopher. She derives her inner strength from the successful exploitation of the inner energy and outward passivity.

Then a reading of Shashi Deshpande reveals the following: Woman arrives at solutions and catalyses the wellbeing of her family; her vision seems inseparable from family and nurturing and she rather prefers to carry forward her culture. Women
crave for liberation but the importance of their home as well as their husbands are merged in their feminine sensibility though man-woman relationship is the most committed and difficult one. They assume their quest for identity while their vision is to break silence.

Deshpande’s attempt to voice the voiceless by delving deep into the female psyche helps the author to place the woman’s predicament issue the conventional trajectory of problem to new visions through self-analysis of questions about existential problems and the language used reveals the feminist vision. These women refuse to be oppressed or carry out things that are against woman’s dignity, it is about woman’s worth and value to herself. The women verbalize their inner turmoil, indicating that the weak have their weapons too, though passivity helps them to endure hardships. During withdrawal, they question their inner psyche and try to comprehend their personality, inner strength and secret capability.

Another observation on the research undertaken leads one to observe how the replenishment and fulfilment of a need enables woman to come to terms with her internal unrest, further aiding her to replenish herself by having her personal space. Woman’s world is a unique world that they have created for themselves in a womb of liberation, freedom and happiness. Hence their conviction that and no one can take it away from them, they belong only to themselves. So, the search for answer is within not without.

Likewise, myths are seen in negative light therefore indicating a resistance discourse. Wherever there is power there will be resistance, and resistance makes survival possible for women; many times, resistance or rather restrained resistance motivates women to reclaim their identity.
One of the researcher’s findings is on Shashi Deshpande’s deep insight into situations, circumstances and relationships. Motherhood is usually glorified and its deity’s qualities remain unopposed even in myths. But Deshpande is one of the few earlier writers who observed and pointed out that women are not born mothers – that they were first babies, then grew up to be girls and motherhood came much later, that many women were not taught or even prepared for motherhood. Deshpande observes that mothers are first human beings with their needs, desires, shortcomings, etc. Therefore, in many short stories and even novels many mothers are not seen to descend from a hallowed place but that they can be cruel, selfish, mean and rude.

The uniqueness of the female imagination is expressed by the female narrator whose discursive voice plays an important role in the short story’s narrative management, and tried to understand how the author’s narrative management helped to bring out the female imagination in her short fiction. Such a narrator philosopher studies the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence, which she becomes aware of in however miniscule a world that she inhabits. Since almost all of Deshpande’s short stories have a moral ending it emphasizes the idea of the female protagonist as philosopher; also, the narrator and protagonist in their quest for solution are led to a female vision of life. The narrator points to important questions on domestic issues such as an insider’s view.

Within such a narrative management, women are observed to break down the walls of language and create a world that carries meaning and displays experiences that create an awareness of woman’s inner self. Further, in such a narrative management, authorial voice and narrative voice merge, with the narrator asking questions and the female narrator conveying ways of female feelings. Deshpande’s
fictional narrations and their aesthetic appeal arise largely from the sensitive portrayal of women voicing their oppression and their mature reasoning of their experiences where they talk with a spiritual awareness displaying their forbearance. Since the woman narrator interprets her predicament and arrives at philosophies by her own explorations, her philosophical exploration reveals a deep understanding of human psychology.

Another interesting observation made from a study of her short stories is that she creates the sensitized woman who explores the self, and thereby realizes that though she is a product of culture she never had any contribution in its making, since her self-identity had been destroyed because of patriarchy, which never recognized her existence or experiences. Also, woman’s awareness of the male gaze helps her to resist gender stereotyping.

Thus, women in Deshpande’s fiction not only haunt a biological space but also a philosophical space, with the former derived from their experience of home making and rearing up children or taking care of them and the family, and with the latter derived from their search for an inner space or identity as woman, or a search for a meaning of their existence. Women in Deshpande’s short fiction are never rendered any appreciation nor acceptance; nor do they mean anything to society despite being tragic protagonists whose failures as well as her successes mean nothing.

Though Deshpande’s short stories are nuanced and could be considered as philosophically resistant to imposing the ordinary and the mundane in the name of culture and tradition, the irony in their portrayal is that they gradually tend to accept life through acceptance of life as restoration and finding solace in inner harmony.
To understand Deshpande’s female imagination, it is a female creative energy that follows a female trajectory through the consciousness of the individual and finally derives from the collective unconscious, thereby making the narrator protagonist a philosopher or a thinking woman in search of a refuge.

The study of Deshpande’s short fiction therefore reveals how a feminist tale need not represent mega narratives of woman’s suffering but that even a miniscule narration of a motherly feeling coupled with her denial of motherhood is worthy as subject of a feminist tale. Such a choice of miniscule narratives of issues pertaining to women reveals that Shashi Deshpande’s female vision is essentially feminist, whether in terms of the women’s denial of motherhood (“Death of a child”) or her choice of domesticity over liberation or her voicing her personal experiences of marital rape (“The Intrusion”) or the woman’s liberal attitude to extra marital affair (“A Day Like Any Other”).

Deshpande’s choice of subject matter is unique to women’s personal experiences where the solutions to the woman’s problems do not separate themselves from the ground realities of woman’s life in India. Hence the female imagination represented in Shashi Deshpande’s short fiction resorts to explore and understand woman’s life. In the above sense female imagination tends to be therapeutic in the modern age since thinking becomes a cathartic moment that is both emotionally purging as well intellectually enriching, leading them to decisive opinions on any issues, though not leading them to take drastic or revolutionary actions.

Shashi Deshpande’s representation of the Indian female imagination typifies the Indian women’s consciousness whose vision of life, narrates her own suffering
within her family and traditional familial relationships that seeks refuge by turning inward like a philosopher.

The Indian female Imagination represented too is different from that of western women writers’ works, since western women writers may talk of exploited women who use an oppressive situation for their benefit using passivity as means to power, taking care of others as a vehicle for control and mastery. For the female literary tradition of the British and American women writers, perceived themselves and have imagined reality different from the Indian women writers. It is possible that the female imagination in Indian women writers may be all these and more. They will not revolt or break away from the norms of the society many a times and prefer familial harmony at their expense and at the cost of their happiness. Deshpande’s women question and define their identities as mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, and as human beings. They are aware that the Western concepts of individual rights, equality and personal choice can destroy and challenge the family structure, which is built upon accommodation and sharing.

The researcher’s conclusion is that female imagination is an expression of female feelings. It indicates that it is written by women as it explains the understanding of women’s self and its discursive voices within her, with female narrators and a discursive method of creation of women’s text or sub texts. It displays how women have perceived themselves, their realities, and their imagined realities.

The study on Shashi Deshpande’s short fiction gave rise to several additional questions and problems, which need in depth research exploration that is beyond the scope of this study. First of all, it can be comprehended that Deshpande’s views on the Hindu marriage, family and women’s role, are given due importance in her short
fiction. Her female protagonists as philosophers become catalysts to confront or transform various domestic problems by exploring and analysing them from an insider’s point of view. Such confrontations basically explore the female and male relationships and the familial situations, and finally put them on the path of their search for identity. Hence, the whole venture of the female protagonists to view their life situation with ‘female ways of feeling’ demands a careful examination and study.

Though short stories do not have the scope for character development, yet within this limited scope, Deshpande has been able to develop the characters in an impressive manner. Her characters are well rounded and they gradually grow within each short story especially female characters, their childhood, their growing up years and marriage till old age. All these phases of life which depicts the female personality and her upbringing have been discussed and focused, in whatever space the short story allows. Such a strength in the novelist’s characterization deserves to be explored and studied carefully too to prove her merit among the best short story writers of India.

Deshpande’s positive contribution to Indian short fiction is immense. Her works reflect and represents the realistic attitudes and feelings of contemporary Indian women who belong to the middle class, in their various life situations. Since she is one of the authors who had started writing right from the 70’s onwards and continues to do so even today, she rightly deserves the reputation and the respectable position she enjoys among the Indian writers.

Few topics that the researcher suggests for future research on Deshpande’s short fiction discuss the following woman centred ideas: woman’s upbringing in the Indian scenario, the background, culture and tradition she is nurtured in. In other
words, the woman centred world of Shashi Deshpande as represented by her works is a subject worth the study.

Another viable issue meant for an in-depth research on Deshpande’s short fiction delves on the possibility of an Indian feminist approach to her works. What are the challenges faced by an Indian woman, when she faces the harsh realities of life, marriage and relationships? Though it takes a toll on her, especially since after marriage she is confronted with a different world, she comes out of her world of illusion and faces the harsh realities of life and marriage, problems of adjustments, compromises and sacrifices.

One interesting dimension of her short stories arises out of her life time sketches of the world of widows, divorced or single women discussed not only in many short stories like “Madhu” “A Man and a Woman” “The Cruelty Game” etc, but also in her novels like *Roots and Shadows* and so on. Deshpande discusses the problems faced by widows, divorced or single women and even their idea of remarriage is looked down by society and many times their own family. The evils of society they have to face and how they are treated as stigma in society could be studied in relation to the world widows and single women in general in Indian fiction writers.

Apart from the above, Deshpande also uses various symbols, metaphors, images and similes in her short stories. For example, the following images becomes significant - the symbol of the cursed *parijat* tree in stories like “Travel Plans” and “The Story” symbolizing the marriage of these women or the image of the sea in stories like “The Intrusion,” the image of the rain in stories like “The First Lady” or “Can You Hear Silence?” Animal images especially of birds like robin, peacock, and
nightingale express freedom discussed in short stories like “Why a Robin?” or “It Was the Nightingale.” Similarly, the titles of the short stories can also be researched in relation to the images and their related meanings they evoke. For an instance, “The Inner Rooms” talks of Amba’s inner psyche and realization that the world outside her is unacquainted with. “A Wall Is Safer” talks of the safe wall of domesticity which the protagonist has created for herself outside which she refuses to step out even when forced by family or friends. “The Pawn” actually addresses the theme of the young girl who becomes a pawn to the male thoughts and desires, thereby allowing herself to become the pawn of the young man caging her only as long as he wishes to, only to ultimately cast her away when his need for her is over. All the above images evoked in her narratives become integral to an understanding of the image patterns, symbols and narrative structures of her works in general. Hence, a study of symbolism in her short fiction is also essential to study her narrative management.

Language is another forte of Deshpande who employs simple, effortless but persuasive English. Her English is very clear, Indian and lucid. Deshpande has used the English language very aptly and effectively in the Indian context. A word like ‘circumambulation’ in her novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is so evocative of the Hindu ritual of women going around the *tulsi* plant that no other word could effectively bring out the custom. Hence Deshpande’s skill for Indianization of the English language is a study worth attempting. She has also skilfully used images linked with Indian life. English in the Indian context is used so efficiently by her that it becomes superior to the other contemporary Indian writers in English. So this art of language can be further analysed too.
Also, silence of the woman is witnessed almost everywhere in the short stories - imposed silence, nuanced silence, unthinking silence or resigned silence. Silence encompassing woman’s submission, patience, meekness, fear etc or silence as act of revolt, silence as a powerful weapon, sustaining power which is more eloquent than speech – these are some metaphors of silence that the author evolves in her fictional works. Therefore, the idea of silence as a metaphor, which can be analysed as a technical innovation, and even the message that silence does not always mean consent that gets embedded in her works are ideas worthy of critical attention.

The most important critical study of Deshpande’s works also needs to examine her short fiction in comparison to her novels, since there seems to be continuity between the two in relation to images, symbols, metaphors, narrative strands, themes, characters, etc.

The study thus hopes to contribute to the study of Shashi Deshpande’s short fiction, a sparsely researched subject of scholarly attention so far. The issues outlined so far attempts to do so to evince interest in Shashi Deshpande’s works on short fiction for further research.

**Note**

1 The term “Female Imagination” is borrowed from Patricia Meyer Spacks who defines the term as a special female self-awareness which emerges through literature in every period; in such literature women depict themselves as struggling for independence rather than for virtue; looking out for evidence of sharing, these women seek for persistent ways of feeling and discovering certain patterns of self-depiction that survive change.
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