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 behavior 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, analyzing 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 organizes 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 fulfill 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.

Shashi Deshpande’s contemplation of creative writing is crucial to our understanding of the above subject matter:

Of what use is creative writing? The general understanding is that it comes under the heading of culture—something one enjoys when one has time, money and nothing more important to do. In fact, it is one of the frills of life and therefore the first thing to be dropped when it is a question of priorities. On the other hand, there is also the idea of the writer as a thinker, an intellectual and a shaper of opinions. In India specially, because of the long connection between literature and religion, writing was imbued with a special aura and writers with a greater wisdom. The rishi-guru image clings on a little to writers even now, an image that is sometimes, one must admit, deliberately cultivated by some writers. We have thus two completely different pictures of the writer’s work and role. But the writer looks at herself differently. For one thing, despite all the stories of the anguish of
creation, writers, like all artists, find great joy in their work; something denied to most people to whom work is drudgery (Writing and Activism 22).

Similarly, evolutionary theory states that the creative urge emerges from deep structures and needs to organize our experience in ways that are meaningful to us individually: As stated by Carroll

Through stories and verse and dramatic enactments—whether written or oral— we realize our deeper nature in vividly subjective ways. Through such realization, we situate ourselves consciously within our environments and organize the feelings and thoughts through which we regulate our behavior (184)

This highlights the importance of narratives that help to ‘regulate our complex cognitive machinery’ (Caroll 184) and its contribution to development and capacity for responding. Especially the female narrative deals with various explorations of gender, concepts, discriminations and the philosophic potentialities. Feminist theory also suggests that the focus is centrally around feminist epistemology and distinctively female ways of experiencing, thinking, knowing, gazing, speaking or writing. Particularly relevant here is Shashi Deshpande’s idea of the writer as a thinker or shaper of opinion or philosopher. For, a philosopher is never at ease in society since his / her concern is not the problems of society’s conventions. Plato mentions: “he, whose mind is fixed upon true being, has no time to look down upon the little affairs of men or to be filled with jealousy and enmity against them” (Philosophers Stone 99). He further states “we may say of the philosopher that he is a lover not of a part of wisdom only but of the whole” (100). According to Epictetus
“Philosophy does not promise to secure a man anything outside himself” (*Philosophers Stone* 101).

For women in Deshpande’s works, philosophizing 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 realize and therefore philosophize. Reinforcing this idea from Simone de Beauvoir, Patricia Meyer Spacks says in *The Female Imagination*:

Writing a historical, philosophical, and psychological account of the state of women, Mlle de Beauvoir quite properly concentrates on the injustices of the female lot and on the consequences of injustice in female experience. She too is angry, as thinking women can hardly fail to be; her anger expresses itself in her essentially masculine posture of defence. Trying to write as she believes only men have written—lucidly, logically, with a firm grasp of wide experience—she indeed demonstrates her power as a thinker, but also her power as a woman (21-2).

What triggers women as thinkers is their love for life, the downfalls they have faced in life and their awareness of life’s complexities. Almost every woman undergoes these torments, tortures, and injustice in different ways. Women would endure such oppression under male hands and many a times bear them and try to arrive at a solution by internalizing the problem. They would ponder and analyses their problem thus philosophizing and in doing so, they tend to arrive at a philosophy of life. A whole new realm of understanding and discovery is opened to them as they internalize their problems. For woman with self-respect, it is important to internalize
and find her own solution, so that she can be happy with her own self as well as others. Thus, loss of the self-identity in a woman causes many conflicts and a search for selfhood is important.

Commenting on the understanding of the self, Rousseau opine thus:

To understand the self was not simply to describe what was evident in a reflexive analysis of the mind, but a task of discovering and bringing to light what was hidden within. Art became a process of expressing, of making manifest, our hidden nature and, by so doing, creating and completing the discovery within the artistic expression. (Charles Taylor 15)

Thus, selfhood is discovering, manifesting and finding an artistic expression especially for the narrator philosopher, and being part of a whole as Marcus Aurelius says:

He who does not know what the world is, does not know where he is. And, he who does not know for what purpose the world exists does not know who he is, nor what the world is…by remembering then, that I am a part of such a whole, I shall be content with everything that happens (The Philosopher’s Stone 4).

So the woman narrator philosopher also learns to be content as she arrives at a philosophy through her discovery by searching her inner self. The woman’s approach to life accentuates what Taylor mentions as personal vision: “The moral or spiritual order of things must come to us indexed to a personal vision” (428). Moral
evaluations have become mediated by the woman’s personal vision of these moral evaluations to be sanctioned as valid modes of philosophical and ethical reference.

Nevertheless, what is unique about woman as thinker is the female emphasis on philosophy that begins with personal vision as a marker to moral evaluations. Another dimension of difference in woman’s role as a thinker is that woman as an individual faces contradiction. There is a complex relation between the appearances a woman displays to the outer world and her own internal existence and experience. This is what one deduces from a reading of many women writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Mahasweta Devi and Kamala Das. Anger, forcefulness and aggression are part of the woman’s inner self. There is a huge difference between the public self and the private self but there is a psychic cost of concealing her pain to assert her passivity. Weakness is what is portrayed in her public self and passivity and compliance too. She may portray to the world as self-sacrificing wife and mother and may never confide her resentment at being insufficiently appreciated. But she derives her inner strength from the successful exploitation of the dichotomy between her inner energy and outward passivity. Such an argument could further be substantiated with what Patricia Meyer Spacks observes about women writers:

They suggest some special relations between women and convention, some special purposes for which women used even the most seemingly empty literary forms, and some special strategies enlisted in the assertion of female identity…they characteristically define a heroine by her weakness, showing how weakness and passivity become social resources…the relation between the enlargement and the diminishment of female capacity as rendered in novels by women exemplifies the complexity of the psychic manoeuvring involved in such work. (Imagining a Self 57-8)
A woman’s weakness becomes her strength to assert her identity, and a resource in the form of woman’s capacity boosted by psychic power that derived its strength from her suffering. Plato says that philosophy begins in wonder. This contrast with what woman’s philosophy began with. However, Plato also says that curiosity is the mother of knowledge. Even Socrates said that we should examine our lives and realize that personal philosophy is a sum of a person’s beliefs, which is akin to what women’s philosophy conveys, since woman as observer of circumstance and its working or functions, desires to go on her quest for knowledge. Like what Plato says, women focus heavily on morality and goodness, recognizing one’s inner self and the fact that life is important to living morally and that goodness does in fact exist in the world. This is also true with women writers, especially Indian women writers in English.

Indian women writers in English create a different world where they are real because in a man’s world they are compelled not to reveal their real nature. These writers present the plight of women with understanding and depth; they write about women who struggle within their modern yet traditional society, where a dual morality or ethics exists. They write with the wisdom and gender awareness that, women are treated shabbily yet they are essential to man as he attains self-realization only through them. Writers like Anita Desai or Kamala Markhandaya or Deshpande inhabit woman’s philosophical worlds. Deshpande explores problems like widowhood, adultery, childbirth; sometimes her women characters take a cathartic moment, an emotionally purging moment which is psychotherapeutic and releasing, evolving the writer’s creative energy as expressed in her short stories. The short stories particularly explore the crisis in the lives of women who might be widowed, divorced, single or married. Various stories display reality of oppressed women
barred from freedom to make decisions, what with certain cultural and traditional values hindering them. It is in such a context that the female narrator emerges in her works of art, as sometimes an omniscient narrator, sometimes engaged in a stream of consciousness, philosophizing things, people and places around her.

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 behavior 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 victimized 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. As the husband forces himself on her it is explained: “His movements had the same rhythm, the same violence as the movements of the sea; yet, I could have borne the battering of the sea better, for that would hurt, but not humiliate like this” (208).

Shashi Deshpande’s women are thinkers or thinking narrators constantly interpreting, exploring their social and sexual predicament as women. Like “The
Intrusion,” in Deshpande’s prologue to the novel The Dark Holds No Terrors a scary incident is similarly described where a male asserts his body on a female. Here it is more than thinking-the female narrator combines feeling and thinking into interpreting her situation of domestic violence:

The hands became a body. Thrusting itself upon me. The familiarity of the sensation suddenly broke the shell of silent terror that had enclosed me. I emerged into the familiar world of rejection. My rejection that had become so drearily routine. I struggled to utter the usual words of protest, to say...No, not now, stop it. But the words were strangled in my throat. The face above mine was the face of a stranger. Blank, set and rigid, it was a face I had never seen. A man I did not know (11).

Sexual violence against these women is also depicted in Roots and Shadows, where Akka is also sexually violated or is a victim of marital rape which leads to oppressing these women into passivity. “The Stone Women” depicts another such thinking woman. The narrator’s visit to a stone carved temple with sculptures of dancing women leads her to contemplate on the masculine attributes of beauty and art. Her realization that she has been clinging on to male appreciation of feminine beauty, leads her to revolt against such canonized or idealized perspectives of female beauty. Thus, the narrator arrives at a philosophy of life through her own exploration, and a search for ‘self’, as she is led to the belief that, loss of self-identity in a woman is the root cause of many conflicts. Shashi Deshpande’s narrator thus philosophizes on woman’s frightening inert status from ancient to modern times:
For some reason, when I look at him, eyes narrowed, mouth pursed as he gazes at me thoughtfully, my mind leaps back to those stone women in the temple. This is how they must have looked, I realize, the men who sculpted the women in stone, as they shaped them from their imaginations… For a moment, while he looks at me, I am overcome by a sudden fear, as if I am becoming one of them too, women frozen for all time into a pose they have been willed into (75).

“Lucid Moments” is yet another short story that arrives at a gender-oriented philosophic realization that patriarchal tradition of lineage denies woman her identity. The mother of the protagonist, who is lying on her bed counting her last days, is described as having led a very satisfied life. Nonetheless as she nears the last days of her life her thoughts are disturbed by the reality that she does not even know or acknowledge the name of that mother who had died giving birth to her. This story tells us how women are recognized in society only as somebody’s daughter, mother or wife, whereby they are realized only by the relation they hold and not by their own identity. The protagonist being a thinking woman philosophizes: “Can I prove to my mother-my mother? No, myself—that even if they never chant a litany of their names at a wedding, these women are real?” (79).

Deshpande’s thinking women eventually are also viewed as caught in the crossroads of life and led to contemplate their moral choices. “The Awakening” talks of a young girl, Alka, who dislikes the poverty of her family, “Let me not die like that, having achieved nothing, having been nothing. Not even knowing that your life was nothing” (119). Then comes her time for crucial realization in her: “When all the noise died down, I realized what had happened. My last way of escape had been
closed. I would never get out of the trap now” (119). Alka reaches a point where she realises how hard her father has worked for many years to make ends meet for the entire family. This makes her philosophize about her life, her family’s life and she eventually grows as an individual; this realization makes her regret her selfishness and makes her give up her dream of even trying to free herself from family responsibilities. The tears that roll down from Alka’s eyes “… were not the tears of childhood. They were the first tears of adulthood, bitter, salty and painful” (120).

Similar confrontations with choices to be made by the woman and her ultimate awareness and realization – all these characterize her story, “I Want,” whose protagonist dislikes the fact that woman’s marriage is not her choice but something imposed on her with her acceptance taken for granted. She then internalizes this reality of woman’s accepted passivity and obedience as the best solution to everything and therefore abides by the norms set for her, acceding to get married, but with her stringent philosophy: “Time to forget dreams and compromise for security” (150). The woman’s awareness and her interiorizing of realities surrounding her is once again perceived in Shashi Deshpande’s story “A Day Like any other” Her husband’s unfaithfulness makes the woman arrive at a defeatist philosophy of life that forces her to decide to accept situations as they are since it had taken years to build up these relations and security for her family.

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. Before letting go the affair she thinks:
And then I knew that he knew, that he cared, and as if a dam had burst, a flood of shame and guilt swept over me, drowned me. I let go of the mirage I had tried to grasp so long…” (61)

The whole story brings to focus the woman’s pain of relinquishing her love at the backdrop of her familial ties. The woman’s lack of alternatives in the Indian society is also discussed by Neena Arora:

Man considers it as normal behaviour to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and the physical levels outside marriage, while it is ruthlessly condemned as adultery in case a woman indulges in it even though accidently the slightest hint of any deviation on her part which may not even involve sex, man turns violent and hostile towards his wife and starts prosecuting her. This condemnation is dictated by man’s interest in preserving his property rather than by any moral consideration.”(Articulating Gender 141)

Shashi Deshpande’s choice of female subject matter also influences the philosophic consideration of life experiences. The thinking female narrator of Deshpande in “Death of a Child” chooses to abort her unborn child. Men are merely outsiders to the experiences and feelings of woman, also to her suffering in childbirth and otherwise. She ponders about her situation and realizes that she does not want the burden of rearing and raising up this unborn child; therefore, she decides not to keep this child. Since she already has two children and the smaller one is also still young, she dreads the thought of bringing up another child while the elder two are still young. She decides that she is the master of her own body and she asserts to exercise her will; she knows what is best for her and after much
contemplation she decides to abort this unborn child with her decision relieving her: “my mind clutches thankfully at the thought-I’m getting out of the trap. I will feel human again. Three times in less than four years. It’s not fair”(65). She furthers says, “I close my eyes tight, but the vision of myself in this ridiculous posture persists. This, I tell myself, is the last and worst indignity I have to endure. Soon the small discomforts crowd out the big ones. The shame fades”(66).

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.

Very often Shashi Deshpande’s female philosopher narrators are middle class women. As Avadesh Kumar Singh observes in If I Die Today:

…one of the concerns of the novelist is to depict what happens to women after marriage: what they have been, what they have become, and what is in store for them. On the surface, all is well with her middle-class women. They have a relatively happy married life with their not so badly placed husbands and are blessed with children in most cases. Yet there is
something rotten in the state of their domestic and married life, for which to a considerable extent their spouses are somehow responsible. Education, economic independence, and motherhood disturb the existing equilibrium. Deshpande provides a series of displacements and shows what apparently looks like and what actually happens. Besides, she also deconstructs the traditional image of a woman as a socio-cultural construct and how that image gets destabilized because of her education, economic independence and motherhood (113).

Deshpande’s women therefore describe the experiences and circumstances of the educated, urban, modern, middle-class Indian women’s lives that move from hope, instabilities of a middle-class urban consciousness and fears, representing woman who endures her share of the emotional ups and downs and trauma, as she cannot even blurt out her anger on her injustices and therefore endures life in her own world of silences. These sad, wronged women are torn between their instincts which are traditional and convictions which are liberal, where the self goes through an inner self discipline. These women remain unfulfilled due to the roles culturally imposed on them. A woman find herself oppressed socially as well as culturally and she does attempt to rebel whether knowingly or unknowingly within whatever space available to her; but simultaneously she also realizes that she cannot reject the social background altogether and this then amounts to her inability to totally rebel. She is thus trapped between modernity and tradition, profession and family, nature and culture, etc. Thus, Shashi Deshpande’s female protagonist is seen to be caught in a philosophical dilemma between their opposing cultures, traditions, ideas, etc.
Very often Shashi Deshpande’s short fiction reflects a philosophical reality that imagines itself in an environment of mythical reality. While discussing the idea of myth Northrop Frye says:

> Literary shape cannot come from life it comes only from literary tradition, and so ultimately from myth. By myths man dignifies his condition. Shaping his life into a pattern derived from his imagination and his literary experience, he insists that he is both real and important. From a rigorous philosophical point of view, of course, the kinds of explanations provided by imagination—“false” as they are—only deceive, creating the basis for an illusory belief in continuity and blurring the vital distinction between real and unreal.

*(Imagining a Self 19)*

Whereas 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.

Shashi Deshpande’s method of depicting a philosophical reality through myths is somewhat akin to what Patricia Meyer Spacks discusses about women’s reaction to oppression: “In society the heroine feels herself helpless; her husband, rejecting her, finds abundant other resources for exercising his emotional and physical energies. She on the other hand, has none. Only in isolation and social alienation can she function effectively. Then she can demonstrate her fortitude, her faithfulness—even her sexuality, denied and obscured before. And her story ends in
death, expressing anger against the male but also perhaps the devaluation of the self.” (*Imagining a Self* 61)

Deshpande too justifies her stand about myths:

…myths are both necessary and relevant to human lives, they come out of some human need…. We are looking for a fresh knowledge of ourselves in them, trying to discover what is relevant to our lives today. We don’t reject the ideals, but we know we can’t approximate to these pictures of ideal womanhood. And we will not bear any guilt that we cannot do so. More important than knowing what we are not is to know what we are, what is possible for us (Deshpande, *Writing Difference* 186).

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 victimized, 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. Joseph Addison who was himself a spokesman for intellectual inspirations of his time is seen by
Patricia Meyer Spacks thus: “often suggests that imagination should be considered itself a faculty of the soul.”(William Cowper 29)

Shashi Deshpande’s imaginative/philosophical reality is seen in her constant switch to aphorism, short sayings, and proverbial kind of remarks. For example, women realize that to assert one-self also means that sometimes you must bear the burden alone; this comes from the new education which leads her to also realize the uselessness or the emptiness of different beliefs regarding women held on for ages. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* considers marriage as “a system which makes one so dependent” (117). She also thinks that love is “a big fraud, a hoax, a trap-a process of making one humble and dependent” (173). The sexual instinct and material instinct, also self-love, self-interest is of interest and meaning to her, faithfulness and loyalty should be a man’s pre-requisite too and not just a woman’s. She therefore has no qualms about sleeping with Naren and when she feels a little bad for this she says, “Why did we make such a monstrous thing out of this?” (169).

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. These bring the proof of Deshpande’s fictional philosophic reality.

“The self-conjoined with the sense-organs and mind (manas) is the experience (bhokta). The self is like a person seated in a chariot; the body is the chariot; intellect (buddhi) is the driver; mind (manas) is the bridle; and the sense-organs are the horses.” The mind is superior to the sense-organs; the intellect is superior to the mind, the self is superior to the intellect. There is nothing superior to the
self. The mind-body-complex is an organ of experience subordinate to the self, which is its agent, an instrument of knowledge, feeling and action. The self is the knower, the enjoyer, and the active agent. The body, the sense organs, mind, and intellect exist for the self. But the self exists for itself. It is the supreme goal to be realized. Evidently the self here is identified with the supreme Self (Brahman). Sometimes the body is described as the city of Brahman or Self (brahmapura). The Self that resides in the heart-ether in the city of Brahman is to be sought. (Jadunath Sinha)

So, the self is knowledge; it knows feeling and action so it is conscious “The self is conscious. It has consciousness in conjunction with the sense-organs. It has consciousness, perception, retention, recollection, reasoning, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, emotion, volition, subconscious impression, habit, merit and demerit.” (Jadunath Sinha 6). He further adds about the separation of the self from the body: “The self is different from the body. The self is the knower, while the body is the known object. The self is unmodifiable, while the body is modifiable. The self exists for itself, while the body exists for the self.” (Jadunath Sinha 15). So the self is of prime importance in the realization process of the female narrator, in the individual’s quest for identity.

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 has to 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.

The self is an organised whole. It is not a simple, unitary, indestructible reality. Just as an atom, life, consciousness and self-consciousness are not simple and unitary, but are structures or organised wholes or composite beings, the self is also a unified structure or an organised composite structure. The self is a “unity of diverse parts with an enduring structure. (Srivastava 247)

But according to Srivastava the self as an organized structure has higher unity, functions and organisation. “Though the parts of the self are transient there is persistence of pattern which constitutes the unity of a self…In the self of man three types of functions are found viz., appetites and desires, emotional reactions and intellectual ideals…The self is the most integrated and highest product…through intelligence man conceives of some ideals and organises all his activities. The more a man pursues his ideals, the more integrated and organised he becomes. His self becomes gradually more and more perfect” (304).

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. As the women reconstruct their selves there has to be a balanced self-assertion. As Patricia Meyer Spacks says in *Imagining a Self*: “Identity, incapable of unifying disparate perceptions, “is merely a quality which we attribute to them, because of the union of their ideas in the imagination when we reflect on them…Our notions of personal identity proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas” (3).

The self is also three-fold. The knowing, feeling and willing are the three types of functions of the self and, therefore, there must be three parts or distinctions within it. If the self were a single independent entity, it could have only one type of function. Therefore, the self has either three internal distinctions or there are three parts in it. The self is not a unitary and simple entity. It is three-fold in existence…there is no unity in the three aspects of the self because the three types of functions come from three parts of the self…the distinction between the subject and object, and the subject and mind, continue up to the psychical stages. This distinction is experienced at lower stages. The subject becomes absolutely free when the distinction is not-experienced. Even the experience of freedom from the subject or the mental states means that the self is not absolutely free. ..The higher the stage of subjectivity, the less is the freedom felt to be achieved though more assured is the faith in its achievability. In introspective stage, the feeling of achieved freedom lapses, but the faith in its achievability is completely assured. At the stages of subject’s identification with feeling and introspection, the subject has the experience of freedom. The subject has not become absolutely free at these stages. The absolute freedom is attained
when the self transcends beyond the introspective level...when the self or subject is absolutely negated, it realises freedom. (Srivastava. 247-8.)

Many a times these women find themselves bound to their old selves, especially after marriage, outwardly it seems like all is well and they have a pretty good middle-class life with their fairly well earning husbands, they have children too and seem to be in a contented state in life. Paradoxically it is just the opposite and there is actually a deep-seated hollowness in their married life and family life, and their husband’s may be blamed for this to a large degree. Their economic status, education, motherhood etc displaces the balance, these factors make the woman neither confident nor content. This is the truth of the middle-class families in these stories that they are unhappy. The sufferings of these women are different yet one, therefore a universality of their suffering, a common female feminist consciousness. There is a critical self-reflection, though these women are busy in their everyday chores, fighting the various pains and sufferings with a sort of philosophical detachment. Philosophizing is a clue to expression of feminist search for identity. As Vijaya Guttal says “Deshpande’s work may be seen as a search for an authentic feminine discourse in which the community of women with a “common heritage of oppression” try to understand themselves and also work towards a positive social change.” (170).

Shashi Deshpande herself says:

I was made to feel about being a female, about the roles that my gender identity seemed to have locked me into, roles which I often chafed against. Worst of all was the idea that this gender identity and the roles that came with it, seemed to deny my
intellectual self, a self that was as important to me as my emotional self. (Deshpande 24)

The reality of a separate identity is still very new to a variety of women who tend to analyze and arrive at a solution only within their given condition. They cannot imagine a space where a woman can be herself without any burdens. Her role as mother, wife, daughter, sister etc cannot be separated from self. Deshpande’s female narrator experiences self discovery. Sometimes to be validated and reinstated within our own selves, the process of knowing the self by multiple practices of self through means of governing and understanding that though may be received from tradition but acquired by a defiance of them.

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 philosophize 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.

As Susie Tharu says:

The construction of a self is independent of other roles prescribed for Indian women and writers like Shashi Deshpande have successfully made forays into the woman psyche to come out with the inner view of the characters with all their terror, turbulence and subterranean shifts. Here we can say that it is not by rebelling and rejecting the tradition of a patriarchal world, but by accepting and embracing it with a new awareness of freedom that one would be able to realize one’s true self, and that means such a dynamic would accord the necessary space to marriage and motherhood in a woman’s world. Shashi Deshpande’s concern is to project such a world (Kalidas Misra 80)
Deshpande’s women are thinking women, they tend to philosophize about their trauma, suffering, problems etc but the stories usually end optimistically. These thinking women are also educated, sensitive and they think about their future and the future of their family. They also raise issues pertaining to marriage, love and relationships. Family, religion and marriage suppress individual freedom and choice of a woman.

Deshpande says as she tries to internalize the problems and mind of her female protagonists, “In discovering other women, I have discovered myself.” (Nirmala Prakash 233). Her protagonists travel through an inner and an outer journey, so a conditioning of the outside and inside is important. So that they develop especially the self and they remain in a better state and establish a conditioned response. As they journey thus they explore isolation, relationships, responsibilities, need for space, and this leads to a journey of self-knowledge, a refinding. They struggle and realize that they have to be their own strength and shelter, and in this process, they also learn association with the other women. These women are also class conscious and middle- class so they are fully aware of their education, upbringing, etc. though they have to struggle between identity, autonomy and self-fulfillment. They are also aware of the power and strength a married woman can have in the Indian set up.

Deshpande says:

“It took me years to say even to myself, ‘I am a feminist.’ It was the culmination of a voyage that began within myself and went on to the ocean of women’s place in the world. Today, when I call myself a feminist, I believe that the female of the species has the
same right to be born and survive, to fulfill herself and shape her life according to her needs and the potential that lies within her, as the male has…I believe that Nature, when conferring its gifts on humans, did not differentiate between males and females, except for the single purpose of procreation. I believe that motherhood does not bar everything else, but is a bonus, an extra that women are privileged to have. (221)

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.

So Deshpande’s women suffer not only pain, loneliness, but they go through a lot of suppression as bell hooks states in her essay “Sisterhood”: “…sexism is perpetrated by institutional and social structures, by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress, and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo” (2000:43).”She states that sexism leads to domination by males like oppression, exploitation, discrimination, subjugation, etc. Also, according to this it is expressed that women are valueless and their value is only in relation to men. She tells women “to live and work in solidarity” and she further states:
When women actively struggle in a truly supportive way, to understand our differences, to change misguided, distorted perspectives, we lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs, and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood.” (67)

As these women struggle and carry the burden of their life they assimilate all their pain but what sets in is a detachment that is philosophical which somehow allows them to carry on and survive. Though they suffer, they suffer with dignity and this elevates them and they accept the inevitable and even in their passivity there is dignity and strength similar to Deshpande’s women and their silence add to their misery but it is inevitable in many cases as it acts as a power for resistance.

As Usha Bande says “When silence becomes deliberate it acts as a barrier to the penetration of the soul by a perceiver; it works as an operation of power rather than powerlessness. As it withholds communication it produces a kind of awe and becomes a potent tool of resistance.” (198) Silence keeps the individual and her individuality from the dangers of total loss, these women defy, bear, endure and suffer but they have also learnt to face life in their silence, they know their own flaws too, mistakes they might have done and failures they might commit in their future, they know that silently they have to search and achieve their own strength which will eventually come from within and this inner strength through silence will make anguish, bitterness, agony, pain and grief bearable and it makes resistance possible. 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,
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 as a whole 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 are capable of empowering themselves, and thus understand the situation and try to solve the problem thus realizing a new self and coming to self-knowledge.

The transformation of an individual by the psychic being is a vital change. But the realization of the psychic personality is not enough…the psychic being cannot totally divinise an individual. After we develop the soul-personality, higher realizations are yet to be achieved. To know the self or to realise it is not to achieve the highest state of its existence (Srivastava 136)

As Deshpande also states that as women start their journey into self-knowledge it’s not easy for them “…we are already burdened with a baggage that has been given to us. The fact is that we don’t start with a picture of ourselves on a clean slate. Inscribed on it already are things told to us by others that determine our behaviour, ideas, expectations and dreams.” (87) Deshpande does not mind women
who dream but she dislikes the structures that hinder their dreaming. As Beauvoir also encourages women to acquire autonomy, to realize and take care of their real self through experiences will come self-realization.

As Kavya quotes what Barbara Berg says:

> It is the freedom to decide her own destiny, freedom from sex-determined role; freedom from society’s oppressive restriction; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of woman’s right to individual conscience and judgment (B. Kavya 157).

Since women can only express themselves when they are not under any pressure by men, Deshpande believes that in a family both women and men should have equal privileges, compromises, understanding and companionship; even woman’s autonomy means a relational autonomy rooted in the family and women should have the freedom to discover their real self, ambitions and dreams for self-fulfillment with sustenance from relationships, rather than being psychologically, emotionally, and financially dependent on men. It is such philosophical, thinking women that the writer tries to recreate in her works. Shashi Deshpande says:

> The writer’s imagination is a very powerful tool; it has both muscle and strength. I would compare it, not to the butterfly’s flitting, but to the eagle’s swoop and soar in flight. There is something daring about imagination, about the way it can go into the dark, leap over a yawning abyss and make connections, which never seemed to be there. It is imagination that allows the artist to get to the inner truth, which goes beyond the facts, behind the presumed reality. “Poetry is
something more philosophical and of graver import than history”: Aristotle’s words. It is the writer’s imagination that makes it possible for creative writing to have these qualities (34).

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 behavior’s 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 philosophizing 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.

As Vijaya Guttal says:

…it is not the aim of Shashi Deshpande to merely document female resistance to patriarchal ideologies, but also to focus on the strategies of readjustments her female protagonists undertake in order to forge an identity of their own. Her women characters struggle to learn to become “one’s own refuge” and value the fellowship of other women. She recreates sensitively the female world and through modes of women’s experience she gives it the mainstream position. She refuses to isolate women’s experience even as her fiction consciously creates feminine sensibility and specificity and is at times even successful in creating a language of her own.” (175)

It is said that Deshpande’s women discover a new sense of self and they gradually grow and mature. As Usha Bande says: “Shashi Deshpande in particular lets her women experience the confusing and disturbing silence within, get a glimpse
of their inner being and empower themselves to confront power politics, comprehend the situation and resolve crisis” (191). For this purpose, Deshpande charts out the inner landscapes of women; she explores the world of these women and their outlook and reconstructs the suppressed or lost experiences of these women and their loneliness, voicing their silenced voices. These women’s experiences display resistance and subversion, with a quest for self-knowledge leading to the realization that, to be free means to be lonely too. But Deshpande’s protagonists suffer loneliness inside and outside marriage too, which Deshpande draws attention to: “A marriage you start off expecting so many things. And bit-by-bit like dead leaves, the expectations fall off. But there two people who have shut themselves off in two separate glass jar who can see each other but can’t communicate? Is this marriage?” (24)

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. “Self-consciousness is a higher principle than consciousness which emerges in man. In self-conscious beings, we meet a set of phenomena quite distinct from the physical or the vital or the merely conscious.” There are grades in the woman’s consciousness… “In man we have a higher principle of consciousness, viz., self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is characterised by reflective and discursive knowledge and capacity for free invention…Self-consciousness is a new higher emergent principle (Srivastava 316-7).” The man has personal experiences, values and purposes because he is a self-conscious individual. “The reflective capacity of the human mind and its power of free invention are not mere complication of lower instincts. It is the essence of self-conscious intelligence to look before and after and vary actions according to circumstances”(316-7.)
Similarly, the self-conscious woman looks before and after her circumstance and realizes a new higher principle as she philosophizes leading her also to self-assertion. As stated by Spacks:

The cliché that women, more consistently than men, turn inward for sustenance seems to mean, in practice, that women have richly defined the ways in which imagination creates possibility: possibility that society denies...Everywhere women gaze into mirrors, embrace suffering, welcome roles of helpless submissiveness...but as a necessary means to self-assertion...Their capacity to accept, even welcome, unhappiness derives from their refusal to compromise, their unwillingness to conform to social definitions of what should constitute happiness, their determination to preserve the integrity of the self...And the passivity of the perfect wife often conceals the assertiveness of a woman willing to cover but not to abandon her drive for power. Of course orthodox psychoanalytic theory would acknowledge that masochism, narcissism, and passivity may constitute stratagems for maintaining the personality.... (*The Female Imagination.* 315-9)

Deshpande too writes of such women who control through her passivity, she might suffer loneliness in and outside marriage and she may also be clasped between modernity and tradition, but she must preserve her identity. She sets up a self-search, in fact leading her to an authentic selfhood; it is a struggle of a woman to express herself also to discover her real self, through introspection and retrospection, as she travels through these factors expressing her vision of the struggle for harmony as well. She talks of rape in marriage, career, woman and family, various relationships
between women, with mother, husband, mother-in-law, etc. which reveal the complicated traditional society that is badly in need of redemption through strength of love, and the need for release from evils like destitution, deprivation, violence, dominion etc.

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 realizes that family life becomes unendurable and so does 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 in reality. Such a behavior very often depends on the environment the woman belongs to. As Sudhir Kakar says:
Super ego, the moral agency is weakly differentiated and insufficiently idealized in Indians. Whereas in the West, an individual’s behaviour is constantly regulated by the proscriptions of the Super ego, in a Hindu it is regulated by what he calls ‘communal conscience.’ He explains that communal conscience which comprises family and jati norms, “is a social rather than an individual formation: it is not ‘inside’ the psyche. In other words, instead of having one internal sentinel an Indian relies on many external ‘watchmen’ to patrol his activities and especially his relationships in all social hierarchies (B. Kavya 81-2)

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 realize that the choice is theirs and they must themselves assert their individuality; the final choice is their own, because they realize 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.

In other words, they are engaged in the process of self-actualization. Calvin states:

Self-actualization is the creative trend of human nature. It is the organic principle by which the organism becomes more fully developed and more complete. The ignorant person who desires knowledge feels an inner emptiness; he or she has a sense of their
own incompleteness. By reading and studying their desire for knowledge is fulfilled and the emptiness disappears. A new person has been created, thereby, one in whom learning has taken the place of ignorance. Their desire has become an actuality. Any need is a deficit. It is like a hole that demands to be filled in. This replenishment or fulfillment of a need is what is meant by self-actualization or self realization (B. Kavya 151-2)

Though the female narrator philosopher realizes this self-actualization and its importance, yet 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 realize 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. Commenting on individuality Ramsay Muir says: “Individuality does not command and never has commanded such respect in India as it does in the west. Self-suppression, not self expression or self-development, is still, as it has always been, the highest ideal of the best Indian minds” (B. Kavya 150).

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 analyze 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 philosophizes, 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 emphasizing the idea of the female narrator as philosopher.