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 centered 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 behavior 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 catalyzes 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 fulfillment 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 homemaking 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 or 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 enrichening, 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 analyzing 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 centered ideas: woman’s upbringing in the Indian scenario, the background, culture and tradition she is nurtured in. In other words, the woman centered 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 of 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 skillfully 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 analyzed 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 analyzed 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.