CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

The Indian Culture which boasts of a hoary past accepts in principle, the importance of woman in the family and in the society. But in reality it has created a convention that certain roles are to be performed by woman only and the welfare of a family is inevitably dependent on her service to male members. Selfless service to the family is expected as her quality, sacrificing her interests for the benefit of the family is considered as her virtue and satisfying her husband by all means is her priority. It is family and not the individual that forms the basic unit of the Indian society and so the Indian society has become predominantly patriarchal. It has carved out gender specific roles for woman. Her submission to male chauvinism has led her to servility. The male prejudice views her as a partner not on equal footing but born to bear and rear children and to perfectly perform the role of a dutiful wife, mother, daughter-in-law etc. She is well-behaved if she is obedient to male authority. She is respectful if she is submissive to male supremacy. She is fit for family life if she is devoted to her husband and loyal to her family members. She gains reverence by her sacrifice. Her home is the field of her activity and the world outside is male’s dominion. If she crosses her limited territory she loses her position. Under the weight of the malevolent male hegemony, she is unaware of her capabilities.

Under the influence of the time honoured patriarchal system she has accepted subservience as a way of life. As a human being she also has a basic instinct of establishing her own identity, but the women of previous generations fall in line with the male members and impose on her the restrictions of patriarchy which they believe to have been in practice since time immemorial. For example, girl children were not given education prior of the advent of the British rule in India. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar mentions about the western education in India as,
It was the ‘open sesame’ to knowledge, freedom, power; it cut the old bonds of convention and tradition; it led in light into the old dark rooms of an obscurantist faith, and it made a new world and a new life possible for its beneficiaries.

The restrictions of patriarchy attempt to stifle her desire of exhibiting her potentiality when it tries to blossom. When she feels the urge for demonstrating her worth and crosses the boundaries of her constrained space, the traditional imprint in her does not allow her to violate the culture of family life. She finds herself in a dichotomous situation of trying to affirm her value in the society like any male member and also lead a happy family life as a dutiful wife. When she realizes that the well-established principles of submission to the will of male members are trying to hold her back, she faces perplexity at first, then makes a self-analysis and finally prefers to stand up for her space in the society. Thus she evolves from a docile entity into an assertive individual and proclaims not to take her for granted. This evolution pronounces her progress.

Progress denotes advancement or development to a better state and the essential quality for her progress is self-awareness. The female of the previous generation had a limited exposure to the outside world because right from their childhood they were trained to be supine and were moulded to be unresisting. Even the educated capitulated to this custom in the name of culture, but later dissemination of information and progressive ideas started making inroads into the veil of culture. So the modern woman revalues her self-hood and becomes sensible of her individualism. She does not beg for her space from the masterful males but decides to display her distinctive traits without waiting for their permission.

The four novelists viz. Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Anita Nair and Kavery Nambisan have plainly and precisely portrayed how pliable women of different upbringings and from different social classes evolve into self-assured individuals. In
Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru faces suppression of her identity right from her childhood. Her mother emulates her grandmother’s orthodoxy without any digression. She doles out differential treatment to Saru and provides preferential treatment to Saru’s brother. This creates an indelible impression in the mind of Saru that her mother has a special grudge against her. But in reality her mother’s approach towards her is quite normal as that of an Indian mother. The feeling of onslaught on her by her mother instigates her to contravene caste norms and choose Manu as her husband. Initially the traditional psyche in her makes her feel elated for having selected a superior man as her life-partner but much to her disenchantment Manu proves to be an unadulterated product of patriarchal society.

Manu is unable to digest his wife’s popularity as a renowned doctor which ultimately results in their disintegration. He behaves as a typical male chauvinist by offending her sexually. But Saru also has an insentient imprint of popular womanhood in her psyche. She longs for a happy customary marriage attended and blessed by her relatives and friends. She has a cherished desire of bearing a child in her arms surrounded by her relatives. She thinks about her friend’s sister who had come home after her disastrous marriage and the care and sympathy showered on her by her parents. Since her marriage had been an arranged one, her parents were part of the misfortune. But Saru’s marriage was not an arranged one and so she could not expect any support from her parents. She understands that she is solely responsible for her woeful marriage and develops a guilty conscience.

Saru faces antagonism first from her mother and then from her husband because both of them are patrons of paternal values. They bring on her excruciating sufferings which she copes with initially but later when she is pushed to the extreme, she makes a self analysis. She finally realizes that her pathetic situation is the result of her overbearing attitude. At her father’s house she ruminates, “My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him.
My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood” (TDHNT 217).

Saru is Janus faced – one face looks back to the ancient traditional image of a woman’s life and the other face looks forward to a whole new world waiting to explore her identity. Thus she wishes for a happy dichotomous life of being a beloved wife of her husband and as a leading lady doctor in the society. But the prevalent social order leads her to think that she has to select either of the two. This lands her in a predicament to decide which way she should proceed. She decides to continue her life as a well known doctor but her conservative thoughts instruct her not to discard her family life and not to fail in her duty as a wife to her husband and as a mother to her children. When her father advises her to live the present life with determination and says, “Don’t turn your back on things again. Turn mind and look at them. Meet him” (TDHNT 216), she decides to meet her husband. At the same time she resolves to curtail her habit of looking forward to her husband with growing expectations and be concerned only about what she does to her husband and others. She has discovered her inner strength and she is no more a meek receiver but a self-assured giver. Her sacrifice is not under the stress of male control but from a position of authority. She rebels against the tradition but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. The development of such a caliber in her mind characterizes her evolution from a passive woman into a self-assertive individual.

K.S.Srinivasa Iyengar comments on the decision of Saru’s integration as,

…strips herself of self-deceptions, guilt complexes and emotive illusions, and Shashi Deshpande’s language itself flickers like a candle and blobs of remembrance melt and form icicles of furrowing thought. Sarita cannot forget her children, or the sick needing her expert attention and so she decides to face
her home again. In this unpredictable world, even total despair can open up a new spring of elemental self-confidence. (758)

The novel ends with Saru’s affirmative walk with hope as against her frustrated walk with despair to her parents’ house in the beginning. It is her progressiveness as a modern woman that makes her realize that the darkness of patriarchy holds no more terrors for her because she has become conscious of her identity. Thus Saru proves that she is a multifaceted individual who is capable of withstanding trials in her life. As a modern progressive woman she passes through a series of transformation which signifies her liberty from bondage to a life with self-assertion.

In Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*, Jaya has been brought up in a conformist spirit by her mother who has never expressed her dissent or disputed against her father in her life. Jaya’s mother along with her grandmother has imbued her with the qualities of legendary women and motivated her to imbibe those widely preached womanly qualities of tolerance, timidity, submissiveness, compliance etc. Jaya’s mother has taught her to discard her desires and act in consonance with the wishes of the male members as they provide shelter to the women in the family. Her husband Mohan is also a typical product of the male dominated social system and expects Jaya to dance to his tunes as a dutiful wife. As a result, she subscribes to the male centered principles in as much as she expects that her child must be a boy and undergoes anguish for concealing the abortion from her husband; she also gives in to her husband’s wishes and gives up writing.

Thus seventeen long years of her marriage teaches her to manage her life with suppressed feelings because she thinks it is more important to be a good wife than to be a good writer. She is on the threshold of getting popularity as a creative writer but when Mohan expresses his displeasure that she has pinpointed him indirectly in one of her short
stories, she stops her writing further. She thinks, “Looking at his stricken face, I had been convinced I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that” (TLS 144).

She seems to be progressive in her writing but in practice she is a follower of the established norms. Her husband wishes her to be a typical housewife in serving him but modern in befriending his superior to cover up his culpable act in his office. She detests this dichotomy of having to live as a conservative in the family and to behave as a radical to the outside world. She does not like to don two different roles with the avowed purpose of fulfilling the necessities of her husband. As a consequence she finds herself in a dilemma of having to live in harmony with two disharmonious facets of life.

She analyses her life and wakes up to the fact that right from her childhood she has allowed others to take decisions for her to such extent that her father’s authority did not allow her to love music of her choice, the thought of annoying her husband prevented her from attending the death of her well wisher – a male who inspired her to write and the despotic attitude of her husband forced her to abandon writing. Altogether her family and society stifled her creativity and caused her to fade away into an archetypal Indian housewife. She has actually surrendered herself to the family without enjoying any privilege and has only made sacrifices for a secure family life. When her husband accuses her of change in her, she laughs hysterically and Mohan is so enraged that he leaves the house as if he will never return. At the same time she gets the news that her son Rahul has disappeared while holidaying. She feels totally shattered and gets into the traumatic state of mind. Thus the fruit of her sacrifices are frustration and supine indifference from her husband for a frivolous reason.

She resolves to redress her problem by having the benefit of her entitlements. She is aware that the remedy lies not in severing her ties with the family but in standing up to the
situations. She has realized that the corrective measure exists not in retorting but in reconciling with her husband when he returns and improving her relationship with him which may take some or more time. She concludes to strengthen her bond with the family through affinity instead of servility. She ultimately makes her mind up to settle down in the family by maintaining the balance of her life as an equal life partner and not as a submissive member. This suggests that the change in her disposition is her self-evolution and it is presented through the following:

…I have always thought – there’s only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices… If I have to plug that ‘hole in the heart’, I will have to erase the silence between us… We don’t change overnight. It’s possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible. (TLS 192)

She decides not to allow others to constrict her space but to have her place on an equal level. The silence she now adopts displays her trait of assertiveness and it is different from her hitherto maintained silence which has been the sign of her subservience. She is no longer a passive member of a patriarchal family but has evolved into a modern woman in family life fully aware of her identity. The silence that she exhibits with a renewed vigour and confidence is the sign of her progressiveness.

Shashi Deshpande has elucidated the various tragic stages in Jaya’s life which lead her along the path of self transformation. The novelist puts the blame of Jaya-Mohan’s marital discordance not only on Mohan’s shoulders but also on Jaya’s. She suggests that women also play a role in their victimisation and should not squarely blame others.
Shashi Deshpande mentions in an article written to *The Literary Criterion* entitled ‘The Dilemma of a Woman Writer’, that this novel is a serious effort towards “maintaining a credible balance between the sexes” (33). Thus Jaya has raised herself against the straitjacketed role models of a housewife and a mother and she rebels against the suppression practised by the age-old patriarchal setup. She has gained the moral courage and resourcefulness to make her life possible in the present. She has become aware of the advantages of the established values and has decided to put up with the realities of life. Jaya’s self-introspection helps her to discover about herself and to redefine her relation with the world. The novel ends with the change and hope in Jaya for a better life. “We don’t change overnight. It’s possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that life would be impossible” (TLS 193), and the ending of the novel suggests a new beginning in Jaya’s life. Thus her progressiveness is not related to the development of societal status and financial uplift but to her evolution from her own psychological constraints which help her to live and make others live peacefully.

Devi in Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*, comes of a traditional background. Devi has her roots in the old practices handed over by her grandmother and her mother. Her grandmother narrates many mythological stories to imbue her with multifarious capabilities of womanhood. According to her grandmother, the mythological women are the role models for the younger generation and are worthy of emulation. Sita, Devi’s mother, a vibrant veena player gave up playing veena, for Sita’s father-in-law had chided her for not performing the role of a dutiful daughter-in-law. She has sacrificed her preferences and pleasures because she has to prove herself as a devoted wife. She has diverted her energies towards the success of her husband’s professional life.

Devi’s father-in-law narrates her stories that convey the limits of wifehood. He
preaches principles centered on male’s stand point from the ancient texts which advocate women to serve and satisfy their husbands. He urges her to stick to this time-revered practice to be honoured in the heavens. Devi is full of rage as she is expected to follow her husband’s “self-contained footprints” (TFN 84) with stumbling feet. Devi’s husband Mahesh has an unambiguous belief that women remain contended within the four walls of the house enjoying the materialistic pleasures provided by men. He is of the view that they should not step out of their protectorate and become active because it is an encroachment on the male’s dominion.

Mayamma, the helpless, illiterate and financially backward woman in the novel undergoes a chain of tortures given by her husband, mother-in-law and son. She has been a silent victim of injustice and indignity heaped upon her. She has faced terrible abuse, condemnations and humiliations from all of her relations and she considers them her fate. She turns the negative effects of afflictions into positive inspirations which strengthen her inner self. Her acceptance of suffering with dignity has helped her to gain strength and attain a sense of calmness. She claims that a woman is neither a bonded labourer to be scorned at nor a slave to men. She learns the strategies of survival and says, “I have learnt how to wait, when to bend my back, when to wipe the rebellious eyes dry” (TFN 126). She finds refuge in Parvatiamma’s (Mahesh’s mother) house and stays there to tend the kitchen and the family.

When the society fails to provide dignity to its female members, it is a necessity for women to draw strength from within and create self-esteem. In reality, when a woman gives up herself to the atrocities inflicted upon her, she becomes weak at heart and loses self-esteem. Mayamma silently endures all humiliations, yet her mind remains calm and composed. She proves herself as a progressive woman by means of realizing her identity.
When Parvatiamma leaves her family and goes in search of the self, her husband and her son who are educated decry her act but Mayamma understands the poignant position of Parvatiamma. She considers Parvatiamma’s getaway from the home as a mark of her liberty and indefatigable strength. She narrates the story of Parvatiamma to Devi and retells her own struggle. As a family retainer she silently approves of the elopement of Devi with Gopal.

Devi, as an educated modern woman, could sense her husband’s uncaring mind-set for her welfare and his uninterested response to her emotions. She finds it difficult to put up with the attitude of her husband. She feels offended by his unconcerned way of behaviour and resolves to avenge him for the affront meted out to her selfhood. The dichotomous qualities exhibited by the mythological female characters emerge in her mind. In this connection, it is worth pointing out Damodar Rao’s words, “…the areas of outward confrontation…are very few…Her mental states rather than actual events occupy the centre stage and the conflicts, having been internalized, result in psychological aggression...” (168).

The self-inflicted sufferings of Gandhari for the sake of her husband and the avenging attitude of Amba towards Bishma for wiping out her marriage life with her lover resurface in her thoughts. They land her in a fix in making up her mind as to which of the qualities she should take in. Her rearing up in the customary atmosphere dissuades her from going for an open onslaught but as a modern woman she feels that culture is only a cohesive force and it is love that acts as an adhesive force. So with great expectations of experiencing love she goes with Gopal, a musician. But her elopement ends in deception because her love for Gopal was platonic whereas Gopal had only a carnal attraction.

Devi analyses her life and those of her mother and Mayamma. Inspired by Amba and
Durga of Baba’s stories, she feels, “I became a woman warrior, a heroine. I was Devi. I rode a tiger, and cut off evil, magical demon’s heads” (TFN 41). She could no more be tamed in the name of culture. Her self-pitying attitude mutates into a revengeful approach and leads her through delusion to self-realization. She does not want to remain as a spineless survivor but resolves to become a conqueror. She does not like to just balance her life like an acrobat walking across a tightrope but settles to live her life. She goes to her mother in search of undemanding love. She finds that her mother who had tagged on to values established by men, had liberated herself from its clutches after her father’s death.

The three main female characters in the novel, Mayamma, Sita and Devi differ in their ages and educational levels but their sufferings are almost similar. Of the three, Mayamma silently displays her evolution and Devi intensely proves her growth. Mayamma’s evolution is based on her courage to live her life. Devi’s progressiveness is built on her strong sense of overriding at different stages to prove her identity. Sita’s suffering is not that much serious when compared to that of Mayamma and Devi. She doesn’t run for refuge like them because she is quite aware of her potentiality and waits to prove it till she gets the chance. After the death of her husband, the restricting force on her selfhood vanishes and she gives vent to her suppressed identity in the form of playing veena. Thus Mayamma, Sita and Devi evolve as new women in the society in their own way.

Akhila in Anita Nair’s Ladies Coupe, is from an orthodox Brahmin family. Brahmins are known for their rigid adherence to ethics and any deviation from the established practices of custom is dubbed as a sin. Though religious rites treat husband and wife as equal partners and a male is not considered qualified to participate in rituals without his wife, the doctrines put forward by males have relegated the female to a secondary position.
Akhila's mother resolutely adheres to the system of giving reverence to Akhila's father, the head of the family. She develops a master servant relationship with him and determines that his wishes and comforts are of prime importance to the family. She is of the strong belief that the religious dogmas in practice are sacrosanct and women carry them on to the next generation and sustain them. So she expects Akhila to revere the principles of her family. After the death of Akhila’s father, Akhila, the eldest one, readily takes on his responsibilities and bears the burden of the family. Her brothers and sisters get settled in life on her financial support. Akhila’s mother is well aware that in the Indian society, the life of an unmarried girl gets stigmatized as unworthy and she is looked down upon and mostly treated as a societal abuse but she does not think about Akhila’s marriage. Akhila’s mother exploits Akhila’s responsibility as the breadwinner of the family and wants to settle down like the other children through the earnings of Akhila.

The poetic lines in the novel Ladies Coupe brings out the exact depiction of the mental state to which an unmarried female is pushed to, in Indian society. “I am a lamp without wicks. I am that which mother of new borns and brides fear. I am the one they ward against… my name when spelt aloud reads defeat…”(LC 135)

After her father’s death, Akhila reels under the pressure of the dichotomy of having to don the role of the head of the family and at the same time having to live her personal life. She has no freedom to live her life as she wishes because she has been forced to get permission from her younger brothers even to get her small desires fulfilled. When her father was alive everyone in the family submitted to his supremacy but when she stands in for her father, she has to tend her family and capitulate to the male members who are dependent on her. She realizes that she has to fit into the role of her father for earning but as a woman she has no authority associated with her father’s position in the family. She is a
frustrated spinster who has sacrificed her younger years looking after her mother, siblings and their offspring. In a conventional family women should mould and transform themselves to suit the interests of the family and Akhila is no exception.

Akhila is not entitled to the respect, freedom and comforts appropriate to her status as the head of the family. She is ordained to serve her family and she feels neglected under the cultural orientation. She becomes resentful when she thinks that she has no identity, no pleasure and no peace at home in spite of all her sacrifice to the family. Her longing for a cosy relationship creates an emotional love bond with Hari, a fellow passenger in the regular train to the office. His adoration and desire to marry her gives her a sense of euphoria. The constant suppression of her physical desires causes an erotic dream and during a short trip with Hari she indulges in revelry by getting physically close to him. She yearns for a conjugal relationship with Hari whom she believes to be a caressing soul. But she is elder to him and she is apprehensive of the established norm in the society that the wife should always be younger to her husband. She is afraid of breaking the stereotypical frame in which she is enclosed and so she lets the relationship die away.

She faces the perplexity of whether to live a strained orthodox life in her family or live a contented life liberated from her family. She makes a self-analysis and decides to transgress orthodoxy which is incongruous to her way of thinking. As a first step she eats eggs, an act detested by Brahmins. She is no more a complaisant orthodox lady but has evolved into a modern woman impervious to the constraints of the society.

Her life which has several landmarks makes her tread the path of progress towards the state of emancipation. Eating an egg for the first time is the first liberating moment in her life. As the next discharging step she goes in search of a serene atmosphere and travels all alone in a train to Kanyakumari. She is fed up with the enervating multiple roles of a
daughter, a sister and an aunt and desires to extricate her from the intertwining clutches of the family. She starts her journey with a probing question in her whether a woman can live alone. She tries to find out the answer from the life stories of her fellow passengers.

The poignant tales of the fellow passengers, Janaki, Prabha Devi, Margaret Shanthi, Sheela and Marikolundu stir up her soul and bolster her collapsing inner strength. From their life stories she perceives that desire and gratification play an important part in one’s life. At Kanyakumari, a young boy falls a prey to her passion and she stays with him for a night. This makes her think that she does need a man and calls Hari over phone and tells her name as ‘Akhilandeswari’ and not Akhila, which means she is no more the meek and inferior one but a lady with the full bloom of her inner self. She relives her experience and decides that she has a right, even at the age of forty five to get her love from Hari. She wishes to begin her life afresh. This decision is her rebellion against the society and its repressive forces. Her evolution is revealed in the spiritually and emotionally liberating journey. Thus she progresses from a phlegmatic character to a strong-willed individual.

In Ladies Coupe, Janaki and Prabha Devi do not feel their life complete without a man because they nurture a notion in their heart that the world has no meaning for a single woman. They feel content with their way of life and induce the need for a marital life in the mind of Akhila. Janaki Prabhakar gets pampered by her parents and by her husband. She leads a very comfortable life and has no needs at all. She is respected and her desires are fulfilled without even a word of questioning. Thus she does not know the real troublesome life of an ordinary woman in the society. She cannot tolerate her son’s concern towards his wife and feels alienated and longs for her husband’s care. She has a complete satiated life and she does not come across situations necessitating evolution or progress in her life.

Prabha Devi in Ladies Coupe, has been reared in an atmosphere of beliefs handed
down by the patriarchal society. Her father sighed when she was born because he thought about the responsibilities involved in bringing up a girl child in the Indian society such as the financial commitment on her wedding and the hardships they have to undergo as parents to settle her in life. But Prabha Devi’s mother has a pragmatic approach to the established practices in the society. She consoles her husband by saying that when Prabha Devi grows up she could be married to a person from a family that suits his business interests. Thus a girl even at the stage of infancy is not looked at as an ordinary soul with normal emotions and expectations. She is viewed as a commodity in marriage transaction in which the ownership gets transferred to her husband and he becomes her rightful owner. Prabha Devi’s parents give her good education and allow her to be modern not with a view to strengthening her character but with the vision of preparing her to fulfill the general expectations of the modern youth. They do not nurture her identity as an individual but nourish the womanhood in her in congruence with the male point of view. Prabha Devi grows with a fashionable trend and sociable attitude. In spite of being modern in outlook she goes in for an arranged marriage quite unaware of her father’s business mind-set. She gets married to the son of a diamond merchant and thus becomes a capital in her father’s commercial tactics.

Prabha Devi’s husband Jagdeesh provides her with all comforts and pleasures but she feels something missing in her life as she has no means to express her individuality. She moves freely with others but Pramod, one of Jagdeesh’s friends tries to take liberties with her. She takes it as an assault on her dignity but Pramod, a typical male chauvinist has no remorse for his act. He blames her geniality as the cause for his wicked act. Male bigotry is so deep rooted in the society that when a woman disapproves of the culpable advancement of a male towards her, it is her femininity that is to be blamed and not his malicious
mentality. Now she realizes the dichotomous situation of having to live as a traditional woman and also lead a modern socialized life. Thus she faces the difficult situation of maintaining a balance between the two facets of her life. She takes her children to the swimming class and gets an urge to swim and consequently the dullness of her life vanishes.

Thus she overcomes the dreariness in her life. Since she has been brought up in modern style, the self in her craves to expose itself by its characteristics but the traditional settings in her mind make her accept the demarcation line which she should not cross. They do not allow her to get out of the family unit. She does not give up her modern outlook but only eschews her desire for revealing her identity to the society. She does not confront traditional values of life but adopts a collision course only against the exploiting acts of male gender. She maintains her nobility and becomes conscious of her personality and finds out other paths to signify her selfhood. She accepts her situations as they are and it is only her approach towards the life that has changed and what once seemed to be boring to her has become rejuvenating now. Thus she evolves into a progressive woman by accepting her life with a change in her outlook.

Margaret Shanthi believes that a woman needs a man but not to make her feel complete. Margaret Shanthi’s mother keeps up with old principles and advises Margaret Shanthi to take extra care to meet her husband’s expectations and satisfy him. As far as Margaret Shanthi’s mother is concerned, she has given sagacious advice to her daughter for a peaceful family life as a responsible mother. Margaret Shanthi’s husband has male prejudice in his subconscious mind and expects her to discharge her duty of attending him scrupulously. He decides her fields of interest and areas of activity and determines how she should appear externally. Since she has been taught to revere her husband more than God, she goes by her husband’s orders and stops going to Church and undergoes abortion even
though they are against their religious values. She exhausts her energy for his well being and satisfaction but he neither appreciates her efforts nor realizes her hardships. She has no avenue to express herself and feels her life as sickening, monotonous and hollow. She expresses her intense depressiveness to her husband and looks for some change in his attitude. But his mind is fully engrossed in the male supremacy and he does not bother to assuage her feelings. She faces a dichotomous situation, to perform the customary role of a traditional wife and also to have some outlet to express her individuality. She finds herself in a quandary to choose either of the two because her mother, her husband and the society do not seem to understand the enervating environment in which she lives.

She feels as a battered soul and could no longer cope with the stressful situation. She settles on to battle for establishing her distinctiveness and uses her skill of tasteful cooking as her weapon. So she prepares food using excessive fat in combination with her sweet words of concern for him and makes him inflate in size. He loses his energy and command, becomes refined and temperate and surrenders to her without being aware of it. She does not go for a direct confrontation with him and so she does not violate the cultural norms. She has only satiated his appetite for tasty foods and has won the war by shattering his ego. When she could not prove her identity as an individual in the traditional way, she channelises her energy through the available outlet and achieves her space unrestricted by customs. Thus from a feeble individual she progresses into a modern woman and exhibits her will-power and confidence. She executes her plan faultlessly and attains her goal.

Sheela is exposed to two divergent views of life. Sheela’s father brings her up in a situation bound by conventions but Sheela’s grandmother instills her thoughts of modernity in Sheela. Sheela succumbs to her father’s pressures in following the customary life and prefers not to adopt a collision course against him but inspired by her grandmother’s
teachings she develops modern thinking. She grows in the dichotomy of living a traditional life under her father’s care and cultivating progressive views under the influence of her grandmother. When her grandmother dies she is unable to tolerate the sight of her grandmother’s appearance. She decorates her body with costume and jewellery despite being considered sacrilegious by her parents. Her act of beautifying the dead body of her grandmother is her mark of respect to her grandmother’s progressive thoughts and it paves way for her future liberation. She gets inspiration from her grandmother’s stance of modernity.

The life of the sixth passenger in the coupe, Marikolundu is not only pitiable but also heart-breaking. Her story reveals her horrifying past – a woman raped, cast out, abandoned with a son and without husband. When compared with her privations, the adversities of other women are superficial. Under the force of widely prevalent male chauvinism it is her destitution that magnifies her sufferings. This can be inferred from the behaviour of the trained lady doctors in refusing to render her help in getting educated and turning her away after utilizing her services. After being raped by a male bigot she does not reveal the identity of the rapist to the society because by convention the underprivileged are born to suffer and not to agitate. The magnitude of male chauvinism and its cruelty can be judged when Sujata says that they would have forced the rapist to marry her if they had known his identity. It is implied that the culprit will not be punished but the victim has to accept the invader as her husband who now becomes her master. He gets an unquestionable right over her as his wife and she shall live under his care and remain loyal to him. But Marikolundu as a modern woman refuses to succumb to this barbarous custom. She boldly decides to remain without marrying and face the society alone. As her son is an inescapable outcome of her rape, she distances herself from him. She clandestinely offers herself to Sujata’s
husband but she has no malicious intent in it because she wishes to prevent him from going after many women to satisfy his lust. She only wants to make him stay at home without avoiding Sujata. As a poor uneducated woman she displays her loyalty to Sujata in her own way of thinking without knowing the consequences. When she is thrown out by Sujata, she does not suffer heart-burns. Whenever doors are shut for her she does not develop animosity against the doer because she has trained herself to bear insults. At every disaster she hopes for the better and never loses self-confidence. Her harrowing experiences make her analyse her life. She discovers her real self and decides to live an independent life. When she sees her son lighting the pyre of his father without knowing his relationship to him, she feels pity for him. The sight stirs her soul and makes her recognize that her reprehensible son is not responsible for her tragedy. On this realization, love for her son blossoms in her mind and she decides to live with him as a rearing mother. Thus from a naive gullible girl she has developed into a matured mother and has progressed as a reassuring individual.

When Prabha Devi asks Akhila if she is happy, she has no answer because even at the age of forty five, she cannot say what she wants. Akhila who leads her life like a water buffalo wallowing in self pity, allowing parasites to feast on her, has a revelation in Karpagam, her childhood friend who has gone ahead and learnt to survive. It is she who shows Akhila her worth. Akhila takes a decision to reclaim her lost love and releases herself from the convention with the revelation “…within me is a woman I have discovered” (LC 270). Now she realizes her independence with exhilaration, savours it and decides to live her life in her own way. She deciphers the message that “women are strong; women can do everything as well as men; women can do much more. But a woman has to seek that vein in herself. It does not show itself naturally” (LC 210) through Marikolundu.

*Ladies Coupe* is a deep probing into the psyche of the women characters. The
novelist Anita Nair brings out the status of modern women transparently without creating role models or making them to preach. She does not pass any judgement on the characters but she manifests the predicament of each character and presents the theme with an open end. The protagonists from different social backgrounds reflect on their conditions and arrive at certain conclusions, incidentally helping Akhila to arrive at hers. They all struggle for freedom; they are aware of their absurd situations that they feel stifled in it and try to find an answer to the very mystery of their existence in a society that does not understand them. All the characters suggest courageously new patterns of feminine existence, redefining the lives of women. Their progressiveness lies in their conclusion to feel at peace with themselves and their worlds.

In Kaveri Nambisan’s *The Hills of Angheri*, Nalli is from a village named Angheri. The village is engulfed in extreme conservatism and clings on unflinchingly to opinions and beliefs handed down through generations. When Nalli prefers to become a doctor she faces dissent from her family and disapproval from the villagers. The immensity of bias against female gender can be judged when the whole village disdains Nalli for choosing the medical profession. It also casts aspersions on her character that she would elope with somebody if sent for higher education. But the same village elates in Jai becoming a doctor.

The patriarchal society shows its partiality even in the field of education. It never allows women to take up certain branches of study as they are reserved for men. A friend of Nalli’s father subscribes to this illogical conjecture and advises her that it requires some manliness to be a surgeon. Nalli’s father considers her as weak in health and hesitates to send her to practice surgery as her profession. But Nalli is stubborn in her decision and achieves her goal through her efforts. She changes her style in order to look fashionable and
to fit into the contemporary society. She cherishes a desire of building a hospital for the benefit of the people in her village but Jai, who the people feel proud of belonging to their village, has no concern for them and has become avaricious. She longs for a marital life with Jai and to serve the people of her village but she faces rejection by both of them.

In the beginning of her career as a surgeon, she stands as a mute witness to the irregularities in her professional field at various places. Since she has been brought up in an oppressed atmosphere, she lacks confidence to encounter them. But in Madras she has grown in stamina to challenge the Chief of the hospital for commercialization of the service and commitment of irregularities. She even threatens to take the issue to the Health Minister but the intransigent authority indicts her for insubordination and shows her the way out. She learns that she does not have tangible evidence and the resources for engaging a lawyer to put up a fight and wakes up to the fact that she will have to fight a losing battle and leaves it. She finds it difficult to reconcile with the surroundings wherever she goes. The spirit in her to serve her village which is steeped in old culture is indomitable and she decides to liberate herself from the self-centered attitude of the city life. She makes a self-analysis of her life and reads her diary. To put it in her own words, “…my first entry, made when I was sixteen, full of impudent idealism” (HA 390). Now she has developed a pragmatic approach to life.

Both Jai and Nalli are brought up in the same village and get the same education. Being a male, Jai has advantages over Nalli. Jai has improved financially and has name and fame to his credit but has lost peace in his family life. He has learnt to diagnose patients professionally whereas Nalli has grown in intellect to read people and situations. She rightly pinpoints that the problems in his family life are that his wife and parents needed him and not his money, success or status. She speaks with self confidence as, “In my own life, I had
done what I wanted when it concerned big issues. Only in little things did I give in, let others decide” (HA 387). Jai has hurt everyone whom he cares for in his life whereas Nalli has only sacrificed her life and has not hurt anyone.

Nalli is able to think in advance on her future when she says,

I could see myself ten, fifteen years ahead: stouter, calmer, more capable, known as such-and-such surgeon. Breast cancer? Go to her, she’s good. Was I good? For how long would I continue to walk in and out of wards which smelt of fever, pain, humiliation and death? (HA 390)

She could shrewdly calculate Jai’s future as,

Twenty years from now the only difference would be more success, greying hair, spectacles maybe, and a paunch. He said he wanted a more restful practice but it would not happen….He was finished because he had stopped taking risks. (HA 389)

But she does not lose the quality of facing adverse consequences boldly. Even at the beginning of her career she does not choose to lead a self-contented life with Jai discarding the village people who shun her. Instead she prefers to eschew Jai and live as a doctor in the village. After her experiences at various places she gains the inner strength to live for the people of her village who are not ready to acknowledge her modernity. Thus from a domesticated village girl she evolves into a forward-looking woman executing her plan assertively.

All the central characters in the select novels yearn for full development of their faculties. They do not look for a liberal life free from responsibilities; they desire only freedom from male centered exploitative activities. A progressive woman does not detest familial bond but seeks recognition for her sensibility and intellect. She solicits a positive
response to her physical and emotional needs. Her battle is only against the antique values of the society and not against the society itself. It is due to her courage and resilience she comes to terms with interpersonal relationships, values them and asserts herself as an individual.

When considering the man-woman relationship of the protagonists, Saru’s husband subjects her to sexual brutality but she develops a detached equanimity and lives with him to prove her as a doctor of high distinction. Jaya’s husband oppresses her intellect by not allowing her to become a writer but she determines to tame her husband by improving her relationship with him. Devi’s husband offends her psyche by his indifferent attitude and Gopal tries to make sexual advance towards her but she rejects both of them as she is desirous of establishing her identity and not after physical pleasures alone. Akhila's mind is hurt when she is forced to look for permission from her dependent brothers for enjoying even small pleasures. She does not enforce her authority on her dependents but distances herself away from them and gets emboldened to renew her relationship with Hari. Margaret Shanthi finds her freedom completely curtailed and suffers and suffocates under the pride of her husband. She retaliates not violently but by feeding him more with fatty contents and crushes his ego. Prabha Devi does not undergo violent subjugation by her husband but her husband’s friend misconstrues her social nature and tries to outrage her modesty. She expostulates with him but does not retaliate violently. This incident transforms her outlook and she grasps the essence of modernity and develops a matured approach to her life. Marikolundu is subjected to bestiality physically and mentally but she does not reveal the identity of the rapist or take revenge on the hard hearted lady doctors or the misled mistress Sujata. Amazingly, the crudeness of the people responsible for her afflictions strengthens her frame of mind and love for her son blooms in it. Nalli suffers pain mentally due to the
hurtful attitude of the villagers and Jai. She sacrifices her love for Jai and prefers to serve her village where she is hardly recognised as a doctor.

All the leading female personae in the novels are mainly from the middle class families. They resist the enslaving attitude of the society and triumph over the subjugators by gaining inner strength. The development of this irrepressible attitude is their progress in life. They all get caught in a whirlpool of changes which initially brings them suffering. Ultimately out of the changes, they evolve as modern women resolutely crossing the barriers and breaking the boundaries. Thus they have progressed from possessing a passive character to displaying a dynamic trait.

The research brings out the similarity in the sufferings of the protagonists and their struggle in their own way to evolve from submissive and subservient beings to self-confident individuals. They are shown emerging as progressive women, not pertaining merely to their economic status but with respect to their social empowerment. The study has analysed the social and psychological aspects of the women protagonists in the selected novels. It brings to focus the attitude and nature of these women towards their self-made and self-styled road of progression without compromising their identity. The novelists emphasize transformation in their protagonists as the word ‘transformation’ itself means a beginning at the end. The protagonists do not remain stagnated compromising themselves with the conventional circumstances but transform themselves by their evolution.