CHAPTER V

Conclusion

A Comparison of Shashi Deshpande and Mannu Bhandari.

Shorter fiction written during the last three decades provides a glimpse into female psyche and deals with the full range of female experience. Short stories written particularly by Indian women present the Indian woman, her conflicts and predicament against the background of contemporary India. They examine and evaluate, in their writings, the socio-cultural modes and values that have given women their image and role towards themselves and the society. In the changing contexts of our country and times, the woman now finds herself at cross purposes with herself as well as the society. Accordingly, both Shashi Deshpande and Mannu Bhandari explore the psychic and moral as well as emotional dilemmas and repercussions of the situation in their women characters trying to achieve a new harmony of relationships with themselves and their surroundings.

Shashi Deshpande and Mannu Bhandari have been accepted as significant literary figures in their respected languages on the contemporary Indian literary panorama. Many comparisons have been made between their fictions and the fiction of other writers. A comparative approach ought to lead us to a more comprehensive and adequate understanding of the works and their authors. Keeping this in view, I have tried to compare the short stories of Shashi Deshpande with that of Mannu Bhandari, a Hindi writer. Interestingly, both these writers share common concerns despite socio-cultural differences. However, a few dissimilarities can also be observed in some aspects.
5.1 A Comparison of Thematic Concerns:

Feminism, a rapidly developing significant ideology, constitutes a major segment of the contemporary writings. It has emerged as a concept that encompasses both a philosophy and movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within a given society. Feminism in literature is essentially concerned with the representation of women in society and their corresponding fluid position. Most of the attempts to define what it is to be a woman, assume a universal connotation; in that, the woman is considered more as a product of cultural norms and restraints rather than as a creation of nature.

Feminism as an extension of existentialism gets echoed in Indian literature too. Short stories of Shashi Deshpande and those of Mannu Bhandari are no exception to this. However, socio-economic factor is at some extent explicit in Bhandari’s short stories. Her women come from different classes of the society. Some of them have to face the economic problem too. Hence, they face internal as well as external problems related to emotional world, whereas Deshpande’s women characters’ problems are mainly existential by nature as they have not to struggle for a living. In Deshpande, psychological realism pervades the narrative though not devoid of social realism and cultural context. While all the three are fusioned in Bhandari’s narrative.

This existential struggle to establish one's identity, to assert one's individuality and the desperate fight to exist as a separate entity appears in all its intensity in the short stories of both the writers. Through their stories both the writers express resentment at the unjust treatment meted out to women. Both of them deal with some similar subject matters like gender discrimination, marital rape, the problem of spinsterhood, discontented sex, incompatibility between the husband and the wife, the quest for identity, frustration, inferiority complex of husband, emotional alienation,
loneliness and boredom of housewives and so on.

These women novelists have awareness which comes because of their wide acquaintance with the nuances of life in the East as well as the West. Their high educational and intellectual standards have sharpened their observation of life and have imparted a psychological depth to their writings. Consequently, these women novelists have been able to create interesting personages who successfully expose the oppression inflicted on women in society. Their women characters symbolize life and growth as well as failure, withdrawal, crumble and loss.

Both the women novelists indulge in exploring the feminine consciousness of the women characters, their evolution towards an awakened conscience and how eventually this leads to enrichment of their inner self in a male-dominated society. Self-introspection and self-discovery help the women characters to realize their veiled inner strength. When the women characters indulge in self-introspection that leads to self discovery but the results are varying.

They differ in the following subject matter: Mannu Bhandari has written stories on the polygamous nature of the husband, superiority as a reaction to inferiority complex in the husband as well as the drudgery of household chores and the pathetic condition of the lower class working women. These topics find negligent treatment in the stories of Shashi Deshpande.

Moreover there are two glaring dissimilarities in their themes. Mannu Bhandari, in addition to feminism, has dealt with the themes such as decision to be single for whole life because of some traumatic experience from male, failure in love affair, love and values, divorce and remarriage, crime, effects of judicial system as well as the problem of unemployment and the pathetic plight of the widow who suffer from family recognition. These issues have not been touched upon by Shashi Deshpande. On the other hand, in some of the stories Shashi Deshpande has gone back to the
Mahabharata, one of the greatest epics of India. In many of the stories from the Mahabharata, women have had no voice. Shashi Despande has given existential voice to them. She has given them a chance to articulate their own inner turmoil. This concept is almost absent in Mannu Bhandari.

5.2 A Comparison through Characterization:

The primary focus of attention in the short stories of Shashi Deshpande and Mannu Bhandari is woman- her travails and privations, tensions and irritations, agonies and frustrations, pains and anguishes. Their stories delineate the social and moral boundaries which Indian women have to contend within life; not only are most of their protagonists women but also the story is narrated from their points of view. The variation emerges from the different kinds of repressive forces depicted, the protagonists’ individual methods of dealing with these forces and most interestingly, the authors’ different attitudes to the same complex problem of establishing female selfhood.

The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande in her stories are middle-class educated women whereas an evolutionary and a very comprehensive picture of the Indian women belonging to educational and economic levels emerges on the large canvas that Mannu Bhandari chooses for her short stories. Both the writers have made use of internal as well as exterior view in delineating their characters. The shift from external to internal and vice versa is quite explicit in Mannu Bhandari, whereas in Shashi Deshpande it is implicit. Moreover with Deshpande, it is the thought that helps the reader understand the character whereas with Bhandari, it is the thought as well as action that help the reader understands the particular character.

In the short stories of both the writers, patriarchy and the values it implies are criticized explicitly as well as implicitly. However, in case of
Shashi Deshpande, the male characters emerge neither as villains nor as objects of ridicule. The writer criticizes the social structure, not individuals. While with Mannu Bhandari there are some self-centred and callous male characters depicted with negative shades, as well as some who help the protagonists to evolve their own identity. It is also noticed that Deshpande doesn't believe in having a propagandist or sexist purpose to her writing even though when it comes to male characters, they are ‘thin’ and typed while Mannu Bhandari has been able to create a ‘rounded’ character of the opposite sex too.

Moreover, the protagonists of both the writers come to awakening through a crisis. Suffering and pain are sometimes necessary to develop one's self and one's level of awareness in individuality in particulars. They experience the transformation of consciousness by the end. Thus, the writers follow the liberal feminist ideal which treats growth in consciousness as the end. However, this awakening leads the protagonists to take some decisions. Here lies the difference between both the writers.

It would be proper to add here that Deshpande's women have learnt to assert themselves but are careful enough to avoid a storm that may unsettle the happy family atmosphere. They have realized that not by ‘effacing’ themselves but making themselves 'felt', they can reclaim the lost ground. Deshpande communicates implicitly through her protagonists, the technique of constructing a meaningful life in the midst of chaos and contingencies armed with emotion and intellect.

On the other hand Mannu Bhandari has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of women in the Indian society. To the first set of woman, a woman's life is nothing but to get married, to bear children, to have sons and to serve the husband. According to them a woman has to adopt herself to her circumstances and environment. To the other set of woman, protagonists openly revolt against social taboos, the cramped, wrinkled traditions and values of their ancestors and ceaselessly and boldly ask the very question of love, marriage and sex. This woman, initially a
conventional one, but emerges as an unconventional through the course of the plot. She frees herself from the convention which tries to put her into a subordinate position. She breaks the marriage vows which prove to be hindering her self-respect. Thus, the portrayal of woman in the stories of Mannu Bhandari is characterized by contradictions—there is a conventional image and there is a protesting voice whereas in Shashi Deshpande, instead of fighting against the patriarchal society and male domination, the female protagonist has taken a balanced view of life from a woman's point of view.

All Deshpande's protagonists are extremely intelligent, introspective and hypersensitive women who embark on a quest for identify and the true meaning of life. While Mannu Bhandari's protagonists are inclined more towards emotional needs in relationship with their world. Both the writers create realistic characters having both their strength as well as their weaknesses, caught between their individual needs and the strong clutches of tradition. Shashi Deshpande portrays the Indian psyche which is very much influenced by these myths, legends and folklores. She portrays strong women characters who refuse to run away from the problems of life, instead face the existential crisis boldly and successfully, and in spite of challenges and hostilities, remain uncrushed. Mannu Bhandari also portrays Indian psyche soaked in emotions which is influenced not much by these myths and legends but by new education and their emotional demands which lead them to even boldly break the tradition and taboos as well as their relations. Thus it can be said that Mannu Bhandari's characters are centred in emotional guided intellectual world whereas Shashi Deshpande's characters live in intellectual guided emotional world.

Another point of dissimilarity between these writers is that Mannu Bhandari has touched upon the theme of aggressive response through rebellion by her female protagonists. In some of her stories, Bhandari shows how in the face of male domination, women do respond aggressively against the oppressor, though only after enduring all kinds
of hardships and always as a last resort. Accumulated hurt and betrayals give vent to take aggressive steps to take divorce and in some cases remarriage also. Whereas the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande are not so much aggressive, nowhere does she encourage her protagonists to rise in rebellion against the males in family matters. The clear-cut message of Shashi Deshpande is that man and woman are like the two wheels of a chariot and that no chariot can race forward if either of the wheels goes out of order. What Mannu Bhandari wants to suggest through her stories that there is a greater chance of happiness for women if they learn to conquer their fears and assert their individuality.

It can be said at the end that both of them are at their best when they work out their themes of intimate human relationships, generally within the family. Both of them have a remarkable insight into the working of a woman's psyche. As the writers, they highlight the secondary position occupied by women and their degradation which is inevitable in an oppressively male-dominated society. Thus, both the writers give us a peep into the emotional as well as intellectual state and condition of the present-day woman. Both use simple language to describe simple life especially of the Indian middle class women. They wrote of simple day-to-day Indian middle class life. Their characters are so realistically portrayed that there is a tendency to recognize oneself in them. Their characters have strong psychological dimensions. Both the writers use interior monologues, diary technique, flashbacks into the past and dreams to bring out the inherent fear, frustration, anguish and suppressed desires lying in the inner recesses of the mind of the character.

What really sets both the writers apart is that their writings hold a universal appeal that clearly emanates from their rootedness in everyday India, a society in which we breathe, a culture to which we belong. Their major concerns emerge from our own environment, holding up mirrors to our own lives. They have never eroticized India neither 'presented' it.
This dissertation is a midpoint in a journey, which is an ongoing one. The justification for undertaking this study is that there is dearth of critical material on the short stories of these writers. This study presents the analyses of the short stories by Shashi Deshpande and Mannu Bhandari from the thematic point of view while the technical aspect of their short stories is not analyzed in detail. There is hardly any exclusive study devoted to their fictional technique. With whatever available critical studies, there is still a great deal of scope to work on the technical aspect of the short stories of these writers. Therefore the dissertation leaves a major area to be explored – the fictional technique in the short stories of Shashi Deshpande and Mannu Bhandari. Moreover, the short story of Mannu Bhandari is also concerned with class exploitation and other social evils. So, these stories can be studied from the sociological point of view. Hence, there is a great deal of scope for further study of the short stories of Shashi Deshpande and Mannu Bhandari.