SUMMIMG UP :
THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

Her [Munro's] art is stereotypic and also a complex counterpointing of opposed truths in a memorable model of life and reality. One form of this doubleness, or reciprocation, might be put like this: in vivid images and dramatic success she presents, and makes real and convincing, concepts that we usually couch in abstract terms, cliches, and wordy description. Conversely, she changes common and familiar incidents with surprising meanings and dimensions

--Martin (1987:1)

Munro and Deshpande in their fiction are similar to photographers for they capture the life of women. The question is how can they be 'photographers'. What do they capture in terms of women's lives? Photography according to Webster's dictionary is the art or process of producing pictorial images on a surface sensitive to light or other radiant energy. Both these writers produce images on a surface, that is, in this case, the women’s minds and bodies. The emotions that they experience being women is, what is captured by these two writers. The writers
present to the readers a picture of normal, everyday incidents at a point of time. In a vein similar to photography, only the presence is captured but one finds that behind the presence there is a larger reality that is hidden and can be unravelled only when one attempts to draw out the reality that is lurking beneath the surface.

The photographer as an artist needs to record and reproduce reality as closely as possible. This aspect is witnessed in the writing of Munro and Deshpande. Stories that illustrate these are the town and people descriptions in Munro’s *LGW* and *WDY*. Deshpande, too, in stories such as “The Valley in Shadow” (*Dark*), “The Intrusion” (*Leg*) and “A Wall is Safer” (*Dark*) attempts to capture the reality of truth. But unlike Munro she does not draw out the details of the settings and the colourings that seep into the setting. This is not, however, a fault for a black and white photograph depicts to us only the shades and does not tell us anything more of the surroundings. Discussing this aspect of photography one is reminded of John Berger and Jean Bohr’s statement:

A photograph arrests the flow of time in which the event existed. All photographs are of the past, yet in them an instant of the past is arrested so that, a lived past, it can never lead to the present. Every photograph presents us with two messages: a message concerning the event photographed and another concerning a shock of discontinuity (1982:86).
Del in LGW too makes this point when she writes about the photographer in her story:

People saw that in his pictures they had aged twenty or thirty years. Middle aged people saw in their own features the terrible, growing, inescapable likeness of their dead parents; young fresh girls and men showed what gaunt or dulled or stupid faces they would have when they were fifty (205).

Thus what one does notice in the work of these two short story writers is the depiction of being able to look at the oddity of life and their ability to comment on the life of the people. This is also the power of the camera. Susan Sontag remarks that the camera has the power to catch so-called normal people in such a way as to make them look abnormal. "The photographer chooses oddity, chases it, frames it, develops it, titles it..." (1977: 131). The photographer is able to reveal the emotions and the feelings of the personality by a careful and artisic use of the camera. Munro and Deshpande, too, in their works display such artistic abilities.

Munro also shares similar concerns about photography. In an interview she comments: "I like looking at people’s lives over a number of years, without continuity. Like catching them in snapshots...." She
further emphasises “I don’t see that people develop and arrive somewhere. I just see people living in flashes. From time to time. And this is something you do become aware of as you go into middle age....Mostly in my stories I like to look at what people don’t understand” (Interview, Hancock, 89-90).

It is to be understood that women have hidden lives and stories that are never highlighted. Borenschen in an article, “Is there a Feminine Aesthetic” (ed. Gisela Ecker) affirms that women’s stories have been thrust away. Women’s activities, their pasts, their lives are not to be forgotten. Women’s sufferings, their subjugations, their oppressions, are part of a darkened cultural history. In this cultural lineage women artists and their works just become shadows that are thrust away ultimately (1985: 31).

Munro commenting on the gendered roles perceived in some of her stories states that until a girl is twelve or thirteen a girl feels free and uninhibited. She is able to visualise life in terms of action, adventure, heroism, power but this changes when she becomes aware of her sexual nature. This transformation can be witnessed by a reader in the lives of the characters such as Violet (“Queer Streak”), Del (LGW), Rose (WDY) and the narrator in “Boys and Girls” (DHS). Munro further adds the girl “understands that for her, participation in the world of action is not impossible, but does hold great dangers, the greatest danger being that it
will make her not splendid, but grotesque” (186). Thus, the girl realises that she has to wait and instead of being courageous, learn to be beautiful. The full human powers are illusory and not as she expects it to be. She is forced to accept this definition or will have to compromise and Munro feels that this is where women have an advantage:

But this very denial of action, of full responsibility to the girl, gives her a kind of freedom the young male in most societies must give up. To be accepted, to be fully male, he cannot criticise, he must sometimes participate in, whatever bloodstained practices his society believes necessary to itself; that, or become a revolutionary (Munro, 1972:186).

Feminine Identity:

Questioning women’s subjectivity and the idea of identity one finds that there are a number of factors that make their impact on this subject. The woman heroine in these stories does not undergo struggle but realises that there are factors that she has to consider in order to develop herself. She does finally regain her self by accepting the connections of life and accepting life in many of the stories instead of trying to be a mythical, heroic character.
It is generally true that women are exploited, oppressed and degraded in many societies but Munro and Deshpande instead of just pointing and reaffirming these characteristics present women characters with a future. One notices such characters in stories such as Jayu in “It Was The Nightingale”, Lalita in “A Man and A Woman” (Gale) and Del in “Baptising” (LGW) and Rose in “The Beggar’s Maid” (WDY). These characters understand that it is up to them to make their lives and they make use of the openings whenever they can.

In the West the relationship of marriage and family is voluntary and is in principle a contract that can be terminated when individuals agree upon it. On the other hand, Indians regard the family as a strong bond and as an upholder of cultural values and tradition. This makes it difficult for any dissolution of marriage, once it is solemnized according to traditional rites and rituals. Therefore, many women also reject feminism which they feel promotes individualistic attitude, egoism, selfishness, sexual liberty and above all a destroyer of the family.

The number of women writing in India not only in English but also in regional languages is a revelation of the changing phase of Indian womanhood. Most of the writing is fundamentally a quest, within the Indian context to know the true identity of women. The subjection and oppression that women face is the major theme of women’s writing and yet these works differ as the perception of women’s problems is based
on a complex social structure which does not enable an easy understanding of the women’s dilemma. The social structure in India consists of various hierarchical levels and it is very difficult for a woman to find her space and articulate as she is thrust into various roles from her birth. It is relevant to know that most Indian women from the middle classes have become aware of their problems due to an increase in education. What Parikh and Garg thus state is true of Indian women:

Contemporary Indian women experience their life space a battle ground between the prescriptive roles based on idealised models of a bygone era and the emerging cognitive map of modern society which pulls them towards wider horizons. Caught between the traditional past and a future inspired by their own dreams and aspirations, Indian women walk a tight rope. They carry the burden of both traditional and modern role expectations, yet are denied the privileges of both (1989: 109).

One notices in such a discussion of identity that Munro’s fiction is more autobiographical and she uses events such as marriage, children, lovers that have occurred in her life as the base for the stories. Catherine Sheldrick Ross feels that she leads a double life, only pretending to be like everyone else. “The idea of a hidden identity appears in many early stories in the form of a watchful child observer, where watching is
associated with shame, betrayal, and exposure”. Ross also points out that in her later books, "the idea of a hidden identity appears as a fascination with the theme of adultery" and the “double life it creates, especially for a married wife and mother who is expected to live her life for other people. Instead she can be living this secret, exploratory life” (1990: 24). One notices such stories in her later collections, namely, *MOJ* and *FOY*.

Feminine identity one notices has created the myth of the 'super woman'. Women are faced with the uphill tasks of standing upto men's standards. They “face the nearly impossible task of breaking through the glass ceiling of invisible barriers to achieve like men, while simultaneously curbing the self to fit into the traditional glass slipper that promises blissful relationship”. It is such a crisis that has led to the fact that women forget their own inner selves. Therefore it is difficult for them to draw on any resources. Moreover even, “cultural myths or images offer little guidance on how to be strong, or on how to be authentic in relationships, or on how to combine self-development with intimacy” (Jack, 1991: 26-27). This is very true in Indian society where one finds that stories from the epics are used to inspire women. A girl child is always told to emulate characters such as Sita and Savitri, even though many stories in the epics feature strong, rebellious women such as Draupadi. Thus, instead of being a supporting structure, culture has prepared and taught women to immerse themselves in self sacrifice. To
create a strong self one needs to explore differences and stick firmly to one’s own point of view. They must understand that it is not necessary to abdicate their own perspectives and values. Women have through the process of accommodating to cultural standards and practices, absorbed the “male practice of discounting femininity itself--its knowledge, its perspectives, its values” (Jack, 1991: 33).

The conventional, traditional route is a myth and an illusion that creates not emancipated but women who lose their identities. It has been drilled into women’s minds that the traditional route offers a safe and secure future. But as a girl matures and adopts such a life-style, she notices that there is a “reduction of confidence, of possibilities” and of her own true self (Jack, 1991: 44). When women try to fit themselves into the ideas and notions of others, they realise that they deny their own needs which causes dis-satisfaction and dis-illusionment. No wonder many women undergo traumatic, agonised lives not knowing how to get out of it. Such instances are noticed in stories such as “My Beloved Charioteer” (Dark), “Intrusion” (Leg) Bardon Bus (MOJ) and “A Man and A Woman” (Gale).

Relationships, the locus of women’s vulnerability to depression, also take place within a historical and cultural context. Depression is both individual and social; it combines the personal and the political. The relational perspective asserts that the self is social. Mind and self
come into being through communication with others. One cannot heal the self in isolation. Since "the individual is in the deepest sense relational, and because women’s vulnerability to depression lies in the quality of their relationships, it is the self-in-relation that begs for healing" (Jack, 1991: 205).

The roles of wife and mother bring together society’s expectations about the roles and importance of women with a woman’s own personal history, self-perception, and hopes. One also finds that such notions act upon women’s physical bodies: "women’s bodies and nature have been simultaneously defined, exalted, and devalued by a male-dominated culture. This legacy of thought, and the long history of gendered patterns of interaction, profoundly shapes women’s self-perceptions". Women have seen themselves as men perceived them and have developed negative images of themselves: "a fear of the rounded female form, evidenced by the rise in eating disorders; a devaluation of feminine biological events such as menstruation, childbirth, and menopause; a dismissal of feminine modes of knowing as intuitive, irrational, or scattered" (Jack, 1991: 85). Such factors are illustrated by the feelings of the women characters in stories such as "The Valley In Shadow" (Dark), “Chaddeleys and Flemings” (MOJ), and “Connections” (MOJ).
Women’s orientation to relationships holds potential as well as danger. Besides imposing a threat to identity, relationships often help in restoring one’s lost self. Some women who are damaged by subordinating themselves to the images and needs of more powerful others later recover their lost selves through relationships with others—people who help them to express themselves as full and equal partners. By exposing both the vicissitudes and the developmental potential of relationships, women are able to know and value their identities and they are thus, able to re-shape themselves.

The questions that arise at this point are: How can woman realise herself? Where can she locate her self? What is one to do with the roles that she carries. Woman thinks of freeing herself but it is difficult, because even when holding a career, she still dons the role of nurturer, provider. Even when she is employed at the so-called professional level, if she belongs to one of the occupations traditionally held by women such as teaching or nursing she “replicates the selflessness of motherhood by focusing on the needs of pupils, patients, or clients rather than by making her own mark” (1989: 21). Munro’s story “Eskimo” (POL) is an illustration of such an aspect.

Each woman’s identity—the identity that each feels is authentic, real, and true to who and what she is becomes obscure as she leads a life based on the expectation that the female should focus on relationships
and tend to the needs of others. In many of Munro’s and Deshpande’s stories one finds that the women have problem in sustaining the sense of self and thinking of themselves as subject. Often we notice that their “subordination to impossible feminine ideals imposed by a patriarchal culture” interferes with the “development of the natural self” (Parikh, 1989: 234).

Short Story Genre:

Reviewing the short story form one notices that both the writers, Munro and Deshpande have successfully used the form in an innovative manner to highlight the predicament and dilemma of women. Commenting on the sequence stories, it is relevent to know what Tim Struthers states:

*Lives of Girls and Women* has been called another collection of short stories, a story-sequence, or a story-cycle; however, it may be best be described as one of a fairly wide-ranging variety of “open-forms”, organised books of prose fiction made up of autonomous units which take on extra resonance and significance when combined with other related units. Such “open forms” are ones to which short story writers are especially attracted and which are usually created by the
revising and the structuring of separately composed, and sometime previously published, short stories. Each organic whole which results has a greater effect than one might expect a simple combination of its parts to have, since an “open form” is more unified than any miscellaneous collection of short stories by a single author, and as unified as, though formally different from, anything clearly describable as a novel (1978: 123).

Catherine Sheldrick Ross talking about SIB says that the stories deal with urban life, “adult experience, the complications of marriage, and the barriers to communication between men and women, old and young”. This statement is true of Munro’s other collections, too. She adds that Munro’s narrative technique convey what the characters themselves despair of communicating, namely “the layers of meaning; the implications in the lies, deceptions, and silences; the gap between what the characters mean and what they are able to tell” (1992: 73).

LGW has been seen as a complex enactment of storytelling processes by Prentice. He mentions that throughout the novel characters not only share stories, but characters also become stories. The stories received from literary, scientific, religious and many other traditions influence and shape characters’ lives. Through Del Jordan’s narrative, one notices that these story making processes help to build the world in
which she lives. At the same time, the narrative is also able to construct her as part of that world. Within this set of sequence stories, the plot and the subplot lose contexts as the narrative is arranged in such a way that the traditional hierarchy of value is displaced. Del, does form the centre of conflict in all the stories and yet the presentation of the stories occurs in such a way that it is difficult to trace a linear traditional consecutive narrative sequence:

The text becomes fabric which exists only in the inter-relation of warp and weft. It can continue to be woven in any direction, as the stories can continue to be told. There are stories present in the text only as beginnings, and there are statements of conclusion, alluding back to untold stories. All can be likened to loose ends of story that have the potential to be woven into the fabric but always resisting final closure (1992: 30).

Postcolonialism and Feminism:

The appropriation of women is a theme persistent in the stories of both Munro and Deshpande. One does find that the stories take a lot from the colonial outlook, namely the appropriation of space and the allusion to the imperial powers. It is to be pointed out that Munro’s
stories do not tell us that “womanhood is a colonized territory whose inhabitants are enslaved”. As Helaine Ventura points out “she does not level her accusation at the male species in particular since she does not portray the father as a bullying oppressor out to dispossess his wife and daughter”. She further emphasises that the father too is harassed and oppressed: “Like her, he is enslaved by his farm, harassed by his work and undoubtedly underpaid for his foxes...The narrator’s mother and father are equally exploited without sex discrimination and they, nevertheless, conform to gender roles as a further proof of their subservience to a more powerful law” (1992:85). Such instances are also seen in Deshpande’s stories. Two good examples are that of the fathers in “The Awakening” (Mir) and “The Intrusion” (Leg).

Postcolonial writing and reading thus display the strategies necessary to survey the colonizing processes. Therefore one notices in the present context of writings that these two writers persistently search for a ‘voice’. One also notices that the writers modify the social conditions to portray pictures of empowerment and of adoption of subversive values to reveal the reality existent in women’s life. They are “subject to the historicising imperative, such that their strategies address the impact of colonising processes on the present and the future” (Prentice, 1992: 281).
Moreover, in Indian colonial period, it is perceived that the nation had been linked to the mother image. As Sen comments the country had become “the arena in which agreements and conflicts between the colonial bureaucracy and the colonised middle class were played out”. She further adds that the country was not only the captive to be freed by her morally inspired children but the central figure who created and protected the sanctuary of the home, where the colonised intelligentsia, besieged by the colonial ruler, could take refuge. In this process the home was demarcated as a refuge and the separation of the ‘home’ and the ‘world’ hardened in the dominant ideology. (1993: 233)

In this context the home becomes a private space where the colonised could take refuge from their masters. This demarcation of the ‘domestic’ as a private space gave rise to the development of a separate private space which was safe and secure from colonial intervention. In such a situation women became bound to the home. It was inculcated in them that while men were the fighters of the outer realm, it was the duty of the women to provide the fighters. Thus, one notices that the women’s reproductive power was given more importance and “housework and childrearing” became their only “legitimate concerns”. The assumption that men’s and women’s roles were complimentary justified the designation of the home as the proper context for women’s activities. The moral health of the ‘nation’ was felt to depend on conformity to these different but ‘equal’ roles” (1993: 233). Within such
an environment the ideology of motherhood became stronger. Women were told that as they were the carriers of the future generation, they had to revere their roles as mothers and give birth to children who were strong and healthy in order to fight for the country. Also, the women to build up the nation had to provide their children with a good educational background. Women were, therefore, educated and taught to be good, strong mothers. The whole theme of motherhood, thus, existed within this framework.

Susie Tharu in an article in *Recasting Women* (ed. Kumkum Sangari) tracing women’s literature feels that:

This nationalist colour to what is really a common trend--glorifying women who fulfil their wife and mother roles with exceptional ardour--placed an enormous burden on the women who came within its defining scope. It was the women, their commitment, their purity, their sacrifice, who were to ensure the moral, even spiritual power of the nation and hold it together. But even as we point this, we must not forget that this phase also made for a positive evaluation of femininity that did not allow for a limited growth. And no parallel phenomenon exists in the West (1980: 26).
Mother-Daughter Relationships:

This consciousness of motherhood and colonialism is replaced by another ideology in the post-colonial context, namely, the mother-child relationship. Women experience pregnancy as a splitting of their selves. In other words, it is a “separation and coexistence of the self and of another, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech”. This identity crisis is boosted in an institutional, socialised manner indicating to women that motherhood is the essence of womenhood. The fantasy develops to indicate that the mother and child are one and there is no existence of the self. The mother is asked to forget herself by being responsible towards the child. There is an unconscious association of women to the birth of children. A woman, unable to bear children is viewed with sympathy and pity, especially so in Indian society. Such a situation is witnessed in Deshpande’s story “And, What’s A Son” (Gale).

This patterned, negative behaviour is taught by mothers to daughters as the mothers are the exemplaries for the daughters. It is also perceived that the mothers fear their daughters will meet with rejection, isolation, and danger if they stray too far outside social norms that govern gender interactions. In their attempt to save their daughters from pain and loss, mothers unconsciously teach them methods of relating to
the male world. This leads to the development of women who are self-effacing, self-sacrificing and highly accommodative.

Social and cultural values create a paradox in which the mother-child relationship is intensified at the same time it is rendered impotent. A mother exerts a powerful influence on the development of her child as an individual while she is relegated to a powerless position in society. She passes along the culture’s devaluation of the feminine to her daughter. Thus, weakness, submissiveness, powerlessness, not only become associated with females, it also passes as essential trades from mothers to daughters. Daughters thus, cannot overcome this inheritance which disables and curbs them.

Mothers do not attempt to victimise their daughters. Daughters themselves, inherit the quality of powerlessness that their mothers had themselves acquired. Thus the daughters in these stories of Munro and Deshpande respond not only to the biological relationship between them and their mother’s, but also to the cultural/social context that perpetuates this relationship. This cultural/social perspective of women devalues their personalities. A daughter only sees a reflection of dependence and weakness regardless of her mother’s individual strengths. The daughters as one notices in these stories in order to negate the image of the mothers attempt to break away from them. But this action is not easy. Thus women not only promote the dilemma but
also get entrapped. One way out of such a predicament is for women to sustain relationships and to draw from it, thereby empowering themselves.

A more sophisticated and complex response would take into account women's wish to sustain relationships as well as to empower themselves. By acknowledging the patriarchal traditions that frame and give form to female powerlessness, daughters and mothers can give the lie to the weakens and dependence the culture attributes to women. By sympathising with the desperate position of a woman of whom both husband and culture demand perfection, a daughter whose mother demands perfection of her can temper her anger toward her mother. By recognising the cultural pressures that set the borders of her own life, a mother can temper her demands on her daughter. Mothers and daughters together can resolve the common predicament of mother blame by building on womanly strengths—a sense of connection with others, an investment in sustaining relationships, mutual empathy, a commitment to co-operation and mutual care—important qualities, often trivialised and demeaned by the culture (Parikh, 1989: 189-190).

To conclude, one has to understand and evaluate women's lives within the social and cultural perspectives. The future of such a study lies in developing and enriching cross-cultural understanding which can be understood in the words of Catherine Stimpson:
Such processes enhance, no matter how internally, a person's sense of power and freedom. Reinforcing this is the probability that reading is an indeterminate act. Because of its very nature, a text can invite us to help create its meaning. As we decide what it is all about, we are cognitively alert, responsible, fecund, capable. We gain a sense of strength. Simultaneously, we enter into what we have left of the world of the text. We vicariously experience events and personalities we might not meet in ordinary life—including dramas of insubordination. We gain, then, a sense of possibility. If we empathise with a character, we may also mitigate some crippling illness, a self-perception of weird singularity. We gain, finally, a sense of community (1988: 159).