Making of the New Woman in Shashi Deshpande’s Novels

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Indian women, unlike their western counterparts, have always been socially and psychologically oppressed, sexually colonized and biologically subjugated against a male-dominant social set-up. Any attempt by a woman to rise above the oppressive forces rooted in the middle class margins has either been curbed mercilessly or ignored in the name of social dignity. Shashi Deshpande all through the gamut of her ever expanding creative horizon always makes it a point to provide a separate space for her characters.

Though Deshpande doesn’t like to be labeled as a feminist writer she mostly focuses on the issues relating to the ‘rainbow coalition of rights, desires, agendas, struggles, victories’, speaking for all the women (Sattar, 1993). Just like a staunch feminist she “seeks to discover the female author’s quest for empowerment through self-expression by escaping the controlling authority of the male in the realm of social/sexual power” and examines the ‘double colonization’ of women under imperial and patriarchic condition. She also dares to “expose, question and challenge the age-old traditions and prejudices in male-dominated society”(Kaur, 2009:15-20). Her novels eclectically employ the post-modern technique of deconstructing patriarchical culture and customs, and revealing these to be man-made constructs (Atrey and Kirpal, 15).

Deshpande sees the need to harmonize the man-woman relationship as equal partners. There is no victory in the subjugation and destruction of the male. The need is to see each other’s need for space, freedom of expression and love (Kaur, 2009:24). Atrey and Kirpal too reinforce this by quoting Deshpande from her interview with Malini Nair, “aggressive feminism does not ring true in the Indian context and that for Indian women selfhood will only come from ‘probing and thinking for oneself’(07). Deshpande doesn’t believe in taking ‘the militant anti-men and anti-marriage stance’. We can also hear an echo of this in the following lines from Beena Agarwal, “The fictional world of Shashi Deshpande is not directed towards the annihilation of the existing order but it seeks a reorientation of society where a more balanced relationship might have been possible (217).

Female protagonists in Deshpande’s novels stand apart from that of their counterparts in the writings of many contemporary women writers. Sandwiched between tradition and modernity, illusion and reality and the mask and the face, they lead a life of restlessness. Progressing along the axis of delimiting restrictions, self-analysis, protest and self-discovery, they try to create both physical as well as psychological space for themselves to grow on their own. Like the archetypal New-Woman, Deshpande’s protagonists are all educated, proactive and progressive, moving on undaunted. They rebel against the dictates of their domestic duties and social sanctions, challenge ‘male-devised orthodoxies about women’s nature, capacities and roles’ (Kaur, 56) and existential insecurity. Transgressing the socially conditioned boundaries of the body, they frankly and frequently enter into a dialogic relationship with their bodies, both within and without; represent values, beliefs and ideas which are modern and stand in contradistinction with the traditional ones. Being the representatives of the new generation of self-actualizing women, they seek to eek out new ways of dealing with their problems, instead of running away from them and realizing that the solutions lie within themselves. They have a balanced, practical approach to their problems. They realize that victory doesn’t lie in the subjugation and
destruction of the male, rather than bringing him to see the indispensability of each other’s space (Kaur, 91). They start up as rebellious and discontented but end up renewed and rejuvenated.

The New Woman is primarily characterized by the spirit of rebelliousness, visibly exercising its influence on all relationships, the boundaries of time and space notwithstanding. This spirit is manifested through diverse means and modes. A woman’s rejection of her assigned role inside the family and society, refusal to follow the traditional paths, inherent revulsion to the idealism associated with normal physical functions of the body such as menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth/procreation which often act as catalysts for sexual colonialism, aversion to the practice of favouring the male child over and above the girl child and disrespect for the social taboos concerning the human body are some of the challenging issues that Deshpande picks up to show how the New Woman conducts herself. The present paper attempts to analyse the progression of women from passive resistance to self-discovery in some of her selected novels.

The plot of Moving On spanning over four generations presents a kaleidoscope of relationships –evolving, expanding and dissolving because of the inherent contradictions. The spirit of rebellion provides the right impetus to the characters to move on with confidence, at least with self-awareness. Vasu, Badrinath’s wife, widely known for her shyness and reticence, was an ardent advocate of freedom, always wanted ‘to be on her own’, freedom from the constant demands on her, from the claims, from the need to be ‘aamchi mai’(125)”. She spews out her suppressed anger in the form of the stories that she writes. Writing becomes an important means for her to fight patriarchal set up. Its being a symbol of rebellion, Deshpande’s protagonists employ it as one of the ways to liberation, to establish independent identity and ‘break up of shackles that chain women’s creativity and individual talent’ as is presented in the novels That Long Silence, The Binding Vine, Roots and Shadows, A Matter of Time and Moving On(Kaur, 60 and 93).

Manjari, Vasu’s daughter, also opposes the things which she doesn’t like and expresses her desire for freedom. Initially she was a nice girl who ‘needed everybody’s approval’ for doing anything and ‘was willing to do anything to please others’(69) but she turns into a rebel in the later part of her life. The socialization process in patriarchal societies desexualizes not only the body of a woman but also her mind and feelings. Thus the ideal woman is a castrated creature: a female eunuch. Germaine Greer advises women to take possession of their body and to use it to attain emancipation (Kaur, 27). Shashi Deshpande seems to follow her advice closely and prepare her protagonists to claim their right over their body and sexuality and pave the route to emancipation. Just like a post-modern, progressive woman Manjari makes the desires of her body open before all. She remarks, ‘all the confusion had vanished. My body is clear now about what it wanted: it wanted Shyam. It wanted Shyam’s love, it wanted his body.”(187). She transgresses the defined domains of her parents and marries Shyam. Towards the end of his life Badrinath himself justifies disobedience and rebellion as an indication of growth. In his own words,

To me, disobedience is not the original sin; in fact I don’t see it as a sin at all. It is a part of growing up, of moving on. Without the serpent we would have remained forever our child-selves, living in a state of innocence, nothing happening, our story stalled. We need the serpent to keep the story moving (205).

The beauty and boldness of the body over the mind is so fervidly established in this novel that it comes between the mind and the heart time and again and shakes
the foundation of all the relationships. In the character of Manjari we find the body pulling the strings of her life. She herself delightfully recollects her childhood when she had ‘an innocent relationship with her body, with her unexpressed sexual desires and her body’s needs’ (71). After Shyam ’s death she thinks of getting united with Raja, her old paramour but Sachi’s abhorrence for any relationship with a male member stops her from going ahead. She is completely aware of all the things that she lost because of her relationship with Shyam, because of her obsession with the desires of the body. Hence she doesn’t want to stake her life again by getting into a new relationship with Raja. Frightened by the repeated calls from the property sharks, she seeks the help of Raja but doesn’t leave the house. She boldly faces the problems of life and tries her best to remain self-sufficient all along.

After Shyam’s death Manjari tries to give all attention to her children but the desires of her body distract her again. She tries to compensate her loss through her physical communion with other people. Face to face with Sachi, she thinks that she had wronged both of her children by making herself invulnerable, by being self-sufficient (311). At the end of the novel she isn’t successful in going back to Raja but she is contended that her children have found a family in Raja’s family. In spite of failures on all sides, she doesn’t give in. Like a staunch optimist she still believes in the potentiality that life has to spur us to move on and on …..In her own words:

The search is doomed to failure. Yes, Baba, you are right, we will never find what we are looking for, we will never get what we are seeking for in other humans. We will continue to be incomplete, ampersands all of us, each one of us. Yet the search is what it’s all about, don’t you see, Baba, the search is the thing (343).

*The Dark Holds No Terror* by Shashi Deshpande is totally different novel in the sense that it explodes the myth of man’s unquestionable superiority and the myth of woman being a martyr and a paragon of all virtues(Paul Premila, 30) Remarkable for the exploration of the inner landscape, it unravels the many questions haunting the female mind. It projects the post-modern dilemma of a woman who strongly resents the onslaught on her identity and individuality. Saru, the protagonist in the novel, is a symbol of a progressive woman who tries to exercise her influence over whatever she does, wherever she goes. She always prefers to take the road less travelled. She doesn’t like women friends who mould themselves into the traditional stereotypes and remain the silent, nameless waiter at the dining table. On the contrary she has great respect for the dignified, self-reliant teacher-friend Nalu, who despises all compromises and remains single to lead a meaningful life of convictions.

At home she always tries to control Dhruva, her brother and views her mother as a rival in the game of power as her mother always resisted all the progressive moves she undertook and had disproportionate love for her son. She reacts in the same aggressive tone when she attains puberty and her mother tells her that she is a woman now. Saru doesn’t want to be placed in the class of her mother. She considers economic independence as an insurance against any subordination. Afterwards she decides to join medical science to be economically independent, in spite of the stiff resistance from her mother. She also marries Manu against the wish of her parents, particularly her mother, severs the umbilical chord as an act of defiance, proving her strength, power and self-reliance. She leaves her parental abode to start her life on her own, putting the first foot towards independence. Her marital life again is not smooth. Manohar, her husband, was the master of the family before she got recognition as a doctor. Earlier she was known as the wife of Manohar but now after the explosion in the factory people recognized Manohar as the doctor’s husband. The
explosion provides her an opportunity to prove her worth and assert herself, though unconsciously. But this shatters their family life. Manohar thinks Saru’s success as his failure. The remarks of Atrey and Kirpal are noticeable:

Unable to assert his ‘manliness’ over her(Saru) like a traditional male(that is, in economic terms), he resorts to sexual molestation of her nightly while playing the loving husband during the day. His purpose, though repressed in the subconscious, is to ‘punish’ her for taking on the ‘male’ role, and to assert his superiority and power through physical violence (43).

Saru has a tough time during this period because Manus bask in her glory during the daytime but ill-treats her in the nights. Manus’s indifference to her becomes intolerable and she uses sex as a tool of revenge and final estrangement. With her responsibilities increasing outside home, she recoils from Manu’s love-making and he takes her rejection of sex as a rejection of himself.

In spite of this incompatibility and role-reversal, Saru clings on to this ‘tenuous shadow of marriage’ whose ‘substance had long been disintegrated’. She doesn’t want to prove her mother right. Not getting disheartened over this, she takes a bold step, puts an end to this façade by moving away from home. This physical displacement from her own home results in her psychological enlightenment, gives her a chance to review her relationship with all. Making a rational analysis of the situation she understands that the problem lies as much within as outside. Earlier it was Manu’s inadequacy that she saw. Now she sees her own inadequacy too – her inability to combine roles and be a source of love as a daughter, sister, wife and mother. With the self-realization comes the strength and decision to confront the problems. The metaphor of ‘home’, used twice in the novel shows her experiments with life, the challenges, the apparent successes and failures which lead to her final reconciliation with her family.

Roots and Shadows, as the title suggests, is a symbolic representation of the dialectical nature of man and woman set against each other in material terms for power struggle. Indu, the female protagonist in the novel, is like a bridge between the ‘Roots’ and ‘Shadows’. When the shadows start surfacing at the death of Akka, it is the roots that start disintegrating. The authority and monopoly associated with the roots die a natural death when Indu takes over as the owner of Akka’s house. The past, a tradition of unity, of respect and of allegiance, comes to an end and the illusory future sparkles upon the seamy present, full of disbelief and questioning. Meitel rephrases this in the following words:

Roots and Shadows is a symbolic representation of the dialectical nature of man and woman set against each other in material terms for power struggle. “Roots” stands for tradition and “shadows” signifies the marginal culture. The dying tradition is soon to become shadows against a backdrop of apocalyptic change. Also it suggests that over the root is removed; life is bereft of the binding force given way to new possibilities (79).

Indu, an indomitable feminist is independent, uninhibited and insulated against the family influence. She doesn’t like the dominance that Akka exercises over the other members of the family, despises all the superstitious traditions, class and caste consciousness which the family strongly encouraged. Indu does not even hesitate to hate her father who deserted her when she was hardly fifteen days old, only because she was a girl. She had been rebellious right from her childhood. Though she was trained to be obedient, unquestioning, meek and submissive, she swore that she ‘would never pretend to be what she was not’(158). She strongly resents the Hindu tradition of women patiently clearing up the mess with their bare hands after every
meal and women like Kaki even eating off the same dirty plate their husbands had eaten in. She questions to herself “Martyrs, heroines or just fools?” and boldly challenges a tradition like this(73).

Indu’s non-conformist ideas are not directed against Akka, the person but the system of authoritarian ideas, conventional views and superstitions that she represented. When Akka puts her confidence in Indu by making her the heir to her property, all the other male members of the family accept her, but not without reservation. She is educated and is successful as a journalist but for them she is a married woman, an outsider. The women folk in her family treat her as a childless woman, not knowing the fact that Indu and her husband had opted out of it for domestic and personal reasons.

As a young girl, just like Saru in The Dark Holds No Terror, she liberated herself from the impinging and destructive influence of the family by running away from home as her ancestral home represented ‘an authoritative male voice’(6). She hated and challenged Akka’s domination and too much of authority on matters of love, marriage, education. Everybody at home, except Indu, admired Akka very much because of her leadership qualities and assuring happiness for everybody. But Indu revolted against Akka and decolonized herself by marrying Jayant, a man of different caste, speaking a different language. Unfortunately her marital life doesn’t follow the path she visualizes. It turns into something unpalatable, where the wife is supposed to dance to the tune of the husband. What she demands from her husband is not judgment but suggestion, not criticism but appreciation, emphasis on virtues, not weaknesses. At the beginning of the novel Indu scorns at the institution of marriage which involves no sacred tie between two souls but a conjugation of two bodies with the purpose of sexual gratification.

Her marriage with Jayant was apparently successful initially. In the family she hailed from she was an incomplete human being without a sense of the wholeness of personality but with Jayant she experienced a sense of completion and wholeness. But gradually it faltered and finally resulted in their estrangement. There was disillusion as well as disorientation which forced her to believe that she is an outsider who was not affected by ‘the waves of sorrow, sympathy and comradeship’ rippling around her. She isn’t able to pull herself away from the pangs of the past, even after rejecting her own family long back. On the other hand she isn’t able to find pleasure in her relationship with Jayant. She is quite fed up with the life full of deception. She had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what Jayant wanted to hear. But Jayant betrays her hopes for harmony and integration, peace and happiness.

For her marriage is a complete surrender of her self, a ‘total surrender’ (52), a gate closing all the paths to freedom. In order to maintain domestic harmony she plays the role of an ideal wife but this role-play circumscribes her self–development by expunging her creative potential. While talking to Naren she frankly admits that she felt ‘hedged in’ by her sex and resented her womanhood as it closed so many doors to her and was linked with ‘uncleanness’. She also doesn’t like to be initiated into the phase of motherhood as it would involve all the pains and problems of child-birth. She thinks both womanhood and motherhood to be the shackles that bind woman down to the ground and delimit their scope to be independent.

She doesn’t even bother to remain confined to the boundaries defined by the society and brushes aside all narrow conventions. In spite of being married to Jayant, she doesn’t hesitate to use words like ‘kiss’, ‘rape’, ‘deflowered ’ and ‘orgasm’ while talking to Naren. She even dares to have physical relationship with Naren more than once and is not at all apologetic about it. Affair with Naren becomes a metaphor for
her rebellion against Jayant’s humiliation of her for being the initiator in their sexual relationship. The affair acts as a catharsis and frees her of self-imposed limits (Atrey and Kirpal, 18). She faces strong resistance form her husband Jayant when she wants to quit the job and decides to become a writer. Jayant is a philistine in search of material pleasures whereas Indu is a writer in quest of her selfhood. However, Indu maintains her resilience and goes back to work silently. Her awareness of the conflicting demands made on her by the society to conform to a cultural ideal of feminine passivity and her ambition to become a creative writer force her to adopt gradual self-alienation. Everywhere, both in her personal life and her professional life, she encounters people who restrict her freedom and force her to submit to their dictates.

The novel is a manifesto of a liberated woman’s voice, expressed through her body, her consciousness and her pen. Indu uses these weapons one after another to challenge the male power structure closing in on her from all sides. She tries to redefine herself in relation to others, particularly after inheriting a major chunk of Akka’s property and bridges the gap between the two generations. Her enhanced economic position provides her opportunity to have the reins over others.

At the end of her journey away from home she, just like Saru in The Dark Hold No Terror and Jaya in That Long Silence, realizes that it is she who was to blame for the marital discord that separated her from her husband; she had created a hell out of heaven and had ‘locked herself in a cage and thrown away the keys’ (85). She decides to go back to Jayant with nothing from the past but with a new resolution that she would leave the job and start writing on her own. Her uncompromising and paradoxical feminine self finally finds its roots in her husband’s home, with all the shadows disappearing. Coming out of the emotional wreckage that had shattered her self she decides to start a meaningful life of peace and harmony with her husband. She is very much confident of an existence full of hope. She declares towards the end of the novel:

If not this stump, there is another. If not this there, there will be others. Other trees will grow, other flowers will bloom, other fragrances will pervade other airs …..I felt as if I was watching life itself …..endless, limitless, formless and full of grace (202).

That Long Silence is apparently different from the other novels as far the theme is concerned but the motif remains the same. Here also we find the novelist projecting a character who hails from a conservative, middle-class family background, possesses the inherent strength of character but is inhibited by constricting traditional influences. Jaya is in no way different from that of the other female characters of Deshpande in regard to her critique of her relationship with her husband, with her mother, brother, the society and her strong resentment against the social taboos.

Mohan, her husband, is full of praise for his mother who silently bore all humiliations heaped upon her by his father but Jaya has a different interpretation for this. She sees the silence in Mohan’s mother ‘a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon (36). Jaya too tries to fall into the same pattern by suppressing her own wishes and act according to her husband’s intentions. She follows him so closely that finally she’s left with no identity of her own, ‘just emptiness and silence’ (144). She is up in arms against the traditional notion of an ideal marriage. She violently projects her resistance to such a tradition:

If Gandhari who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn’t want to know anything (61).
Just like Jayant in *The Roots and Shadows*, Mohan is a materialist who is ready to manipulate all resources to maintain an air of dignity but unfortunately falls into a trap and an enquiry is on. After his suspension from his post of superintendent engineer, he is forced to leave his Churchgate bungalow and accommodate in the humble Dadar flat of his wife. He transforms into a pitiable shadow of his former self as he is no longer able to maintain his aristocratic façade. The process of the dissolution of his dignity set in. He looks a ‘sad, bewildered man’, his former self-assurance deserting him completely. He frightened confesses to her, “I don’t think I stand a chance. I’m finished” (9). Mohan’s loss of personality helps Jaya to gather confidence. At this critical juncture in her life, Jaya doesn’t breakdown but falls back upon her inner resources. Remembering her father, a Gandhian freedom fighter, she gets inspired. It was her father who had named her ‘Jaya’ meaning victory and always motivated her to be courageous and resilient.

In the early years of her marriage she utilized the training that she had received at home to be obedient and submissive. Like ‘a pair of bullocks yoked together’(8) she and Mohan shared the burden of life together; people outside their world were left with no clues to understand whether there was love or hatred between them. The mechanicality of this image indicates the loveless life that many partners of marriage are forced to lead. Gradually she realized more and more that the wrong must be resisted. Though she seemed to be passive she continued the ‘guerilla war’ with her husband for many years (9). In course of time the covert fighter in her becomes an overt one with more confidence and strength.

Many times in her marital life she resents the kind of treatment meted out to her but isn’t able to speak it out. One day in a state of sexual ecstasy when Jaya was restless for the passionate response, Mohan withdrew himself from her contact and did not care for her heat of passion.... Jaya is frustrated but instead of being destructive, she endeavours to sublimate her suppressed energy. She decides to revive her career as a journalist(Agarwal, 78). She writes for the newspaper column Seeta in which she portrays the travails of the middle-class wives and becomes very popular. Equipped with the weapons of her imagination and self-assertion she probes the meaning of marriage, love and life. She confronts life through her fiction and writes a story about a man ‘who could not reach out to his wife except through her body’(144). The story is considered to be an authentic depiction of life and wins her a prize but her husband Mohan was deeply hurt by this story as he believed it to be a literal presentation of their own married life. But Jaya is too strong to get affected by such minor acts of disapproval.

With Mohan it’s mostly “a silent, wordless love-making”(85). Such dispassionate physical encounters lead to her final disenchantment when she no longer gets stirred up by the passions and gets used to sleeping beside him without a desire. When Mohan moves away from home all of a sudden, she ruminates over her relationship with him. She realizes that she and Mohan didn’t make up a family, a home. Though they had been married for seventeen years, there were no “bridges of understanding and love between them” (8). There had been only ‘emptiness’ between them (185). This emptiness provides the base for her alienation from Mohan and illicit relationship with Kamat. He was an intellectual structured to loneliness and it is his intelligence that pulls Jaya towards him. Besides he is warm, friendly and companionable, attentive and considerate towards her problems and treats her as an equal. He reads her stories with attention and provides her valuable suggestions, thus felicitating her intellectual progress. But Kamat dies a sudden death, unattended, alone. Jaya is too afraid to acknowledge her clandestine affair with him and slinks
away without anybody’s knowledge. She stands at the crossroads of life when her husband has lost the job, her mentor is dead and their marriage on the brink of breaking down. But Jaya doesn’t lose hope. She anxiously waits for the return of Mohan. At one point we are made to feel that Mohan has left home for good but at the end of the novel we understand that he has only gone to Delhi on some personal work, to try to get reinstated. He succeeds in his efforts and sends a telegram to this effect. It seems evident that both Jaya and Mohan are eager to start everything afresh, in spite of the pains and pangs of the past. Jaya wants ‘just to live and to know’ that ‘at the end of the day my family and I are under a roof, safe, enclosed, in a secure world”(181).

Jaya decides to make adjustments wherever possible, through an objective analysis of the situation. As she herself admits, “I’ve 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” (191-92). In stead of blaming Mohan for every failure of hers she resolves to try to be more introspective and find out means to live life fully. She realizes that everyone should fight his/her own battle, through a balance between ego and self. She is aware that changes don’t occur overnight but there is always scope for development. She admits at the end of the novel:

But we can always hope. Without that life would be impossible. And if there is nothing I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible (193).

*The Binding Vine* is another venture in the same direction, showing the trajectory of a woman’s predicament, perseverance, perspicacity and victory in a male dominated world. It is through the consciousness of the female protagonist that the novelist describes her search for love, meaning and happiness in life. Following the footprints of other female protagonists of Deshpande, Urm (Urmila-the central character) is educated, a co-breadwinner and assumes a new role in response to the needs of the hour. As a working woman she has a lot of problems to face both at office and at home. At the office she faces the antagonism from the male colleagues and at home she gets no cooperation from her children or parents. She feels that things would have been different if her husband had extended a cooperative hand to help her out. Though she had a love marriage, she wasn’t happy with the way she was being treated. Initially her life was full of ecstasy when her love provided her immense strength but with the passage of time, her confidence wears off and she reels under constant fear of losing her husband but she strives to maintain an independent identity as far as possible. The fine fusion of psychological suffering, physical pain and the exposition of social reality makes this text as a perfect voice of subaltern who pass through the stage of silence to self-realization(Agarwal, 98).

All the marriages, both arranged and love, in the novel are unhappy and fraught with one or the other kind of malady. Urm calls all the arranged marriages cold blooded affairs because in such marriages the woman never has a choice and suffers all along her life because of her submissive nature. Love marriages are in no way different. The marriages of Mira and Urm are there before us to see. Both of these are full of hypocries and contradictions. Because of an unhappy marriage, Urm gets trapped in an illicit relationship with Dr. Bhaskar Jain in whom she finds a perfect friend. These extramarital affairs are threats to the age-old institution of marriage but they are inevitable in the life of a woman whose physical needs are relegated in the name of social dignity. These affairs as we have seen in most of her major novels, are happy interludes in their general drama of pain. The protagonists get into these relationships, not out of desire but out of necessity, notwithstanding the disapproval from the society. In times of crisis they need some source of support to
fall back on. When they regain their composure, they either forget these relationships or are forced to turn their backs on them.

The New Woman looks at sex without a spiritual and emotional base from a different perspective and sees absolutely no difference between rape and this kind of forced physical relationship. Gender discrimination is another ailment that women in most traditional societies are subjected to. Urmila remembers Kishore’s father who never looked at his daughter Vanaa even though she tried her best to draw his attention, only because Kishore was there. Urmu strongly scoffs at the women who silently tolerate the torture inflicted upon them by their partners. She appeals Vanaa to assert herself and stop crawling before her husband so that he would go on bulldozing her. She becomes furious when she comes to know that Vanaa wasn’t given a choice before the medical termination of her pregnancy, though she wanted to have a son. As a woman aware of the new responsibilities in changing times, Urmu speaks highly in favour of the freedom of choice for woman but she, nevertheless, knows well that for a girl marriage is a kind of indemnity which provides her security and safeguards her from other people.

Love, the binding vine, sustains all relationships, provides the strength to survive. Urmila recollects when she finds things slipping away from her hands, “And yet I think of Vanaa, heavily pregnant, sitting by me …I think Akka crying for Mira, of Inni’s grief when Papa told her about his illness …of the touch of grace …in Shakutai’s hand when she covered me gently at night …”(203). These gestures of affection show the true value of love, an important ingredient in all human relationships.

An in-depth analysis of Deshpande’s female characters reveal the trajectory of the physical, intellectual and psychological growth of the New Woman through their constant resistance, struggle and success. The apparent failures at different phases of their lives don’t jeopardize their inherent strength; on the contrary they awaken their superior selves and provide them the impetus to look forward for newer ways of living their lives. Notwithstanding their improved socio-economic position they always try their best to maintain a balanced social relationship. From the quagmire of their troubles and tribulations, they always rise victorious, not vanquished, rejuvenated, and not refurbished. Deshpande, unlike the feminists, doesn’t make her characters all time rebels against patriarchic hegemony; she makes them grow with their renewed knowledge of their own selves vis-à-vis the world they live in.

Works Cited: