

Chapter V

Conclusion

The central argument of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* is that women remain enslaved because of a corrupt process of socialization which stunts their intellect and teaches them that their proper purpose in life is to serve men. In society, women have been assigned the roles that are non-rational, and inferior to those of men. The African American women, hailing from an ancestral home of rich and colourful history, literature and folklore of West Africa, were familiar with literature. So a Black American carried a cultural past. The slave narratives were the weapons of the Negro slaves which were used not only to strike at their personal grief and affliction but also to awaken the conscience of the nation.

Within the Civil Rights Movement in America, women were treated as second class citizens and they came to an awareness that they should develop as Black and female. Women of colour have a different cultural experience from that of White women and the Black women felt strongly that those differences should not be ignored in the realization of their identity. The reality is revealed poignantly in the words of Black poet Audre Lorde in her article 'The Master's Tolls will Never Dismantle the Master's House in Morga and Anzaldua' who bares before us the psyche of the Black women's,

those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women, those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference, those of who are poor, who are lesbians, who are black,

who are older, know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish (qtd. in Tandon 61).

In the male authored texts, women were portrayed as inferior beings, who were confined to roles of wives and mothers without an individual self. They were regarded as mere beings or objects and were assigned to perform activities that would only please men. In Black male writings too, the women were given elevated images as that of earth mothers and mammas of superhuman wisdom and strength but unrecognizable as individuals. When many other aspects of their personality were ignored, Black women decided to rescue themselves and their sisters in the past from historical and cultural invisibility and set about creating a literature of their own. The twentieth century America has witnessed the most widespread and sustained migration of African American citizens from the South to the urban centers in the North. There are many diverse reasons of migration, the major one being southern violence in the form of lynching and rape. Historian Darlene Clark Hine writes that even major scholars have also failed in paying heed to the “non-economic motives propelling black female migration”(qtd. in Bharati 83).

According to Hine

Many black women quit the south out of a desire to achieve personal autonomy and to escape from sexual abuse at the hands of southern white men as well as black men. The combined influence of domestic

violence and economic oppression is the key to understanding the hidden motivation informing major social protest and migratory movements in Afro-American history” (qtd in Bharati 83).

Migration narratives further presented the fact that their leaving the South alone was no solution for the Blacks. They had to face a change of culture, and an insensitive urban landscape. They felt they could be better equipped to face the challenges in the North by stirring up the assured facets of the ancestral southern folk culture. It is clear that Black women experienced a multifarious form of oppression as being victims of sexism, racism and classism. Hence ‘the Black women writers were very keen on presenting this unique experience of Black women.’

Subjugation of women in all spheres has been a universal phenomenon. During the 19th century, there was a refreshing change in the Social Reform movements in India, which led to the reexamination of inequalities, injustices, oppressions and practices and customs that led to the suffering of women. The movements not only concentrated on removing the evil practices but also engaged in advancing the status of women by promoting their education. There was an emphasis on the need to involve such women who were educated and trained as partners in development. In spite of all these reforms, the status of women in India remained an inferior one because of female infanticide, *sati* and child marriage. Realizing the lack of awareness among the women about their rights and status, many women writers emerged with a social commitment particularly for the uplift of women. Writers like Krupabai Sathianathan highlighted, how in addition to the domestic work that was done to keep men in comfort, educated women could also

be real companions “to the men for True education strengthens and forms the character, expands and cultivates the mind, gives a wide view of life and its duties, teaches the importance of all work, and tempers the bitterness of life” (Krupabai Sathianathan 20). However India remained adhering to its fundamental cultural ethos and values. How much ever they tried to project liberated women with progressive ideas, the basic tenets of culture reflected in the writings of Indian writers. Hence, culture in Indian writing was not presented as to have a negative impact marring the women marching forward. Instead, it functioned as a moderator, voicing out the moral and ethical values. The shackles binding the women in the patriarchal society were slowly but steadily broken and the creative writers of the 20th century voiced a real concern for the uplift of women in the family as well as in the society. Women who spoke models of feminine behaviour were dismissed as being “casualties of patriarchal brainwashing who have internalized the myth of female inferiority” (qtd.in Ruthven 34).

Shashi Deshpande, tries to present her protagonists moving forward towards a stage where they could be free of the ‘dependence syndrome’ (Singh 17) to borrow the words of Chaman Nahal. The central characters in the novels of Shashi Deshpande try to lead a life of self-reliance without slavishly depending on the husband or the father or the community or even religion. The upper middle class women are educated career women who could lead a life armed to face the challenges of the situations. Directly or indirectly the creative writers advocate employment. Even today, the women novelists in English advocate education as the basic requirement for solving problems of women in family and in society.

Deshpande's novels are no exception to promote this idea of women's education as a strategy for women's empowerment. Education secures them employment which offers them a freedom to do whatever they want but surely without negative implications.

In their journey towards empowerment, Naylor's and Deshpande's characters undergo agonizing experience. They exist and live with the pressures from within and without. They encounter multiple levels of oppression in families and in society. Like Gloria Naylor, Shashi Deshpande also presents the varied experiences of the woman in different roles as young lass, a daughter, a wife, a mother. In Gloria Naylor's novels the various phases of their agony and suffering are due to racism, sexism and classism and also due to sexual advances and suspicion of infidelity resulting in alleged accusations. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Mattie endures patriarchal prescriptions by her father, sexual exploitation by her own community man Butch Fuller and later betrayal by her son Bazil. Unlike Mattie whose innocence traps her into such a plight, Etta Mae Johnson's own sexual errands apart from the societal causes tricks her into defeating humiliation. Kiswana Browne with an affluent lineage in *Linden Hills* wishes to be a partaker of the sufferings of her people and moves to Brewster Place, voluntarily in spite of her parents' opposition. Cora Lee suffers from the denial of formal education and parental guidance which also leads her into a strange obsession of begetting babies and negligence of the same when they grow into children. Ciel's life of humiliation and degradation is mainly due to Eugene who wants to desert her, showing open contempt for her pregnancy. Ciel's efforts to retain him, even to the extent of

undergoing an abortion, fail. The sudden demise of Serena, her daughter due to electrocution proves to be the last straw on the camel's back. Thus Ciel suffers isolation and loss of her children.

Willa Prescott Nedeed in *Linden Hills* is a victim of her husband Luther Nedeed who suspects infidelity on the part of his wife arising out of his son's light skin. Willa suffers segregation from her girlfriends and her husband's inhuman domination and the atrocity meted out to her in locking her and her son in his basement morgue. The women of previous generations too are agonized in different ways – the Luwana Packerville's separation from her husband and son Evelyn Creton's sexual frustrations and self-hatred that springs from her husband's sexual inadequacy and Priscilla McGuire's erasure of identity. They are innocent victims of male superiority and cruelty leashed out on to them. Laurel Dumont's tragedy is partly because of her choice of becoming a top IBM executive and a status marriage which deprives her of peaceful agrarian past leading to her increasing emptiness culminating in her divorce and withdrawal from life. In *Mama Day*, though the community of female power has been established, the price that has been paid – Miranda who is hailed as the mama of the whole island lives a life of self-less interests. She is forced to take up an untimely motherhood and shoulder family at an age of five and remains unmarried. In *Bailey's Café* the protagonists, Peaches, Esther, Jessy Bell and Mariam, struggle against sexual exploitation, violence, brutality, debauchery, male subjugation, gender oppression before they take refuge in Eve's Boarding House.

The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande suffer right from their childhood as they are subject to gender discrimination. In *Dark Holds No Terror* Saru's parents' preference for the male child is explicit and the girl child's feeling of an *unwanted burden* is inevitable. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* also grows up in a family where "women and children should know their place" (RS 48). In *That Long Silence* Jaya's brother Dinu has been given more attention in her parental home. What hurts her more is that the women do not even figure in the family tree prepared by her uncle Ramukaka. Marriage too, offers no escape from this patriarchal domination for these women. They are expected to lead a life of pretensions to be definite about their roles. Urmila in the *Binding Vine* lives a life of loneliness without her husband's immediacy and intimacy and Vanaa, a life of submission to her domineering husband. In *A Matter of Time* the women's sufferings are mainly due to the male indifference. Jiji's agony in *Moving On* is exclusive as a young widow who is struggling to meet the demands of her body as well as the society. Devayani's story in *In the Country of Deceit* is another life of sacrifice not just at the altar of reputation but for the family.

In the analysis of agony and awareness of women characters, the researcher finds that, while Gloria Naylor's women are victims of racial discrimination, sexual exploitation, male superiority and economic inadequacies, Shashi Deshpande's women suffer due to gender discrimination, marital incompatibility, male exploitation and gender oppression in the society. The intensity of the struggle is lessened because the women faced the complexities as a group, as a family, and as a

community. Amidst all the oppression what enables their sustenance, survival and their assertion is bonding, the women's support for each other.

In Gloria Naylor's novels, the bonding among the women is an integral part of the African American women's lives, culture, sustenance and success in creating a space of their own. The transferring of maternal strength from Eva Turner metamorphoses Mattie into a central mother figure of the Brewster community. The nurturance, warmth and love that Mattie experiences in Eva's home make her an epitome of black female resilience. The ties that bind Mattie and Etta help Etta escape being a passive, subservient victim. The encounter with Kiswana relieves Cora Lee from her indifference to her grown up children. She is awakened to the realities of equipping her children and enabling them to face life in their future. She unites with the other women in demolishing the wall, the societal stricture of confinement. Ciel, is reborn in the presence of Mattie, the mother healer. The maternal bonding between Mattie and Ciel revives Ciel back to life that she goes to San Francisco and takes up a new job. There is a new beginning of her life since she has found a man loving and caring who can be relied upon. Kiswana Browne's understanding and compassionate mother and Kiswana's feeling of oneness with her community people help her stay focused in her mission. She transfers the love that she gains from her mother into the transformation of the lives of Cora Lee and her children. In *Linden Hills*, the bonding of the spirits, the bonding with the maternal predecessors, helps Willa to reclaim her identity by rendering poetic justice to the Nedeed's patriarchal dynasty. In *Mama Day*, the sisterly bond between the two sisters and a feeling of oneness with the foremothers and with nature

empower Black women. The bond that exists in the present stretches back to the past to be passed on to the future. The knowledge of the foremothers, allowing one to be partakers in the tradition and a perfect communion with nature have enabled one to inherit the power to be a matriarch. In *Bailey's Café* Naylor recreates a vital sisterhood among Black women who are put in oddities in their life with notions of female sexuality prescribed by patriarchy. It is the unified desperation in the voices of women that makes the possibility of creating a space for curing their souls. Thus Eve's garden signifies itself as a place of refuge for the afflicted women who have been sexually abused or are drug-dependant or victims of their own beauty.

In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, the novel ends with an importance given to Saru's profession that gives her the courage to confront reality. The presence of the employed woman in a better position than her husband sprouts inferiority complex in the husband's mind. Saru, the famous doctor, thus suffers in the hands of her husband Manu who is a sadist during night and a perfect gentleman during daytime. Women undergo a lot of humiliation and trauma because of those inferiorized men. With Saru's necessity to attend to the illness, her profession gains significance and the assertion of her career helps her confront the terror within. In the process of illumination she realizes that the dark holds no terrors. In *Roots and Shadows* Indu becomes aware of her autonomy as a writer. Her inheritance of the ancestral home from Akka, an elderly matriarch of the family, reawakens Indu's vital connection with the roots that she is an independent woman, a daughter, a wife and a writer that she had earlier rejected in her pursuit of shadows. Her rootedness gives her the conviction to reach out to Jayant with a better understanding of the self. In *That*

Long Silence, Jaya decides to break the bondage of silence when she realizes that silence is no longer a strategy of survival. In the lives of these protagonists, their journey into the past through retrospection, literally going back to ancestral homes, gives them guidelines for their future to assert themselves. Indu and Jaya obtain certain autonomy only within their family or society. Their introspection helps them realize their potentials and redefine their relation with the world. They have found their voice and space after achieving self-realization. Urmila in *The Binding Vine*, recognizes in Mira a victim, who endures the violence of marital rape in her marriage. Urmila identifies Mira's story with that of Kalpana's, a lower middle class rape victim. From her ties with Shakutai's life she becomes aware of the brutal treatment of the women in the lower strata of society and her awareness makes her realize that Akka, her husband's step-mother was also forced into marriage to fulfill the wishes of a man who wanted a mother for his beloved son more than a wife. Urmila longs for the emotional security that she could get from her husband, but at the same time rejects his monetary support asserting her financial independence. In this novel, female bonding – the women's coming together with other women in the family and outside the family – is seen at its best. Urmila is the voice of Mira and Kalpana, the powerless victims of rape. Amidst the agony and anguish, there is awareness to the overwhelming presence of the binding vine of love which helps them rise above all suffering. *A Matter of Time* is a tale of the varied facets of female resistance to patriarchy that make the women's survival and success possible. (As asserted by the novelist herself in an Interview) Hence Sumi's reaction to Gopal's desertion is not passive. She does not want pity and unpleasantness to

linger in her life. She has a positive attitude towards life and is more concerned with getting on with life. Sumi, like Urmila, longs for the assuring presence of Gopal and misses the familiar rustling by her side at night, but once the awareness dawns upon her that he has gone on living and his life has moved on without her, she puts her heart and soul into her job and her children, refuses to grieve for the past and begins a fresh phase of life seeking employment. Right from childhood, Kalyani's life is full of victimization but she comes out of all that victimization intact. Aru, vociferous in her claims, takes on life with a better understanding of people and of the necessity to bond. In *A Matter of Time*, Gopal's desertion of Sumi and her three teenage daughters, grandfather Shripati's self confinement at the loss of his son makes Kalyani a mute sufferer who virtually survives and emerges whole and intact. In both these acts of desertion, the women realize that life must go on and they show their strength to survive and succeed shedding the dependency syndrome. Jiji, in *Moving On*, is assertive in deciding her way of life. She does not conform herself to a pattern of life dictated by a man. She emphatically pronounces that there is no place for dual control in her life which is the bold voice emerging from a woman of second generation. During the struggle as a prematurely widow with two children to take care of, it is the bonding with Roshan, her female boss, which sustains her spirit. In the latest novel, *In The Country of Deceit*, Devayani, the protagonist though detracted from her normal life for sometime is unable to linger in such a life of deceit as she is more bound to her family. It is her familial bonding that helps in her restoration "to get on with my(her) life" (ICOD 258). Her graduation in Law secures her a chance to work with her advocate Iqbal.

Through the lives of Indu, Jaya, Urmi and Sumi, Shashi Deshpande has depicted the changing attitudes of these women who are educated and intelligent, and who have found means to earn through their talent and creativity. In delineating through the lives of Saru, Akka and Mira, Shashi Deshpande strikes at the men's use of sexual power to subjugate women. With the portrayal of women like Sulu, Shakutai, Akka, Jeeja, Inni, and Mohan's mother, she depicts the condition of women who are confined to traditions and lead a life of self denial, suffering and sacrifice. Shashi Deshpande never advocates rejection of values of being a wife or a mother, though in her novels, she presents subjection, submission and suffering of women. In various interviews she has expressed her opinion that 'it is needed' (qtd. in Tandon 174), on the part of a woman to be a wife or mother. She is only against the meek conformity to the role in the pretence of obedience. This is the reason why her protagonists introspect and assert their identities as individuals before taking up their roles as wives and mothers once again. They take up their roles with a new knowledge and they have learned to fight back, with full knowledge.

Gloria Naylor too presents a realistic picture of the life of her society. The commonality of female experience finds expression in her novels. It is also her personal concern that, whatever adverse things happen to a woman, especially to a married woman, she must be able to stand up and do whatever she wants in this world and take care of herself and her kids and each one should have a sense of self-worth. As stated in Chapter I (pp 40-41) this is a stance that echoes Shashi Deshpande's, when she defines liberation in the context of Indian feminism.

Similar instances could be cited from the novels of both the writers. They strike a chord with regard to their sufferings and the means adopted to overcome the rigidities of male dominated societies. From the lives of Jiji and Ciel in *Moving On* and *The Women of Brewster Place* respectively, one apprehends if it is only the maternal duty to take care of their children, bearing up silently the negligence and irritation of their husbands. In times of desperation, women are inspired to take up life with courage by bonding with the dead. Urmila in *The Binding Vine* having been inspired by Mira's diaries reaches out to the needy even after her daughter's death. Willa Prescott In *Linden Hills* derives strength at the basement by establishing a spiritual bonding with her predecessors. The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande consider the knowledge of the past as inevitable to enable them to assert in the present, and to move forward into the future similar to the African American belief that one must know from where one has been in order to understand one's destination. Sulu's immolation in *The Binding Vine* is an expression of her disgust against her husband and an act of helplessness; but Willa Prescott in her self-destruction, destroys her husband too, putting an end to the Nedeeds. Her sacrifice is instrumental in establishing an identity of the protesting women.

The analysis of the novels by the researcher has unveiled the various creative devices offered by the novelists. The bonding of women, introspection, reminiscence, articulation, and resoluteness are the strategies adopted by the women characters in the fiction of both the novelists. They certainly help them in exploring their true potential selves. The authorial devices offered by both the novelists exhibit the destruction of patriarchal norms. Both the novelists employ stream of

consciousness techniques, interior monologues, articulation, and self-introspection to enable their protagonists to review their situation and reconsider decisions.

Silence is never advocated as a strategy for survival. In Shashi Deshpande's novels home can be a site for gender discrimination. However, the protagonists go back to their ancestral homes and get a clear vision of their future. In Gloria Naylor's novels home is certainly a colonial space, an entrapment.

However both Gloria Naylor and Shashi Deshpande, employ unique creative devices to suit the specifications of the society they portray. As Naylor's women are the underprivileged, she adds deep rootedness in native culture as a primary device. Communion with nature endows her characters with ability to inherit natural powers and spiritual vision. Shashi Deshpande's women, on the other hand, are the privileged. Hence, education, taking up career and economic independence are the cudgels the protagonists pick up to strive against suppression. The authorial devices certainly pave way for the women to counter the clutches of patriarchy.

In spite of the cultural, racial and spatial difference, Gloria Naylor, an African American woman writer and Shashi Deshpande, an Indian writer in English of the present era, stand in unison in giving a clarion call for women's liberation and empowerment through education, employment, female bonding and assertion of self identity.

To sum up, the researcher cites remarks by Mrs. Michelle Obama in Town Hall with Students in Mumbai, India on November 07, 2010 to reiterate the findings.

“ My family didn't have a lot of money. My parents never went to college. I grew up in a little bitty apartment in a working-class neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. My parents worked hard to pay the bills and to keep a roof over our heads. But even though my parents couldn't give us material things,... They taught us to put every last bit of effort into our education and to take pride in our work. They taught us that our circumstances didn't define us, and that if we believed in ourselves, if we made the most of every single opportunity, we could build our own destinies and accomplish anything we put our minds to”.