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A Comparative Study of New Woman through the Female Protagonists of Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande

Nidhi Bhatt, Ph.D.



Kamala Markandaya and Her Works

Kamala Markandaya, whose first published novel, *Nectar In A Sieve*, made waves way back in 1954, passed away Sunday, May 16, 2004 at her home in the outskirts of London.

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Markandaya was 80 and had settled in England since the age of 25, following her marriage to Bertrand Taylor. Her daughter Kim Oliver survives her.

Another long-time America resident Indian author Shashi Tharoor put it succinctly, "Markandaya was a pioneer who influenced all of us Indians writing in English". Born Kamala Purnaiya in a small town in Mysore in 1924, Markandaya attended the University of Madras, beginning in 1940, where she studied history. From 1940 to 1947, she worked as a journalist and also published short stories in Indian newspapers. During the war she worked for the army in India and later returned to journalism.

Fame and success came with her first published novel, *Nectar In A Sieve* (1954), a Book-of-the-Month Club Main Selection and bestseller in the United States. In 1955, the American Library Association named it a Notable Book. That novel was followed by nine others: *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Cofferd Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) and *The Pleasure City* (titled *Shalimar* in the American edition, 1982). In the US, her early novels were published by John Day and Co, the same outfit that published the works of Jawaharlal Nehru.



Shashi Deshpande and Her Works

Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka, India. She is an award-winning Indian novelist. She is the second daughter of famous Kannada dramatist and writer Shriranga. She was born in Karnataka and educated in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Bangalore. Deshpande has degrees in Economics and Law. When she was living in Mumbai she did a course on journalism at the

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Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and worked for a couple of months as a journalist for the magazine *Onlooker*. (SAWNET:Bookshelf:Shashi Deshpande)

She published her first collection of short stories in 1978 and her first novel '*The Dark Holds No Terrors*' in 1980. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel *That Long Silence* in 1990 and the Padma Shri award in 2009.(SAWNET:Bookshelf:Shashi Deshpande)

Shashi Deshpande has written four children's books and six novels, besides several perceptive essays, now available in a volume entitled *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*.

Mythology and Linguistic Usage

Indian mythology and vocabulary have given 'Women' many synonyms namely 'Nari', 'Abla', 'Prakarti', 'Aurat', 'Angna,' etc. It is said that woman is born to manage the entire living world.

If we go in the field of writing we find that in 1951, there were 5 or 6 women writers who usually made year after year some of the most significant contributions to the English novel. Women are natural story-tellers, even when they don't write or publish.

From India, we can cite Toru Dutt, the woman writer, who wrote novels both in English and French.

As the centuries were changing, so were the concepts changing day by day. Now, the mingling and transfusion of the cultures are also prominent here. It is also changing the minds of the people. People are highly influenced by these concepts and they develop their social, mental and psychological status based on these concepts.

Comparative Study of the Feminine Concept

The comparative study of the Feminine concept is not new in India. Many researchers have written earlier on this concept, for example, Rekha Jha (*The Novels Of Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Jhabwala*) and A. Ramakrishna Rao (*Comparative Prospective On Indian Literature*). Although, Kamala Markandaya and Shashi-Deshpande are the two major women novelists, each with impressive corpus of fiction to their credit.

The Art of Kamala Markandaya

Kamala Markandaya is identified unquestionably the most outstanding woman novelist. She is very familiar with the southern region. That's why in most of her novels, she takes

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us to the hearts and cultural mores of South Indians. Yet, she has a varied repertoire of women characters in her fiction. Her first novel, *Nectar In A Sieve* (1954) deals with the life and travails of a peasant woman Rukmani, the narrator and protagonist of the novel. Rukmani, who is faced with great odds like famine, death, infidelity and prostitution amidst a backdrop of bone chilling poverty, wages a constant battle. She wins our sympathy because of her sheer will power that endures a life without hope like '*Nectar In A Sieve*'.

The plight of the rural woman in poverty is juxtaposed with that of the urban poor woman in '*A Handful of Rice*'. Here, we see Nalini, a sprightly carefree girl, transformed slowly into a harassed and victimized woman, trying her best to pull her husband and children through the miseries of a cold hostile life in a big city. Nalini is as doomed as Rukmani.

Rukmani is closely associated with the earth and draws spiritual strength from its fertility and beauty. She learns to help other women in childbirth, to adapt to and accept the unpleasant changes the tannery brings to the village and to withstand seasons of want and hunger. Instead of petulance, she exhibits tenacious and life-affirming endurance.

Dignity and Hunger

In Rukmani's quest for dignity, hunger is a potent enemy. Fear of hunger, she says, torments the peace of every peasant who lives by the vagaries of the wind and rain.

Rukmani insists on teaching all of her children to read and write, even though many in the village believe such knowledge leads to trouble. Rukmani is a strong voice for the world's poor because she speaks with clarity and truth. She reveals a world the literate are seldom forced to examine and her descriptions of the physical ravages of starvation are simple, powerful and timeless.

Challenge to Traditional Views

One of Rukmani's particular strengths lies in confronting her own misconceptions, as people and events often challenge her traditional views. Fertility is so precious to her that she takes risks to pursue it. When she is pregnant with Ira, she encounters a cobra in her pumpkin vine and though it might have killed her and does induce early labor, she does not stop raising vegetables for fear of snakes. Her vegetables are a source of both food and beauty to Rukmani and she compares their rounded shapes to fertile young women. She conquers her fear of a foreign doctor to seek treatment for barrenness, risking Nathan's disapproval.

Focus: Protest Against the Ruthlessness of Modern Technological World

In fact, Kamala Markandaya writes with increasing mastery of the medium. Although there is some obvious contriving and some ingenious formulations of contract, the novel as a whole is a deeply disturbing protest against the onslaught of modern technological ruthlessness against the simplicity and humanity of an earlier order of life.

Kamala Markandaya neither repeats herself, nor turns her fiction into a formula. In Kamala Markandaya's novels the accent is as much on the principal characters as on the diverse backgrounds, economic, political, cultural and social.

Shashi Deshpande's Natural Gifts

Shashi Deshpande is gifted with an inborn literary bent of mind, which matured with her experiences in life. Even her graduation in Economics and Law did not seem to have much impact on her writing that came to her very naturally.

Shashi Deshpande has many avatars. In literary circles, she is the author of the 1990 Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel '*That Long Silence*'. At intellectual discussions, she champions the cause of English as an Indian language and fights for the recognition of women as individuals. She speaks her truth gently but firmly, her words lingering, long after her exit.

That Long Silence

Shashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence*, through details of everyday practices, routine, mundane and particular stories, engages with issues of collective identity. The novel explores how images of nation are embedded in the ordinariness of lives and how the nation-state through an effective mechanism of individuals' imagination institutes them as citizen-subjects.

That Long Silence presents the oppressive, debilitating life situation of a housewife. This family life is firmly located in its middle class environs. The silence and the silencing of the woman as a gendered subject is the focus of the narrative. But even as the family life is located in the middle-class environs, the narrative maps the position of the middle class.

As is typical of all her novels, the central character is a lady named Jaya. We get introduced to bits of her life in the form of people who have pervaded that situation.

There is the father who died when she was still in school. Her grandmothers have wilted and died among families, yet away from them. There is the mother who is distant in place but ever present in thoughts. There are her brothers; one a successful doctor and the other a disreputable "never do good," who enters her sphere whenever he needs help.

Then there is the immediate family with its hidden hostilities. The power struggle with the husband which she claims to have lost, but in truth is still fighting over. The disappointment in her daughter and the expectations from her son are mirrored in the pages. The neighbours have always been around to help her. One who is no more, but even in death haunts her. Other ghosts from her past include those who catch up with her either in person or in memories as she endures her personal tragedy.

What Marriage Could Mean

The typical role playing is involved in a marriage where the husband must be made much of by the wife and where the wife feels guilty to breathe if that breath is not constructive to the caring of her husband and his children. The shackles of society are willingly taken on and this could suffocate her own desires. Marriage could also result in the dawning of the truth of the sham that her life is. The resolve to change, to be more than what she is, the knowledge that one step backwards will take her back into the abyss that she has stepped out of all become obvious at this stage.

There is uncertainty of the future of her relationships with near and dear ones. There is a definite challenge of bringing about a change. The situation also offers the resolve to stick to the new life and accept the unpredictable prospects that the future will bring.

It is all there in this story that won the author her award. This story is typical of her short stories and true to form. Not as compelling as the shorter reads, but a good portrait of the woman who is struggling with herself to be who she really is.

A Critique of the Patriarchal Construction

Through this exploration the novel develops a critique of the patriarchal construction of 'nation' and contests the legitimization of the male discourse as the 'normative' national discourse.

My Goal in This Paper

I wish to argue in this paper that the equalized terrain of the victimization of women that the novel presents glosses over the cultural marks of the women characters represented in the novel leading to the appropriation of the cultural other into a universalized brahminical woman. This critique is further supported by calling attention to the way there is a belittling of female discourse in the novel.

Desire for Social Mobility and Its Consequences

The desire of the middle-class family for social mobility is also driven by viewing the life

of the upper class. For Mohan this viewing begins in his childhood when he, while at a function, watches three women conversing in English. The three women, who were for Mohan 'so different from all the women' he had known, also carry with them intimations of modernity for him. The way Jaya comes to understand this experience of Mohan is as a 'revelation': 'Those women had given him his first vision of a different kind of life, a life that had none of the poverty, the shabbiness and ugliness, the rigid rules and rituals he had known till then. For Mohan this 'revelation' of modernity in the image of the English-speaking women becomes the starting point of an ambitious life. It is this again that is behind his choice of Jaya as wife, one who is 'educated and cultured.' As pointed out by Doreen D'Cruz:

“Jaya's right to language is inscribed within her marriage to Mohan. It was her facility with English which identified her as the woman of Mohan's dreams. She recalled to him his impoverished fascination at the women he had seen from a distance at a wedding to which he had been taken out of charity. Their effortless English, along with their perfume and their gossamer saris, proclaimed them as fantastic beings. They reflected access to a culture that Brahmanism alone was insufficient to unlock. Mohan's arrival at that point of cultural privilege was to be mirrored by his possession of the right wife.” (Doreen D'Cruz, '*Feminism in the Post Colonial Context: Shashi Deshpande's Fiction*,' in SPAN: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, no.36, 1993)

Shashi Deshpande seems to be alive to the delayed self-assertiveness of her protagonist. In an interview she has argued:

“My novels always begin in a moment of crisis. Most of us go on unquestioningly until we are shaken out of the rut by something catastrophic or disastrous. Suddenly all that you have taken for granted becomes doubtful, everything falls apart. You begin then to question everything. And it is through this questioning, through this thinking that you move on, pick up your life once again. But you are never the same after this. This is true of all human beings, not just women. My protagonists being women, one of the things they question is the fact of their being females, what it has done to them. But they are also probing the human condition, the human predicament. In this thinking process, humans do discover their own potential. So do the women I have written about. “(Chandra Holm, '*A writer of substance*', in Indian Review of Books, May 2000, p. 5.)

But, significantly, this opposition hides another kind of opposition between 'I' and 'they.' Within this other framework, the 'I' of the polemical prose itself is split into its class/caste opposition. This split is then reconstituted into a separate 'self' and 'other' divide. Herein we see the class/caste construction of 'I.' The polemical prose constitutes the problems of the 'I' with a flattening of class and caste difference in such a way that it appropriates the other cultural identities to merge with the 'I,' who is a victim of patriarchy. Patriarchy is seen here as the common enemy, without class/caste (or other) specificity. As has been noted by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan:

“The force of Deshpande's indictment of women's lives lies in the way she is able to universalize their condition, chiefly by drawing similarities among Jaya and a variety of other female figures, including characters from Indian history and myth; and among three generations of women in her family (Jaya, her mother, her grandmother); among different classes of women (Jaya, her maid Jeeja); among different kinds of women of the same class and generation (Jaya, her cousin Kusum, her widowed neighbour Mukta). So compellingly realistic is this rendering that no Indian woman reader can read this novel without a steady sympathetic identification and, indeed, frequent shocks of recognition.”(Rajan, *The Feminist Plot*, p. 78.)

Shashi Deshpande is considered as the author of the 70's and the 80's. Her Contribution to the world of literature is the Presentation of the reality of the middle class woman:

"I realize that I write what I write because I have to. Because it is within me. It's one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that I think is my contribution to Indian writing." (Shashi Deshpande, Interview by Vanamala Viswanatha, *A Woman's World*-----Literature Alive.1,3(Dec.1987)page-9.)

Deshpande writes not for publicity, but to mirror the society as she observes it. She is least bothered about name and fame. She was very curious to bring forth the changes accruing in the society, in her novels. But, since she was very much fascinated by her women characters, so she laid more emphasis on women only she dealt very minutely and delicately with the problems of middle class educated women. Infact, initially, she always had in her mind people from the real life in India to write about, but as she

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proceeded, spontaneously and involuntarily, woman became the focus of her writings. When interviewed by Vanamala Viswanatha, Shashi makes it clear by saying:

"It all starts with people. For example, *'The Dark Holds No Terrors'* came to me when I saw a couple." (Shashi Deshpande, Interview by Vanamala Viswanatha, *A Woman's World*----- Literature Alive, 1-3(Dec.1987), page-8.)

Conventional and Unconventional Types

Generally, there are two types of role played by women characters in Indian fiction, that is, Conventional and Unconventional. Both the types suffer in one way or the other.

Woman in Shashi Deshpande's novels is initially an unconventional one, but death is not the way out for her. Woman occupies a central place in Deshpande's novels. All of her novels in their own way make suggestions towards the feminine theology. But, Shashi Deshpande herself does not relish the idea that she should be grouped with the female writers of India.

A Duality of Vision

It is to be noted that Kamala has not been partial in the creation of any of her characters. Kamala Markandaya has always got a liking for English people and culture.

In *'The Nowhere Man'*, we find a very balanced presentation of Indo-British Co-relationship. As Thakur Guru Prasad Comments,

"It is a very objective, balanced and truthful account of the Indo-British relations, past and present filtered through genuine artist's imagination, pointing to the final view, echoed half a century later, after the Kipling vogue has come and gone. It has the mark of authenticity." (Thakur Guru Prasad, "*And Never the Twain shall meet* , *The Nowhere Man, Indian Woman Novelist* ed. By R.K.Dhawan (set-2,vol-3,New Delhi,1993),page-179.)

It is a matter of great significance to make a comparative analysis of these two significant female novelists. Kamala Markandaya does not disown her Indian Sensibility. Her statement is proof positive that sensibility which informs a writer's vision is more definitive of his or her identity than nationality.

As Doireann MacDermott informs us;

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"Markandaya has acquired a duality of vision; enabling her to observe both British and Indians with cool detachment ... as she herself has said, in spite of being an outsider by choice ... [her eyes] are still Indian eyes."(Doireann McDermott, *Markandaya Kamala, 1924, Indian Novelist, Encyclopedia Of Post-colonial Literatures In English*, ed.Eugene Beson& L.W.Conolly,vol-2(London:Routledge,1994)page-986.)

Markandaya has given ideas for the development of women in the society by applying Feminine concept in her novels. She has presented the liberalizing aspect of change in the attitude of women. She also underlines the traditional attitude to women in her novels. In '*Some Inner fury*' the novelist refers to the silent barriers against women:

"There is a tradition not only in India that women should not be worried, that the best way to ensure this is to keep them as far as possible in ignorance.....certain domains belong to men alone, and Indian women learn early not to encroach." (Kamala Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* (London; Putnam, 1955), page-117.)

First Person Narrative

Kamala Markandaya has chosen first person narration in most of her novels. In '*Nectar -In A Sieve*', Rukmani is the narrator and her narration is reminiscient in tone as she looks at herself as a young girl of 12. The first person narration encourages the thought process of woman narrator whose point of view becomes also the point of view embodied in the novel. Also, her next novel '*Possession*' shows 'Anusuya' as the narrator and she also follows the pattern of first - person - narration. All of these characters tell about themselves mostly in their novels.

On the contrary, Shashi Deshpande never counts herself in any particular group of writers. In spite of her readings and familiarity with works both Victorian and Modern, Shashi Deshpande is essentially a self-taught writer. She told an interviewer:

"My husband was a commonwealth scholar and we went to England. We were there for a year. I thought it would be a pity if I forgot all our experiences there. So I started writing them down and gave them to my father. He gave them to *Deccan-Herald* ... which published them promptly, so it began very accidentally."(*Literature-Alive*, 1/3, 1987, page-9.)

Fettered By The Natural Functions Of The Body

Apparently, as said earlier, her women characters seem to be rather fettered by the natural functions of the body. She has shown in most of her novels that the idea of marriage providing protection to the wife is important in Indian Society. As Minh-ha says, "difference reduced to sexual identity is thus posited to justify and conceal exploitation. The Body, the most visible difference between men and women, the only one to offer a secure ground for those who seek the permanent, the feminine "nature" and "essence", remains thereby the safest basis for racist and sexist ideologies." (Trinh T Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Post Coloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), Page-100). Growing into woman is to Saru of *'The Dark Holds No Terrors'*. For example, 'something shameful' and 'Torture'. Jaya in *'That Long Silence'* is painfully conscious of the fact that around her husband's 'needs and desires' her life revalues.

Raman Selden writes about the position of women,

"The Time has come when woman's body must be heard and woman must uncensor herself, recover her goods, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal ..."
(Raman Selden, *A Reader's guide to contemporary literary theory*, New York:Harvester wheatsheaf,1989,page-150-51.)

However, anything like this is yet to happen in Deshpande's fiction, notwithstanding anatomical descriptions and detailed specifications in her short stories, but the absence of total reticence in this respect in her novels is a proof of the novelist's comprehensive understanding of the grass root reality and woman's plight in India.

Shashi Deshpande is a careful and conscientious writer. She does not believe in offering ready-made solutions. But, she prefers a positive attitude towards life. The narrators of her novels are conscious that they are not in a privileged position, in either suffering or understanding.

The Setting in Shashi Deshpande

The setting of her work is the middle-class India of an educated woman:

"Well-educated, hard working people in secure jobs, cushioned by insurance and provident funds, with two healthy well-fed children going to good schools." (Shashi

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Deshpande, *That Long Silence* (London, Virago, 1988),
page-5.)

In the novels of Deshpande, the desire for isolation is a particularly charged theme. This desire can be seen in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, where Sarita thinks,

"All right, so I'm alone. But so's everyone else. Human beings ... They're going to fail you. But because there are just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk." (Shashi Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (New Delhi, vikas, 1980), page-200.)

In fact, Deshpande uses a beautiful image to describe the married life of a woman, that is: 'A Pair of Bullocks yoked together'. To an Indian reader this image of the bullocks suggests a world of meanings. It means that the bullocks so yoked shared the burden between themselves but no one knows whether they love each other or not. She presented the woman in an apt image of a worm crawling into a hole. She has brought into light the burning problem of an educated woman, in a contemporary society.

High-lighting The Real Image of Women

The purpose of this comprehensive study of the depiction of women by Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande is to high-light the real image of women and to make people acquainted with their pathetic condition. Both Kamala and Shashi Deshpande have chosen "Feminism" as a concept of their novels. The French dramatist Alexander Dumas firstly used this term in 1872. The aim of this concept is to bring forth several subjects relating to feminine conditions. It is a kind of movement in which women's rights and opportunities are supported.

Kamala Markandaya has used feminine consciousness and their emotions in the male dominated society. She is the writer and spokesperson of the women suffering. She sheds light especially upon the miseries of the poor woman. Finally, she has proved that women had got extra energy and power to face the problems of life and to struggle in life more than men.

The other novelist, Shashi Deshpande's novels consist of women-sexuality, self discovering, etc. But, then she also can be termed as 'Feminist'. She tells us that in present, the important role of wife is nothing less than walking on the razor's edge.

In her conversation with Gita Viswanath, Shashi Deshpande opines, "We are shaped by our childhood and our parents." (Viswanath, Gita. 2005, "In Conversation with Shashi

Deshpande." *Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*. Ed. Chanchala K. Naik, New Delhi: Pencraft International, p.229.)

Women Self-hood

Deshpande bares the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operating within the institution of family and the male-centered Indian society at large. Deshpande's feminism does not uproot the woman from her background but it only tries to expose the different ideological elements that shape her. These include social and psychological factors such as woman's subordinate position in the family and her restricted sexuality. She seeks to expose the ideology by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in society. Her novels eclectically employ the postmodern technique of deconstructing patriarchal culture and customs, and reveal these to be man-made constructs.

In Deshpande's view, when women undertake their journey in pursuit of self-knowledge, they do not start light, "... We are already burdened with a baggage that has been given to us. The fact is that we don't start with a picture of ourselves on a clean slate. Inscribed on it already are things told to us by others that determine our behavior, ideas, expectations and dreams". (Deshpande, Shashi. 2003, *Writing From The Margin*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, p.87) .Simone de Beauvoir's statement, "one is not born a woman, one becomes one", (Beauvoir, Simone de. 1997. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M. Parshley. London: Vintage, p. 295.) has a special relevance to India where conventions, religious and social taboos dictate and inhibit woman's individuality. Femininity as a cultural construct inscribes the society's views about women. The behavioral patterns for the Indian women are pre-determined by the caste into which one is born and the values and traditions of a culture that upholds archetypal images of woman.

The male domination in woman's life is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society and the consequent relegation of woman to a secondary position seemed to have prompted Indian women writers to take up the cause of women. They stressed the need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position and see their own need for self-fulfillment as more important than the duty of sacrificing themselves for their husbands and children. The new woman voices a note of resentment as they feel stifled under the oppressive restrictions. She has her own changed notions of life. It is true, "Women's education, her rights of citizenship and other legal rights and above all her gainful employment and economic independence has tremendously influenced her outlook and conjugal relationship and attitude towards marriage"(Kapur, Promilla, 1976. *Love, Marriage, Sex and Woman in India*. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, p.194.)

Deshpande's Feminist Critique

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Shashi Deshpande as a writer offers feminist critiques of the patriarchal Indian society. Her art lies in selecting situations with which most Indian women can identify. Her focus is on the woman within marital, domestic relationship.

According to Deshpande, there is a sharp division between women's world and men's world, "even today, you'll notice, to insult a man, you say, 'go wear bangles.' Bangles mean identification totally, and absolutely, with a woman"(. Kuortti, Joel. 2003, "*Maybe Only Your Wife Can Read.*" Interview with Shashi Deshpande. *Tense Past, Tense Present. Woman Writing in English.* Kolkata: Street, p.36.). The *Binding Vine* projects the issue of resistance to such patriarchal ideology. The protagonist Urmila is the voice of resistance in the novel that voices a protest against the patriarchal attitude to the issue of rape. Two forms of gender violence are juxtaposed here in the case of Kalpana and Mira. If Kalpana lying in an unconscious state represents the silenced subaltern, in Mira's poems and diaries, writing itself becomes a mode of resistance. Urmila's account of the incident of Kalpana's rape is loaded with ideological undertones. Shakutai's insistence that the police should not be informed as it will lead to Kalpana's disgrace and exposure is, in reality, an exposure of the societal attitude toward the rape victim and the patriarchal ideology that rape disgraces the victim rather than the culprit.

Her novels, featuring female protagonists, reconstruct aspects of women's experience and attempt to give voice to 'muted' ideologies, registering resistance and on her own admission, in her novels she charts, "the inner landscapes of women," (Sebastian, Mrinalini. 2000. *The Novels of Shashi Deshpande in Post Colonial Arguments.* Delhi: Prestige, p.143) where she provides her women characters a context to understand themselves.

Deshpande consistently explores the nature of the female world and reconstructs the suppressed records of female experience. She constructs contexts, representing different facets of the trapped female psyche and attempts to transcend its boundaries. These narratives function as modes of women's experience underlining its resistance and simultaneously subverting it, which opens up a space where the, "marginal comes into being and retains its difference"(Chatterji, Lola. Ed. 1986. *Woman Image Text.* Delhi: Trianka, p.6).

Shashi Deshpande's novel *Moving On* also projects the protagonist Manjari as a woman who resists the patriarchal ideology and tries to live her life on her own terms. She displays enormous courage and steadfastness in her decision to give up studying medicine to marry Shyam, and again during such trying moments when it is revealed that her sister Malu is made pregnant by her husband. When Malu dies after giving birth to Sachi, followed by Shyam's suicide, Manjari faces a painful period of struggle and strain.

Estranged from family, she grapples with innumerable difficulties to support herself and to survive with her baby son. She turns down Raja's repeated proposals to marry him because she thinks that marriage without the foundation of love and only as a means of social security for a single woman is not acceptable to her.

In almost all societies, a woman is culturally assigned norms of behaviour in which standards of conduct and decorum set the boundaries for her as external signs of what it means to be seemingly proper and respectable within the differentiated hierarchy called gender. Any form of deviation from prescribed norms or any display of transgressive potential in violation to the ideal image of womanhood makes her an unruly woman to be ostracized by society.

As Bartky points out, the situation of woman is such that she, a free and autonomous being, finds herself in a world where she is compelled by man to assume the status of an inferior to whatever man imagines himself to be. Women are bound to their oppression; "by male control of the dominant institutions and the dominant ideology..." (Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1998, *"Body Politics." A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell. p.85.). Hence, in order both to gain equality and to realize their human potential, women must transcend their distinctive femaleness to lead the kind of life men do, in other words, they must be autonomous.

Beauvoir exhorts women to achieve autonomy, to discover and nurture their authentic self through lived experience for self-realization. This argument may apply in case of Manjari, as she negotiates many opposed discourses and moves forward in a quest to know who and what she is.

In the context of the changing world we live in, it has become imperative to do away with separate domains for woman and man and to redefine man-woman relationship as equal and complementary and not on terms of domination and subordination. For Deshpande, "A world without frightened, dependent, trapped, frustrated women is a better world for all of us to live in." (Deshpande, Shashi. 1988. *"Why I am a Feminist." Writing from the Margin*. New Delhi: Penguin, p.85.)

In her march towards emancipation and self-hood, the contemporary Indian woman has to struggle against the insensitive fatality of options and the indoctrination of centuries which endeavor to fashion her into the mould of 'womanhood' with a silent persistence.

Deshpande has portrayed women who exhibit the results of this indoctrination in their psyche and behavior. Her "Ajis" and "Kakis" are the women who could not have the opportunity to develop and grow except in home and family related roles and have surrendered to the traditional clap-trap about the women's-place-at-home-only.

This self-deception also perpetuates the power-equations, as Vrinda Nabar points out: "Whereby the woman/mother eventually sees her imprisonment as empowering her by conferring on her the attributes of mother and wife. She sees these largely in relation to the men in the domestic power hierarchy. She thus becomes a symbol of what men later expect their women to be. She is imprinted on the children's consciousness as sublime sufferer, selfless slave, tireless worker for her family's comfort and happiness." (Nabar, Vrinda. 1995, *Caste as Woman*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, p. 185-86.)

Deshpande's novels sympathetically record the lives of such women and this is one of her themes. She has endeavored to transmit the basic anxiety, loneliness and helplessness of their situation. The novel sensitively presents how a woman's existence is confined within domesticity and how all forms of oppression perpetuated on her are convincingly rationalized generating a closed-mind syndrome. The figure of Mohan's mother can be quoted as an example. In Jaya's narration, "the woman's crouching in front of the dying fire, sitting blank and motionless, the huddled bundles of sleeping children on the floor, the utter silence." (Shashi Deshpande, *That Long Silence*, New Delhi, Penguin Publishers 1989.)

Conclusion

The point of departure for this study of Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande is the hypothesis that literature is the product of a given milieu, language and individual sensibility. Together they constitute a cultural entity, rooted in the changing traditional value system of a people.

Indian traditions themselves have brought about some of the great problems regarding Indian woman. Kamala Markandaya has dealt with some of these problems like poverty, marriage, illiteracy, etc., in detail in her novels. Some of the customs, which make a mockery of the development of Indian women in society, can be easily observed more vividly in India. She moves forward to oppose such backward customs allotted with great skill and vigour. She is an expert in joining the East-West features and in framing a complicating network of the drama of human relations. What the commentator S.K. Tikko writes about Kamala Markandaya's novel *The Pleasure City* is applicable to her art:

"In conclusion, one might add that Kamala Markandaya's art as a novelist seems to consist not only in presenting these relationships and analyzing the mental attitudes of her British and Indian characters but also in recapturing a vision of the English people as there were, when they ruled India, when life was simple and pleasant." (S.K.Tikko, "*Human Relationship in Pleasure City* ed. Indian Women Novelist by R.K.Dhawan set-1, vol-3(New Delhi, 1993), page-239).

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