

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters we have dealt with four women novelists rewriting the world of women in postcolonial India. None of these novelists, however, professes any special feminist theory nor do they anywhere reveal a strong anti-male stance. In their novels, they rather create women characters who attempt to realize themselves in the given world and attain therein an identity and individuality of their own. All the four novelists deal with upper class or upper-middle class urban women. The only exception is Rukmini who belongs to rural India. In many respects, these protagonists show an uncanny resemblance to each other. At the same time, their individual characteristics set them apart from each other and contribute to the variety of the protagonists that one comes across in their novels.

In their assessment of their situation or position in society, the protagonists of Markandaya, Deshpande and Hariharan show a more realistic and mature approach than the protagonists of Desai's novels. Rukmini, Roshan, Anusuya from Markandaya or Sarita, Jaya, Urmi from Deshpande are no doubt troubled and feel hemmed in by the social shackles which bind them to traditional attitudes and expectations, yet they attempt to achieve an independence within that framework. To them, marriage no doubt means constricting bonds. But they do not believe in a total break and hence, never attempt to do away with a social institution like marriage. Achieving a realizable goal within the accepted codes of society, these protagonists are able to come to terms with themselves and the social reality around them. On the other hand, Desai's protagonists lack the capacity to come to terms with the reality around them. Hence, they succumb to life's tensions like Maya or Monisha, or live a life of isolation like Nanda Kaul or Uma. Their over-sensitive natures and unrealistic expectations make it impossible for them to accept the vagaries of their lives. Hariharan's protagonist, Devi, however, adds a new

dimension to the pursuit of self-realisation on the part of an Indian woman. In the novel, Hariharan explores the continuing impact of the age-old myths and lores about the women's roles and models which may still remain entrenched in Indian women's psyche and thus make her vulnerable. Devi, however, overthrows the heavy rock of heritage with its 'thousand faces of night', and thus becomes the 'new woman' of the postcolonial India.

Belonging to upper-class urban society, most of the protagonists of the novelists under our consideration do not have any separate position or role out side their homes. They do not hold jobs and hence have no economic independence. This obviously curtails the possibility of their self-assertion. Even Sarita, who is a successful doctor, finds her familial and personal expectations in conflict. Her husband finds it difficult to accept the reality that she provides both the bread and the butter for the family. Jaya and Indu attempt to find a role outside the family but soon realize that the restricting bonds of the family hinder them in this process. Even honest self-expression through their writings is denied to them. In fact, the traditional male always fails to see the need of a woman to realize her true potential outside the domestic sphere. Her possible independence is also viewed as a threat to her husband's masculinity. So deeply ingrained is the discourse that Sarita even begins to hold her success directly responsible for Monohar's sadistic behaviour:

My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood
(The Dark Holds No Terrors, 198).

Hence, when women like Roshan and Amala decide to pursue their career, they decide to be 'manless' in their life.

Marriage and marital relationships form an important segment of the lives of the protagonists of the four novelists under our consideration. While Markandaya views the institution of marriage from sociological point of view, for the protagonists of Deshpande and Hariharan discord and disappointment in marital relationship are the starting-points for introspection and self-realization. But, while marriage to Deshpande's protagonists is an important social institution and solutions are sought within the marriage only, Hariharan's heroine, Devi, withdraws herself finally from the male-world to stay with her mother, Sita. Only Desai's protagonists show a radically different approach to the institution of marriage. From the child-wife Maya to the respected 'home-maker' of a Vice-Chancellor, Mrs. Nanda Kaul, marriage never provides the sense of security, freedom and happiness, which they expected from it. Being disappointed in their expectations of marriage, they constantly over-react to the situations they face. They are not just sensitive but over-sensitive and lonely to the point of being neurotic. These women also lack the inner strength that is a characteristic of Deshpande's or Markandaya's women. In fact, not having a real identity of their own, or being unsure of their expectations from traditional institutions, they are incapable of serious and honest introspection. Desai's early protagonists show a thoroughly defeatist attitude. The choice of homicide or suicide as a solution of their problems indicates the immature and impractical nature of Maya and Monisha. Even the stately Nanda Kaul has been a living lie all through her life, pretending to a love and position that she never attains. In her later protagonists like Uma, we obviously find an introspective bent of mind, yet they also lack the maturity required for a satisfactory introspection.

Closely related to these women's attitude to marriage is also the possibility of extramarital relationships. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists have extramarital attractions: Sarita for Boozie and Padmakar, Indu for Naren and Jaya for Kamat. Hariharan's Devi has a complex relationship with three men –

Dan, Mahesh and Gopal. But all these women are able to view such relations objectively as any other experience and do not allow themselves to be bogged down by any feeling of guilt. For example, Indu considers it as having nothing to do with her relationship with Jayant. A failure to achieve meaningful relationship through marriage spurs them into these relationships. However, very soon they see the futility of such relationships.

In contrast to these women, Desai's protagonists experience no extra-marital attachments. Nanda Kaul is portrayed as being deeply hurt by her husband's life-long liaison with Miss David, and yet there is no attempt on her part, as on the part of other women characters of Desai, to find a comfort in a relationship outside that marriage. They clearly follow the traditional line.

In this respect, Rukmini's relationship with Kenny is that of a complex one. There is obviously an eternal bond of love, but that is completely asexual which has roused from their mutual sympathy and respect to each other. Rukmini adores Kenny as 'God' because she thinks him always the benefactor. With the only possible exception of Lady Caroline, all women characters from Markandaya really feel no incestuous desire in their lives.

Except Markandaya's Rukmini, all the protagonists of the four novelists under our consideration possess another common trait of showing no predilection for motherhood – a role that has been inextricably linked with women both by nature and social conventions and expectations. Devi even carries her disinclination to bearing a child to the extreme because she thinks herself not "an efficient receptacle for motherhood" (The Thousand Faces Of Night, 88). Monisha does not brood about motherhood or her incapacity to bear a child, even though women around her frequently discuss her blocked fallopian tubes. Some of these protagonists also have been disappointed by their mothers who fail to rise to their expectations of an ideal mother. Very

often they see their mothers as restrictive in their attempts at freedom and self-realization. Sarita acknowledges her animosity towards her mother:

If you're a woman, I don't want to be one (The Dark Holds No Terrors, 62).

Jaya also prefers her father to her mother, and Indu resents the domination of her mother figure – Akka.

Though all the four novelists of our consideration have disclaimed all attempts to categorise them as feminists, yet all of them always present a woman's world from a woman's point of view. Shashi Deshpande admits:

I am a woman and I do write about woman, and I'm going to say it loudly (Deshpande quoted Pathak, 1998,18).

In fact, none of the novels analysed here has well-developed male characters. All the men are seen only in relation to the protagonists as husbands or fathers or brothers. They are presented only within the limited sphere of a specific role. Moreover, there is no animosity between the fathers and daughters like that which exists in the mother-daughter relationship. Instead, closeness can be seen between the fathers and the daughters. It is Rukmini's father who offers her the scope of little education that she has. Sarita's father helps her to see the baselessness of her guilt-complexes. Maya's father treated her in her childhood like a princess, and as a result of it she views every other male only in comparison to her father.

Last but not least, the repression, prohibition, exclusion and domination of these women characters can be analysed in terms of the dynamics of the spirals of power-knowledge-pleasure. These join together to penetrate and

control the individual's private pleasures, desires and behaviour. As Michel Foucault has pointed out, "Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another, they seek art, overlap and re-inforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and device" (Foucault: 1978:93). These spirals are mutually reinforcing and are promoted by numerous interests. Power, for Foucault, is not "something acquired or shared"; it is "an institution and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic station in a particular society" (Ibid).

All the novelists under our consideration have conveyed their women characters' fundamental dependence on men. These women sometimes attempt to assert their independence and self-sufficiency, but their quest for identity is thwarted at significant junctures of their lives. Some of them, like lady Caroline Bell in Possession and Monisha's mother in Voices in the City, represent a 'frosty love of power' (Voices in the City, 215), and some of them, like Urmi in The Binding Vine and Devi in The Thousand Faces of Night, do raise a cry of protest occasionally, but that does not change their lot.

Power and sex are, in fact, two well-known deployments of interpersonal relationships. The latter is assigned an important place in the novels of our consideration. "The deployment of alliance comprises systems of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission, of names and possessions" (Foucault: 1978:105-106). Most of these have a constraining effect upon women. Foucault has referred to the Freudian endeavour "to ground sexuality in the law – the law of alliance, tabooed consanguinity and the Sovereign – father, in short to surround desire with all the trappings of the old order to power" (Ibid: 150). No woman in the novels under our consideration has been fortunate enough to free herself from the shackles of femininity completely and most of the male characters in these

novels are invariably much prosaic and follow the middle path of life. They represent the sovereign father figure and their dominating authority. The women, on the contrary, are highly sensitive, and sometimes over-emotional too.

✓ To conclude, all the novelists under our consideration have presented their protagonists as highly sensitive women with a certain capacity to question the accepted social codes and then try to achieve a role and pattern of life that fits their expectations. They refuse to be the angel in the house, the ideal 'pativrata' or the passive, docile, self-effacing woman who occupies a secondary position at home. They refuse to be marginalized or cater constantly to the whims of the males in the family. They wish to occupy a rightful place as human beings in a civilised society. In order to achieve this, they are willing to reject all kinds of socially accepted, traditional role models. In spite of all these similarities, they function differently also. While Markandaya's women try to fit themselves to the nationalist resolution of the women's question, Desai's women seek a harmony between their feminine selves and that nationalist resolution, although that cannot be attained. Deshpande's women do find that harmony at the cost of sensitivity and emotion. Githa Hariharan's *Devi* alone succeeds in creating her own harmony, and thus can offer one model for postcolonial reconceptualisation of Indian women's quest for identity.