

## MYTHS AND GENDER STEREOTYPES IN SELECTED NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE AND HELEN GARNER

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### **Abstract:**

*Gender Stereotypes relate that man and woman are seen differently by people. Women themselves often view their personalities and professional preferences in a way, which is essentially different from that of a man. A major issue is whether the female archetypes of old are still valid. Should Indian women still follow the path set by Sita and Savitri? If not, who should be the beacon lights, what role should a woman play within her family and in the world? Such questions are raised by Shashi Deshpande. Similar are the questions raised by women in Australia. Garner's novel questions the prevalent gender stereotypes by highlighting their negative role and seeks to redress the balance by repudiating them unequivocally. The aim of this study is to see how these novelists present an implicit critique of societal expectations and demands on a woman by portraying images of women who confirm to society's prescribed norms for 'feminine' behavior but fail to achieve any happiness.*

**Keywords:** *Feminism, Socialization, Biological difference, Identity, Expectation.*

### **Introduction**

Feminism can be identified as the liberation of women from social taboo and male dominance. Jane Flax (2001) in fact considers gender as the basis of feminism "Gender relations enter into and are constituent elements in every aspect of human experience." (p. 400) Most of the feminist authors' works provide a pointer to the catatonic status of women in the tradition-bound, male-dominated middle-class society, in which they are struggling to overcome the restrictions and constricting dilemmas of pre-fixed definitions and pre-set norms, and thus attempting to redefine their status.

Feminism challenges the age old view, which states that woman is the weaker sex and the acceptance, that she belongs to kitchen only. It assumes the equality of the sexes and seeks to achieve for women a place in society, which such equality narrates. This has led to a rethinking on gender relations reflected in literature and in life. In her study of women's writing Ruth Sherry stresses two aspects of Feminism : the disabilities and disadvantages women suffer on account of inequalities and injustices, and the value, the values of women and human dignity.<sup>4</sup> Chaman Nahal defines feminism "as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome: whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group, when women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life."<sup>5</sup>

All women's writing is not feminist; equally true, that even when gender identifications cross cultures, cultural constructs also help to differentiate feminist positions. Yet it needs to be recognized that feminist interpretations can emerge even through absence and negation, they do not necessarily have through identification and equation.

Many women writers of the nineteenth century can be cited for their idealization of the prevalent stereotypical ways of thinking about women. The qualities we are asked to admire in Dorothea Brooke in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) are "her noble resignation of self to her husband's narrow egoism" and

her conforming to the ideal of submissive self-sacrificing womanhood, beloved of men, especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (p. 26) Showalter (1978) has also pointed to the exaltation of the feminine role by the 19<sup>th</sup> century women novelist, especially the major ones like Jane Austen and George Eliot. It would be pertinent to quote Showalter's assessment about the protagonists of 19<sup>th</sup> Century women writers.

“The heroines are hardly concerned with self-fulfillment in the modern sense of the term and if they have severely limited possibilities in life it is because their authors saw great danger in, plus a higher alternative to the practice of selfassertiveness” (p.58)

The use of the word “danger” in the above quoted passage provides a key to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Women writers' bid for acceptance, by the dominantly patriarchal social structure through their seemingly confirming narratives.

Women who are a victim of such pathogenic misogyny have prepared the backdrop of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1989) and *Small Remedies* (2000) and Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip* (1977) and *The Children's Bach* (1984). These novels raise many questions by providing the reader with an insight into the problems of different roles that woman in society, despite the romanticizing of womanhood, has to play. Women in the male centered fiction are often portrayed in terms of the popularly available stereotypes of the suffering mother, the restive wife or the shrewish mistress in all the cases as an easily dependable appendage to the male counterpart. The marginalization insecurity and segregation experienced by women has been effectively depicted by these women writers.

This paper analyzes both gender roles and their representation in myths, which are hi-gendered in our society. They are the products of our evolution, and are inextricably linked with abilities predominant in one gender or the other, which are determined biologically. Throughout history, it has been accepted that roles for each gender have been prescribed according to their physical and mental capabilities and have only recently been challenged. Implicit within this view is the belief that these roles are desirable, as they are as per the intelligence and hormonal differences of both sexes.

Contrary to the perspective of biological differences, the sociocultural view of gender roles states that gender roles and stereotypes develop within a culture and are then perpetuated by that culture. Individuals within the culture are expected to conform to these norms, and are socialized in manners, which constantly reinforce the beliefs, and behavior, which are prescribed and presupposed for them. Also, there are cultural differences which need to be considered. Marriage, caste, family structure, home, love and relationships play an important role, as do myths and legends. Women in the process of becoming need to confront and negotiate these. Sexuality plays a dominant part in the self-discovery process. Reality is gendered. There is no getting out of the body, even though one may transcend or ignore it. Gender continues to govern the individual's interaction with society and gender is both a social and cultural construct. In the attempt to understand and redefine the self, the novelist has to reevaluate the role of sex, of love, of procreation and motherhood and of freedom. The differences both in writing and in evaluative strategies are directly related to these cultural situations.

Gender stereotypes have related, that man and woman are seen differently by people. They are seen as different “in personality traits in physical characteristics, in interests, in occupational roles and status levels, and in many other ways.” (1994: 94) Women themselves often view their personalities and professional preferences in a way, which is essentially different from that of a man. Women's cognition is often influenced and conditioned by their perception of gender based social stereotypes and hence in most of the cases, cannot remain agentic. Awareness of female biological limitations, family responsibilities and glorification of traditional feminine role by the society often impact the decisions like career choice, marriage etc. of girls and women.

A major issue is whether the female archetypes of old are still valid. Should Indian women still follow the path set by Sita and Savitri? If not, who should be the beacon lights, what role should a woman

play within her family and in the world? Such are the questions raised by Indian women writers like Shashi Deshpande.

The socialization of a girl for her future role as wife and mother begins in early childhood when the prevailing social mores and norms are studiously inculcated in to her through myths, legends, folklore and rituals. The sociologist, Leela Dube (1988) avers: "Gender roles are conceived enacted and learnt with in a complex of relationships" (p. 113) Despite the patriarchal character of the Indian family, there exists an independent community of women which evolves as a result of the taboo on the interaction between the sexes. This community which has already internalized patriarchal values now ensures the conditioning of the female child in to her social role of docile daughter/ wife/ mother.

For the socialization of a girl child, she is continuously made to listen to Folk tales, rituals, rigid conduct codes and rules throughout her growing years. The universal validity of de Beauvoir's (1949) famous observation that "One is not born but rat her becomes, a woman..." (p. 267) is strengthened by the means through which a girl is socialized into feminine submissiveness. In every home, the differentiation starts with certain household chores that are set aside for the girl- like setting the table, helping in the kitchen and cleaning up after meals - which boys are never asked to do. Any deviation from the protocol invokes derision. Jaya in *That Long Silence* (1989) remembers that it was always the duty of the girls in her uncle's house to clear up after meals. When one of the girls had asked angrily, ". why can't one of the boys do it? Jaanu or Shridhar? Why does it have to be me and Veena?" (p.81), she had been answered with mocking smiles. These house hold practices and stereotypes are deeply internalized equally by the community of women and the males in the family. Mohan, Jaya's husband in *That Long Silence* (1989), is offended when she suggests that he should cook during her pregnancy.

Alice Munro, a Canadian writer has successfully portrayed in *Lives of Girls and Women* (1974) that the prevalent sex and gender stereotypes are partial to men, enhancing their selfassertion, and masterfulness. On the other hand, they discourage the decision-making rights of women, promoting self-rejection and submissiveness in their attitudes. Del the heroine's association with her aunts- Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace- expose her to patterns of traditional feminine smugness and coquetry. Her aunts keep themselves busy with their domestic chores, and criticize her mother for her intellectual pursuits. Just like Deshpande's Ajis and Kakis, the behavior of the aunts confirms to the stereotyped feminine behavior appreciated and encouraged by the society- they thrive in a world of superficial courtesies, well-cooked dinners and nimble malice. Del realizes that the separation between the male and female worlds was an inviolable principle for them, ".they were prepared to believe in what he did.. .And they would never meddle with it" (p.46) There is a distinct line drawn between man and woman's chores, and any crossing over this line, would bring criticism from all over the society.

One reason why women are largely irrelevant is that they emerge from a male- dominated society. Society is in a evolutionary stage, where gender roles are being redefined.

Kate Millet terms this age as one of "sexual revolution" in her work *Sexual Politics* (1971) and supports women's playing a leadership part as never known before in history. It is an age where sexual stereotypes are no more irrelevant, where freedom from rank or prescriptive role, sexual or otherwise, is increasingly evident. The change is less evident, however in ancient and tradition -bound cultures like the Indian, where the male hegemony persists.

Shashi Deshpande and Helen Garner are two distinguished names in Commonwealth literature today. They are the women writers of feminine sensibility, well known for their confessional mode of expression, for their honest views of man-woman relationship, for their unconventional approaches to some of the significant social issues, such as love and marriage and their effects on individuals. Though they were born in different climates and culture - one in South India, and the other in Australia - they have certain points in common while certain others in divergence. The backgrounds of their novels are also

entirely different but the underlying theme is common in all. Shashi Deshpande's setting is Indian society where woman is economically independent but emotionally dependent. It is same with Helen Garner's protagonist but the setting is Australian urban society.

Women, when articulate their thoughts and feelings in an uninhibited manner, they tend to challenge the age - old customs and traditions. More courageous and challenging is the Indian author in this matter, for she is writing against a conservative society - and yet remain thoroughly feminine in their outlook upon life. In olden days, in the patriarchal society, women's voice was not paid any heed to. Though the world today is still patriarchal and male- ordained, the women have gained legal as well as social liberty to voice their problems and to protest against injustices done to them. Issues like individual freedom and equality with men no longer exist and now the question is how far women have succeeded in getting the rights for which they fought. In her march towards emancipation and self-hood, the contemporary woman has to struggle against the insensitive fatality of options and the indoctrination of centuries which endeavour to fashion her into the mould of "womanhood" with a silent persistence.

### **Role of Myths and gender in Shashi Deshpande's works**

Deshpande, in her novels, compassionately records the lives of such women as one of her themes; a subject, which is normally labeled as cliched by authors and therefore sidelined. Her approach is neither barrenly intellectual nor argumentatively vocal. She has strived to convey the basic anxiety, loneliness and helplessness of their situation. She has also scathingly attacked the myths, which the Indian men hold about women. *That Long Silence* (1989) presents the stereotypes and myths about Indian femininity through various peripheral characters. In the initial part of the novel the character of Kusum acts as a counter-foil to Jaya, who reflects the darker regions of her being. Jaya assesses and ensures her sanity and normalcy against Kusum who works as a touchstone for her.

Deshpande's writing has a pleasant feature of unselfconscious use of literary mention, myth and folklore which impeccably meshed her work with previous literature. In *That Long Silence* (1989) Maitreyee and Yagnavalkya, the wife with the enquiring, probing mind and her legendary philosopher husband, are evoked as naturally as Sonia and Raskolnikov and Fanny Price and Aunt Bertram. Jaya recalls Fanny Price and Aunt Bertram when an aunt of hers gives her some solemn advice on her wedding morning. Vanitamami's hands hold a tray of things used in worship and she is near the Tulsi shrine in the yard of the house. The myth of Tulsi, who by her selfless devotion to Krishna became an indispensable part of his worship, is part of the cultural heritage of Hindu women. This plant-deity enshrined in all Hindu households' commands daily worship from women, for it is believed to free a wife from the fear of widowhood.

Deshpande's 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. The woman's social role for which she is prepared since childhood revolves around her sacrifice for the welfare of her family. Sociologist Sheila Ruth (1980), describes the qualities that characterize the stereo type of the Mother:

"She is tenderness, fragility, Love, Charity, Loyalty, submission and sacrifice.... She is.....totally absorbed in the activities and qualities of caring.....Placing the needs of her charges above her own, she busies herself with feeding them, watching over them, making them happy (p. 91)"

In the Indian context, once the marriage takes place, be it an arranged marriage or love marriage, the husband takes complete control over wife. The wife has to blindly follow the husband, without ruminating of right or wrong path. When Mohan is caught in an act of malpractice and is supposed to be unavailable for certain period, he assumes Jaya accompany him. Though she is unwilling to follow the

examples of Sita and Savitri, paradoxically, the situations and circumstances, compel her to follow the principle that “both are yoked together, so better to go to the same directions, as to go to different directions will be painful.” (p. 10)

Shashi Deshpande uses an apt image of a worm crawling into a hole to describe the state of Jaya, a budding writer dwindling into a stereotyped Indian housewife:

Middle class. Burgeoise. Upper-caste. Distanced from real life. Scared of writing.  
Scared of failing. Oh God, I had thought, I can't take any more. Even a worm has a hole it can crawl into. I had mine- as Mohan's wife, as Rahul and Rati's mother.  
(p.148)

This again is reinforced in course of her recollection of the past. Jaya indulges in selfpity and feels that she was “prodded out” of her “warm and safe hole” of domesticity (p. 173). Theirs was a loveless married life, which caused the wife and the husband to drift away from each other. Jaya complains bitterly of her failure:

I'll tell you what's wrong. I've failed him. He expected something from me, from his wife and I've failed him. All these years I thought I was Mohan's wife: now he tells me I was never that, not really. What am I going to do? (p. 185)

Jaya's husband, Mohan, always interprets things in relation to the effect it may have on the society. He unobtrusively likes to conform to the social norms even if they are strong. The success of Jaya's novel portraying the gender relationship is evaluated in relation to a futuristic society. So, he pushes Jaya also to think like him and persuade her not to work on themes that may endanger their marriage. But she does not like to submit to the male-chauvinistic ideas, for her prudence does not allow her to submit before ignorance. This results into a struggle amidst ignorance and prudence.

Over the years, Jaya has molded herself in to the stereotype of an Ideal wife and mother, because Mohan expects it of her. Mohan has named her Suhasini after marriage. Jaya considers Suhasini to be a symbol of the proud, finicky housewife, a perfectionist who derives inordinate pleasure from maintaining an impeccable home. Inwardly too, she has metamorphosed in to the stereotype of the ideal woman dependent on a man for the completeness of her existence. In the past, Jaya has written perceptively and sensitively about oppressed women but has given it up because Mohan disapproved of such writing. She becomes so much engrossed in becoming Suhasini, that she forgets various other shades of her personality.

*That Long Silence* (1989) portrays the miseries and deprivations of feminine life by portraying certain characters as stereotyped representatives of traditional womanhood. The novel also presents an analysis of the myths, which are encouraged and followed in the context of femininity. Jaya has given up writing for the newspaper column “Seeta”, which means symbolically giving up her traditional role model of wife. Mohan persuades her to continue writing for the column but now she inwardly refuses to be Mohan's wife, “Rahul and Rati's mother” (69). Like Gandhari, she had earlier bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband. She says: “I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn't want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay, that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that we could have the things we needed...” (p. 61-62). But the strength of the novel lies in its bold analysis of the realities about the Indian womanhood.

Deshpande's *Small Remedies* (2000) is the novel that does not conform to the stereotypes set for traditional womanhood. Madhu, the heroine of *Small Remedies* is overwhelmed by her own omnipotence because she can create an infinite range of Savitribai's - a great 'rebel who defies the conventions of her time.' The feminist who lived her life on her own terms. The great artist who sacrificed everything for the cause of her art or the impetuous lover who abandoned a secure married life in a Brahmin Household to live with her Muslim accompanist.

*Small Remedies* (2000) also represent the analytical aspect of Buddhist tenets, coupled with a search of permanent values amidst chaos, which the life has been reduced to. In the Buddhist view, liberation consists in realizing the unreality of the self and in eradicating every trace of individuality. This concept of Buddhism is clearly evident in the portrayal of Madhu, the narrator/protagonist of *Small Remedies*. Madhu has grown up without her mother, brought up by her father and Babu a manservant. She doesn't even seem to be concerned about not having a mother in her life. She recollects mothers as "drab creatures, forever working, scolding their children" (p.182) and therefore she does not feel deprived. But life changes for her when

she herself becomes a mother. "The in-control-of-herself Madhu is lost, gone forever.....my place in the universe is marked out now" (p. 183) Her world is complete with her son "what can you give me my Lord, I who have everything?" "Aditya's mother" becomes her identity and she enjoys it (p. 229) The sudden death of her son in an irrational act of communal violence breaks her and she almost loses her sanity, "Death is not an event, it's an end. It's like a nuclear devastation; there's nothing left. Som and I are moving through the rubble of our devastated Dives, searching for something, for any bits and pieces of our past. But there's nothing." (p. 211).

*That Long Silence* (1989) and *Small Remedies* (2000) provide two diverse versions of the mode of resistance to patriarchal ideology both at the level of the individual and the community of women. All the novels interestingly trace the transformation of the ideology, from the state of the internalization of patriarchal values through awareness of the value of female bonding and self-identity to assertion of women's rights. Even in her other novels like *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) she points out the gender difference. For Saru's mother a son only matters, as she says:

Don't go out in the sun You will get  
even darker Who cares?  
We have to care if you don't We have to get you  
married I don't want to get married Will you  
live with us all your life?  
Why not?  
You can't And Dhruva  
He's different, He is a boy. (p.45)

The gender difference in her mother's treatment of Saru and Dhruva enrages Saru. *Small Remedies* (2000), on the other hand, is the story of three 'transgressive' women over-reachers in their own right, who follow the call of their soul to fulfill themselves as individuals and pay the price it entails. They are able to successfully create a space for themselves despite social and familial resistance.

Social learning theory applied to our study predicts that individuals need not directly be told what their expected roles are; continued exposure to others in those roles, for example in the media, is sufficient reinforcement (Long, 1990). The theory that gender roles are determined by society and not biology, fixes the problems inherent in the biological view. If sex roles are transmitted culturally, then probably, Western sex roles need not be universal, and any roles which are followed according to the culture are correct.

### **Gender Stereotypes in Helen Garner's works**

Helen Garner is one of the finest of Australian writers. She has written highly personal novel, created from life with an attention to detail and imaginative richness; and she has written essay journalism and other non-fictional work that explore the complexities of reportage. This is evident in her novel *Monkey Grip* (1977) where Nora expresses her desire of taking up journalism for reporting about women.

Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip* (1977) confronted acceptable notions of sexual and social behavior for women. Her both novels try to redefine the traditional roles of women. In *Monkey Grip* (1977) the heroine Nora does not want to be the conscience of the world or a stereotype anymore. She has to accept

Javo for what he is and she tries to love him for what he is. The affair between Nora and Javo represents two people touching each other. She almost mothers him at times. Sex is not a cherished commodity in the novel and it is given without commitment or expectations.

Nora has an emotional attachment with Javo. Although she does not want to be a typical stereotyped female, she does household chores for Javo. She says: "I went home and did four loads of washing at the Laundromat. I washed his shirts and Jeans and socks. Why do I do it? I do it for love, or kindness. Women are nicer than men. Kinder, more open, less suspicious, more eager to love". (p. 82)

There is reference to Asian mythology when Julian, Martin's brother and Nora are talking about Martin and Javo's getting busted for stealing a pair of sunglasses. Julian says: "... You probably won't like this much but it's karma, you know. What you give out, you get back. It manifests itself clearer in Asia than anywhere else." (p. 52)

Just like other girls Nora also is afraid of losing the one she loves. She is afraid of being left behind. She asserts this when she says:

I was afraid to talk about loving him when he was in that cold rational frame of mind,  
because I didn't want to be left behind, or something.

(p. 74)

Nora does not have the traditional female attitude towards motherhood, she does not want to be a mother. This is because she feels that it will limit her freedom:

'... and the fact that I had been through this struggle myself with Gracie, years before:  
hating her because her existence marked the exact limits of my freedom; hating  
myself for hating her; loving her, all the while, gut-deep and inexpressibly; and  
beginning each day with the dogged shouldering of a burden too heavy for one  
person: the responsibility for the life of another human being. (p. 172)

In *The Children's Bach* (1984), Garner has shown Athena trying to get free of the foundation laid upon her. She is tired of the expectations of Dexter and Vicky. To Dexter and Vicky Athena is a "Saint" (p. 79), a heroic Goddess who will always be there to toil and love them "contained without needs, never restless" (p. 26). Her eventual flight is more than "a rejection of household routine she is also escaping the heroic role that has been thrust upon her by others." (p. 14)

Dexter is oblivious to the niceties of a light - weight iron, and he cannot operate a washing machine, even in order to hide his shame. This is women's work and therefore not worth knowing about.

Dexter is shown in the novel as a dominating husband who suppresses Athena. This is explicitly evident in the conversation that they had when Elizabeth and Vicky come to their place. Elizabeth asks about who plays the piano. Dexter tells her that it is Athena. When Athena is asked to play she denies as she is busy with the domestic chores. Dexter then says in a sarcastic tone:

'Yes, dear', said Dexter. 'You ought to practise when you're the only one home.' He  
turned over a page of the newspaper. 'It's a bit dreary having to listen to someone  
picking their way through those pieces.'

(p.48)

Dexter is an egoistic male. Since he had been ruling over the family and nobody could go against, when Vicky replies him back he is shocked.

'Had anyone ever crossed Dexter before? Had anyone? He jerked back as if he had  
been struck. His chair splintered under him and he saved himself only by flexing  
his legs and grabbing the corner of the table with one hand.' (p.62)

Athena is considered to be a perfect wife and mother.

'But I like the mother,' said Poppy.

'Athena's perfect, isn't she'

'Perfect-you reckon?' said Philip  
 Elizabeth looked at him.' She'd have to be, to live up to the name.'  
 'The goddess of war,' said Philip.  
 'I didn't mean that perfect,' said Poppy  
 'Of war and needlecraft,' said Elizabeth. (p.62)

*The Children's Bach* (1984), makes use of the motifs of 'the search' and 'the homecoming' in order to explore these ideas of the gender labelling of occupations and how they are cherished and the liberation of women by increasing their options.

Garner's novels question the prevalent gender stereotypes by highlighting their negative role, and seeks to redress the balance by repudiating them unequivocally. For years, it has been assumed that sex roles are biological, and therefore static, can be rebutted by the simple observable fact that, even within our society, sex roles have changed and are under the course of changing. Women, long considered to be unable to hold positions of power or careers involving intelligence, are at last beginning to be allowed to serve in such capacities (though the struggle for complete recognition is still far from over). In addition, women are in the process of refuting the belief that they must have a family and children to be complete, when in fact many are happier without them.

### **Conclusion**

The protagonists in these novels do not assert in a pragmatic manner Jaya, Madhu, Athena and Nora, all of them suffer from psychological or cultural alienation, but they suffer in silence, perceive the agonies of existence and are quickly withdrawn in to their own worlds. By portraying images of women who conform to society's prescribed norms for 'feminine' behavior, but fail to achieve any happiness, these novelists present an implicit critique of societal expectations and demands on a woman. By persuading the reader's empathy for the inner conflicts and frustrations experienced by these women, these writers are also articulating some of the limitations of the 'feminine' role model.

The set pattern which has evolved through centuries is that a man is born to rule and a woman, to obey and serve him, man is the god, and woman is the devout; man for the fieldwork and woman for the household chores and so on is now being challenged. Today the novelists depict a large number of women characters including hawkers, painters, doctors, nuns, journalists, architects and women employed in a variety of professions. Women now occupy the center of the stage, in the novels not only by women but also by men. And with all conviction these women characters fight with the social evils and male superiority. The new emancipated women are non-conformists who are discontented with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman. They want to liberate themselves from the stereotypes set for them and exercise their rights for the manifestation of their individual capabilities and the realization of their feminine selves through identity-assertion and self-affirmation.

Current and past changes in sex roles can moreover be explained by the fact that, since cultures change, what roles are adaptive to each culture will also change over time, and should do so. The socio-cultural view, influenced to a great extent by feminism, further states that the current female sex roles in our society are psychologically damaging to women, as they endorse certain behaviors and beliefs, which do not match with reality and prove to be maladaptive to psychological adjustment. Similarly, the male gender roles are equally detrimental for men. Woman, who was dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural and sexual roles assigned to her from the unconscious dawn of the patriarchal society, is now gaining strength to rebel against the cultural oppressions. But simultaneously, she does not succeed in rejecting her social and cultural background totally. She stands therefore at intersection between tradition and modernity.

Much of the research that has been done is about the detrimental effects of gender stereotyping, and has focused on how these stereotypes tend to further subjugate women. But looking at both sides of the picture tells that men also get hurt. But as per the gender stereotypes they are told that they should not



display their emotions, they are socialized in a way that they can be aggressive, and they should derogate anything female. This manifests itself as a high level of competitiveness, a disability to be open and vulnerable, and a lack of competence in interpersonal relationships.

One can thus conclude, the position of woman in general has been paradoxical. That is, she has been the key person, the master figure in the family and yet she has lived the life of slavery, subjugation, suffering and suppression. However, now she has become conscious of her rights and responsibilities, her distress and her destination. Just because a woman wants to become a successful individual, does not mean that she has no desire for love, marriage and domesticity. Even if she unshackles herself from the stereotyped conditioning of the society and does not rely on the male presence to validate her thoughts, emotions and deeds at every step, she can have a balanced and purposeful life. Now when she has started thinking and feeling differently, she stands alienated from man. And this alienation has generated in her a sense of loneliness and emptiness, which she has to fight with all her might. A woman can play different roles, be it a wife, a mother, a friend, a sister, a companion and still she can be herself- be self-sufficient in the true sense of the word and does not require the shadow of male presence behind her, have that power and energy which erases her conditioning and stereotypes of the society and frees her from the oppression of centuries.

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