Introduction
CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Looking at the growth of the Indian English novel, one discerns three important stages of its development. The first stage of the development of the Indian English novel can be seen when the big trio-Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao appeared on the scene and made the real beginning. The mid 1950s and 1960s mark the second important stage when writers like Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal came out with their works that changed the face of the Indian novel. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Bhabani Battacharya focused on the socio-economic- cultural world of the characters. But with writers like Arun Joshi and Anita Desai, the internal world of their characters became equally, if not more, important. The third important stage came at the beginning of 1980s.

The appearance of women novelists has added a new dimension to the Indian English novel. They with their feminine sensibility have opened up a new vista of human nature and man-woman relationship. Now they have started questioning the age-old patriarchal domination. They are no longer puppets in the hands of men. They have proved their worth in the field of
literature quantitatively and qualitatively. Today the works of Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Shobhaa Dé, Gita Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Bharati Mukherjee, Mahasweta Devi and others have left an indelible mark on the readers of Indian fiction in English.

The term ‘New Woman’ has come to signify the awakening of woman into a new realization of her place and position in family and society, conscious of her individuality. She is totally dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural, natural or sexual roles assigned to her right from the unconscious dawn of the patriarchal India. Writers like Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal have documented this female resistance against a patriarchally maintained Indian culture.

Women, who very rarely lead an independent life, exist in a bipolar world. They are subordinated to the masculine world of their husbands and committed to the assertion of their womanhood. In Indian fiction in English, women play dual roles-traditional and unconventional. The unorthodox women suffer for flouting accepted social norms and for their rebellious nature. The traditional or conventional women suffer too, but their suffering is sanctified by the norms of a patriarchal, male-oriented culture. They are
no longer totally dependent on men. They have depicted a society in which women are abused and ill-treated.

After the Second World War, the history of Indian women novelists got a new track, a new vision. Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala are unquestionably the most outstanding personalities in the field of social and artistic novels. Nayantara Sahgal truthfully mirrors the contemporary Indian political theme without professing any specific political ideology or favouring any political creed or movement.

Kamala Markandaya’s first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955) made her a great writer of fiction in both theme and technique. The novel deals with a realistic picture of the Indian villagers, their customs and cultures, rites and traditions. This novel reminds the readers of Thomas Hardy’s famous novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1986). *Some Inner Fury* (1955) made Kamala Markandaya popular all over India and abroad. It deals with the protagonist Mira’s recollection of the past, her emotions, passions and ecstasies. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes, “*Some Inner Fury* is a tragedy engineered by politics, even as *Nectar in a Sieve* is a tragedy engineered by economics; and in both novels the chief characters transcend the bludgeoning of economic or political mischance and assert the unconquerable spirit of

Like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala has left an indelible imprint in the history of women novelists in English. Many of her writings deal with the different shades of Indianness. Though she was born in Germany, she married an Indian and lived in India for more than twenty-four years. A study of her novels reveals much longer and greater involvement with Indian society, which makes her a truly Indian writer. She has focused most of her attention on the upper class North India. Her novels are generally saturated with the drab realities of day to day life so much so that they appear to be repetitive. They strike two things-urban middle class Indian life tinged with domestic problems of an average joint Hindu family and the conflict between the East and West attitudes. For instance, *Esmond in India* (1957) and *A Backward Place* (1965) strike the note of east-west encounter. *To Whom She Will* (1955) her first novel presents a realistic picture of Indian society known for its unity in diversity. It also deals with the fatal consequences leading to the partition which uprooted millions of people.
Women novelists like Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai have contributed in large measure to the growth of the Indian English novel in the latter half of the 20th century. Though Nayantara Sahgal's fiction reveals political overtones, it focuses attention on Indian woman's search for freedom and self-realisation. She has steadily grown over the years with her maiden publication, *A Time to be Happy* since 1958. Her other novels include *This Time of Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977), *Rich Like us* (1985) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988). This last novel brings about a union between religions, different social backgrounds and political beliefs.

The treatment of women characters is unique in the novels of Anita Desai, a significant and prolific writer, who has given a new direction to the Indian English novel. She dives deep into the inner working of the protagonists, into the hidden and secret depths of human psyche. Her inner voyage of the characters in the novels is largely influenced by what Virginia Woolf (1953:177) maintains:

> Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.
In order to capture the prismatic quality of life in her fiction, Anita Desai employs the stream of conscious technique and interior monologue which become coincident with consciousness. She rightly observes:

(1978:01)

Literature should deal with more enduring matters, less temporary and less temporal than politics. It should deal with life and with death. It should be too ironical and also too mystical to accept the world at face value and regard it as the whole or the only truth.

A thorough study of her novels — *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *Voices in the City* (1965), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1985), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1977) and *Fasting Feasting* (1999) brings out the fact that she resembles writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Henry James in her psychological portrayal of the hidden depth of her protagonist who is haunted by numerous nostalgic events of the past.

Many Indian writers have now presented a picture of women, which has totally changed from the image of the past. Change in the economic
condition has brought about a remarkable change in attitude towards gender. As a result, the Indian woman has substantially consolidated her position as she has shed her servile attitude to her husband. Writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Das, Manju Kapur and Shobhaa Dé have taken up the cause of women in their writings. A study of the recent Indian-English fiction reveals that the female protagonists are quite conscious of their identity and are no longer meek and submissive.

Indian English novel has had a very remarkable growth in the last twenty five years, beginning with the year 1980. One finds a galaxy of new writers with tremendous talent for fiction writing in a new way, by encountering everyday reality. The remarkable feature of this astonishing variety of fiction writing is the contribution of women writers towards the liberation of women from the domination of men. One such excellent woman writer is undoubtedly Shashi Deshpande whose novels deal with women who belong to Indian middle class. They are brought up in a traditional environment and struggle to liberate themselves in order to seek their self-identity and independence.

One can today visualize a cultural climate, which is deeply affected by contemporary feminism. Women writers of the last two decades have,
through their writings, launched a movement in search of their freedom. Broadly speaking, feminism is a dominant issue in the contemporary women’s thought. Ian Watt pays a rich tribute to the sharpness of observation and keen perceptibility of women when he writes, “The feminine sensibility was in some ways better equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationships and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel”. (1957:57)

As an Indian English novelist Shashi Deshpande stands apart, for she writes about certain specific concerns after her own manner. Starting her writing career in the nineteen seventies, she has so far published twenty two books which include nine novels, eight volumes of short stories, four books for children, and one collection of essays. In recognition of her major contribution to Indian English fiction, she was deservedly honoured with the Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Letters) award in the year 1990. Notably however, notwithstanding the huge popularity of Midnight's Children (1981) and the post-Rushdie boom and variety of this genre, she never tried to join the bandwagon. If anything, she nurtured and further evolved her distinct identity and location and continued to write her kind of fiction with rare insights and finesse. It is this courage of conviction and this bonding of the author’s relation with her work - neither fashionable
packaging nor commercial hype — that makes for the ‘writing difference’ in Deshpande’s fiction. She has kept on writing with a faith in herself seasoned with the “desire to write”: and she affirmed as much when she wrote, “And so I went my way, learning the craft as I went along. Wanting, above all, to write well, to write the way I want and then, to be published and read. All else is a surfeit”. (2003 : 12)  

Shashi Deshpande deals with the Indian middleclass woman's turmoil, compulsions and frustrations in a changing world. She exhibits her instinctive ability to articulate the feelings of the contemporary, urban, educated upper middle-class woman who is caught in the transitional period between tradition and modernity.

Shashi Deshpande's focus in her fiction is essentially on the Indian woman and her role in the modern society. The Indian woman in the past was denied opportunities available to women in other countries. Early marriage and purdah system confined her to her home. Her identity was embedded in the matrix of her family. But the advent of English education and the reforms advocated by social activists brought a gradual change in the attitude of the public.
The new woman is constantly trying to live as an independent individual. Shashi Deshpande tries to project women who endeavour to give equal importance to their professional as well as personal lives. Her protagonists-Indu (Roots and Shadows), Saru (The Dark Holds No Terrors), Jaya (That Long Silence) and Urmila (The Binding Vine) - are all career women who belong to the middle-class working group. Her career women attempt to redefine human relationship by taking newly acquired professional status into consideration.

In her novels, Shashi Deshpande has depicted different aspects of the middle class woman's life. Without fighting against the patriarchal society and male domination, she has taken a balanced view of life from a woman's point of view.

Shashi Deshpande is aware of the predicament of a woman in a male dominated society, particularly when the woman is totally dependent on her husband. Indu of Roots and Shadows and Jaya of That Long Silence are caught between self-expression and social stigmas. However, they finally succeed not only in overcoming social stigmas but also in asserting their individuality and in realizing their potential in the professional area. Sarita in The Dark Holds No Terrors depicts the journey of the modern woman
towards financial independence, emotional balance and social recognition. These modern women realize their potential and self-hood through their professions. They prove to the world that economically independent women can definitely bring changes in the society and that women, as individuals, will gain control over their relationships and profession.

Shashi Deshpande not only strongly articulates a thematic and technical maturity, but also communicates an intensely comprehended feminine sensibility. She has added a new significant depth and dimension to Indian writing in fiction by offering varied interpretation of Indian values as well as highlighting Indian cultural heritage.

Shashi Deshpande has emerged as one of the leading women novelists on the Indian literary horizon. Being a writer of the 1970s and the 1980s, she reflects a realistic picture of contemporary middle-class woman. Her work has not yet received due attention it deserves from the scholars and the readers. Hence, this study attempts to trace the tensions in which the Indian woman, particularly the middle-class woman is caught. It deals with the image of modern woman as projected in the novels of Shashi Deshpande.

The reasons for Shashi Deshpande preferring the middle-class woman may be her own middle-class background, her pre-occupation with the social
forms at work in society, the clash between idealism and pragmatism and
lastly the middle-class woman becoming a representative of a large part of
contemporary Indian society. Her portrayal of the modern woman is unique
since she represents neither the old and orthodox image nor a modern
westernized one. She portrays the ordinary woman of the middle-class
society, who tries hard to rise above tradition but finds herself forced to
work within its confines.

Shashi Deshpande presents a suitable analysis of conflicting phases
and causative factors and suggests a way out of conflicts for her female
protagonists, by articulating the feelings of the educated middle-class
woman who is torn between tradition and modernity.

Shashi Deshpande uses various narrative methods like the use of
interior monologue in order to convey the state of a woman's mind and her
true feelings. She has depicted different aspects of middle-class woman's
life. The narration shifts from present to the past covering the whole life
span of the protagonists. All the time, they are brooding over fate and
question themselves as to who they really are. The novels of Shashi
Deshpande end with an optimistic note and with the hope of some positive
action in the future for women.
As one who is a woman and who writes in English in India, Deshpande’s authorial self is often plagued by a deep sense of her isolation, doubly so because what she writes is out of step with the mainstream writing. She therefore finds no models, in texts or authors in the corpus of Indian English fiction, to follow and wonders where does she belong. To vindicate and authenticate her selfhood and self-expression, she has insisted over a long period of time on being called simply ‘a writer’ and not ‘a woman writer’ much less ‘a feminist writer’. She maintains that she writes about “person to person and person to society relationships,” that she should not be evaluated by her gender, and that her authorial position stays beyond male/female dichotomy. In an interview with Gita Viswanath (3rd June 2003) she says,

And as far as readers are concerned, I would like them to read me as a novelist, not as a feminist novelist or woman writer or whatever. That’s one part. The second part is that when I write, I don’t write as a feminist. I keep saying this over and over again and somehow I seem to need to say it again and again. I do not write as a feminist novelist. But my ideology is going to permeate my writing; and my feelings, thoughts and ideas about
women are very important parts of my ideology. But I have other agendas also. By agendas I don’t mean I set out to write with a specific agenda. There are other things that do matter to me and that do come into my writing. I mean human relationships, not just women but what human beings in general are like, what the loneliness of a human being is like — these are equally important parts of my writing and when I am called a feminist writer, these are missed out and this is what I really object to.

The theme of woman’s quest for life has continued in all the works of Shasi Deshpande: Roots and Shadows, The Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence, The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time and Intrusion and Other Stories. These novels deal with Indian woman in disharmony with her sexual, cultural and social roles. She tries to assert herself not only as a woman, wife or mother, but also as an individual. She chooses and rejects both ways – staunch rebellion and timid acceptance. In the words of Shashi Deshpande, her heroines follow the middle path.

Shashi Deshpande’s themes, however, are universally applicable. Her characters try to make sense of their lives, to find a pattern in the past and a
direction for the future. Although her characters are women and although she is always aware of the particularities of women’s experience, her work is not just confined to themes of the relationship between the sexes. She herself says, “I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women or men” (1987:8-14).

While describing the experience of the modern, educated, middle-class Indian woman, Shashi Deshpande’s novels show both similarities and dissimilarities when they are analysed and contrasted with Western feminist works. Many of the overt themes of her novels are similar to those of the recent European and American women’s fiction. The child realizes that boys are preferred at home. The adolescent feels disgust in her developing female body. Women are taught to think of the female body as unclean, from the time of the first menstruation. For example, Saru in spite of her medical training describes herself as a “dark, damp, smelly hole” (TDH, 10, 24). She can remember “walking as stiff as possible, holding my pelvis rigid, willing it not to move, so that I would be as unlike her (her mother) as possible” (TDH, 55).

There are, however, significant differences from Western novels. Saru is aware of the strength of a woman in a traditional marriage. The passage
given below from the novel The Dark Holds No Terrors describes the room of Saru’s mother and constitutes an image of the power of traditional marriage.

She peeped into the room which had been her parents’. It had been ‘their’ room, but it had always seemed only his, so successfully had she managed to efface her personality from the room. And how powerful, how strong, she now thought, her mother had been to achieve that. How certain of herself she must have been (TDH, 15).

This is rather an inner certainty gained from willingly accepted role in society or perhaps from believing in a religiously determined fate. To a Western reader this may be somewhat surprising and unacceptable. Another clear difference is that Jaya, as a middleclass Indian woman, has a different relationship to poorer women than would her Western counterpart. She becomes aware of how she exploits the poor:

All those happy women with husbands in good jobs, men who didn’t drink and beat their wives …. They were of no use to me. It was Jeeja and her like I needed… it was these women who saved me from the hell of drudgery (TLS, 52)
These two novels of Shashi Deshpande have placed her among contemporary Indian novelists in English. The female protagonists of these novels, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence* seek an inner peace and a more mature relationship with their friends and relatives and even upon images derived from women’s magazine fiction. If her characters are not the heroines upon whom a male narrator projects his desires or his fears, neither are they the female heroines of some contemporary Western feminist fiction.

One finds responsibility as a particularly charged issue in the world of Shashi Deshpande’s passive narrators. Their ambivalent attitude towards responsibility is applicable to women everywhere. Her female characters have both a tendency to blame others and need to feel guilty for actions which are beyond their control. They often worry about matters of responsibility for the life or death of some one. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* can hardly forget that as a child she was to blame for her younger brother’s death. In remembering and reliving this incident, she casts herself as a seductress leading him to his death in a swamp. Similarly Jaya in *That Long Silence* blames herself for leaving the body of her friend, Kamat, without reporting his death, because of fear of what neighbours might say.
Shashi Deshpande is a feminist par excellence. Her uniqueness is that her protagonists are not rebels but they learn in the course of their struggle with the harsh realities of life to generate in themselves the power to cope with the male orientation. The earlier protagonists like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu in *Roots and Shadows* and Jaya in *That Long Silence* think primarily about themselves and seek their own redemption. But the protagonist Urmila in *The Binding Vine* (1992) is preoccupied with the suffering of her long-dead mother-in-law subjected to rape in marriage and the unmarried girl Kalpana who is also the victim of rape. This recent novel deals with the multi-facetedness of its protagonist Urmila.

Shashi Deshpande is the only contemporary writer who has given graphic details about the girl child and her psychology. Most of her women characters try to transcend their identity crisis by analyzing their childhood and the process of their upbringing. *Roots and Shadows* projects the educated women who are unable to enfranchise the traditional background in which they are reared. Since her childhood, the psyche of a girl child is conditioned in a particular fashion to inculcate in her all types of feminine qualities. Simon de Beauvoir says:
One is not born but rather becomes, a woman; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature described as feminine (1952: 126).

Shashi Deshpande appears to suggest through *Roots and Shadows* (1983) that a change in the upbringing of girl-child is required. The novel ends with a positive note with the hope of a new dawn. The novel gives minute details of the development of girl-child. It discusses three main female characters and their girlhood: Mini, Akka and Indu.

Shashi Deshpande deals with the inner world of the Indian women in her novels. She portrays her heroines in a realistic manner. Basically she writes about the situation of women and their failures in the fast changing socio-economic milieu of India. Her depiction of women’s world is authentic, realistic and credible. Woman is the centre of her fictional world. Her desires, efforts and failures in the traditional Indian society are the major points in her novels.

It is in her analysis of the varied emotions, rationalizations and miscomprehensions that make up the relationship between a married couple that Deshpande’s work is particularly effective. While both Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) and Jaya in *That Long Silence* (1988)
initially have schoolgirl romantic ideas of love, they quickly move beyond sentimentality in their attitudes towards their husbands. They see their marriages as largely a kind of business arrangement, in which it is the woman’s job to support the man in his dealings with the hostile world. This is true of Jaya who feels that she should bear some of the responsibility for her husband Mohan’s shady business practices, since she shared in his desire for greater wealth.

Another area of concern for Deshpande’s narrators is their relationship to motherhood. Being a mother is often described very differently from having a mother. Shashi Deshpande romanticizes neither having a mother nor being one:

Do you know, Manu, how easy to cut the umbilical cord and separate the baby from the mother? (TDH, 34)

Can one ever possess another human being? The act of birth can be cruelly deceiving, making claim on the human you bring into the world (TDH, 149)

The desire for isolation is a particularly charged theme in Shashi Deshpande’s writing. Her narrators react by taking a cold, rational view of families. In her novel Roots and Shadows (1983), Indu’s mother, the main
character, dies giving birth to her daughter. Indu idealises her father but rejects the other women in the family. Saru’s mother in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, however, dies just before Saru’s narrative begins. Saru says of her mother. “It is because she cursed me that I am like this” (*TDH*, 179). In *That Long Silence*, the mother is a less important theme. The reader is aware, however that in all the novels of Shashi Deshpande there is no mother who could serve as a model for the daughter.

Shashi Deshpande’s female characters seem both passive and willing to pay attention to the advice of men. They tend to be critical of members of their own sex, and share the biases of their society. For instance, Jaya stops being a friend of Leena when she is told that Leena is a bad girl. However, Shashi Deshpande does not want to make her heroines dance to the tune of male authority. Both Indu and Jaya strive for some kind of autonomy and realize their immense potentialities for action and self actualization. Their return home does not mean defeatism, but the triumph of the independence of women. Their perception is best expressed in the words of Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own*. “There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind” (1976:76).
More than any other woman novelist of her times, Shashi Deshpande tries to project women who endeavour to give equal importance to their professional as well as personal lives. When a woman commits herself to a career, it reflects her desire to fulfil her own potential. It amounts to the rejection of an identity based mainly on a relationship such as mother, wife or daughter.

In the past, early marriage and social customs confined the Indian women to her home. Her identity was deeply embedded in the entire family and her roles as wife and mother were given top prominence.

Women’s education and the constitutional provision of equal rights and privileges on par with men have helped in a big way for the professional development of women. The new women are coming forward to bear the burden of work with their fellow-men in every walk of life. They are trying to balance family and career and see to it that their profession does not affect their married life.

Shashi Deshpande is aware of the predicament of a woman in a male-dominated society, particularly when the woman is not economically independent. However, time has changed for the better for women. Education and economic conditions have largely contributed to this change.
Women have changed by understanding the need to work. At the same time the working woman has to face the problems of marital adjustment and experiences a conflict of values.

In olden days, the voice of women used to go unheard and unsung in the patriarchal world. Though the world today is still patriarchal and male-oriented, women have gained certain amount of freedom, thanks to social and legal facilities. Shashi Deshpande deserves special praise for analyzing the image of women in the modern world. The predominating issues and themes in her novels emerge from the situations that focus on women “who are caught in the crisis of a transitional society where the shift is taking place from conventional to unconventional” (Sarabjit Sandhu, 1991 : 13).

Family, marriage and other social norms bind a woman completely. Even though there are political laws for protecting women, they just remain on paper only. The ideal man – woman relationship in the Indian context is so prominent that even the most forward male is incapable of looking at woman in terms of equality. This is what Shashi Deshpande has honestly attempted to show in her fiction.

Shashi Deshpande’s plots begin with an unconventional marriage and later on deal with the problems of adjustment and conflicts in the minds of
the female protagonists who ultimately submit to the traditional roles. Shantha Krishnawamy aptly observes:

Despite the changes in the norms, the variations in norms, the variations in taste, in standards of judgement, the impact of western culture and alien moves, economic and educational progress, she (woman) is essentially Indian in sensibility and likely to remain so. (1984 : 84).

Shashi Deshpande is not a militant feminist who sees the male as the cause of all troubles. But she writes for women, presents their problems and lets the world know the problems faced by women today. The projection of the women world in her novels is authentic, credible and realistic. She has not attempted to present her women characters stronger than they are in real life. But she has done her best to expose their passivity, anxiety and confusion.

The contemporary Indian fiction writing through Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Amitabh Ghosh, Nayantara Sahgal and Arundhati Roy has obtained the international status. Women writers like Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal have contributed enough and energized fiction. Shashi Deshpande, a novelist of distinction and repute is now
recognized as a crusader for the causes of women. In her novels, one can locate the dehumanizing facets of the patriarchal framework of the society that appallingly upset the applecart of wife-husband relationship.

Throughout, Shashi Deshpande pens the perturbing truth of modern Indian women and their embarrassing relationship with their husbands. Her characters after a great deal of bitter and biting experiences overcome the sense of down and defeatism. Moreover, they manifest their firmness to face their challenges. They play the successful role of mother, wife and beloved by keeping their entity dignified. The novelist analyses the fragmented and fractured syndromes of her heroines while they assert individual identity. She is a writer to be considered as a crusader who fights for the cause of women.

Shashi Deshpande portrays her heroines in a realistic manner. She basically writes about the situation in the fast changing socio-economic milieu of India. In addition to this, she discusses the conflict between tradition and modernity in relation to women in the middle class society. She makes it clear that hers is not the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees man as the main and major cause of all troubles.
In the interview given to Gita Viswanatha (2003), Deshpande reiterates the fact that she has no models before her and she does not desire to emulate any one. She stresses that she does not valorize ‘freedom’ in absolute terms, but considers it valuable in terms of choices one makes in life. All her works are about choices not only of her characters in their lives but also the choices an author makes regarding writing, themes, social issues and ideology. Human relationship has always been central to her work and she considers its complexity not as ‘given’ but as a product of the social reality we live in. Reality therefore is not a static figuration but a version of one’s own individualized perception. As a critical humanist, the reality that Deshpande portrays is the ‘lived’ lives of human beings in their triumphs and failures.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) is a story of marriage in troubled waters. The novel opens with Saru, a doctor by profession who returns to her father’s house after fifteen years because she is unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. The rest of the novel discusses Saru’s remembrance of her past and confessions to her father of her married life. The narrative moves on between the present and the past. With her varied experience, Saru has the courage to face reality and the dark no longer holds any terrors.
The narrator of *That Long Silence* (1988) is Jaya, who recalls her past in an attempt to find herself at a time when her husband, Mohan is under investigation for shady business activities. Like Deshpande’s other works, these two novels are primarily concerned with the plight of the modern Indian woman who is trying to understand herself. She writes about:

Well-educated, hard-working people in secure jobs, cushioned by insurance and provident funds, with two healthy, well-fed children going to good schools (1988:5)

*The Binding Vine* (1994) occupies a special place in the oeuvre of Shashi Deshpande in the sense that it presents predominantly the women’s world. It is not that men are entirely absent, but they make their presence felt merely by the power they exercise over the women, especially over their wives and daughters. It is a world where women outshine men in terms of their clear perception of things around them, their courage to cope with their surrounding and come to terms with their losses, their ability to forge an alliance among themselves and learn to live. They are unique individuals in their respective domains, may it be an affluent and well-to-do household or a broken family front, voicing forth their displeasure and airing their views, or
fighting against injustices inflicted upon them by an oppressive patriarchal system.

From a simplistic feminist perceptive Deshpande’s chief narrative concerns in *A Matter of Time* (1999) are with articulating the trials and tribulations of the female characters spanning three generations: Kalyani, Sumi and Aru. Unresolved issues regarding the self constitute the novel’s overriding philosophical engagement. The plot does not revolve simply around what happens when a man deserts his family (even though in this case all ‘deserted’ members are females). *A Matter of Time* weaves an intricate pattern of relationships with an extended family spanning across generations. Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru belong to four generations of the same family, each representing a specific mode of experience. Manorama is the typical product of patriarchal value system, for she resented the birth of Kalyani, her daughter, as she wanted a son. She forces a marriage between two unwilling partners, her daughter Kalyani and her younger brother Shripati and she even holds Kalyani responsible for all her sorrows and calls her an enemy. But it is Kalyani who represents the survival power of women which tides her across her mother’s ill-treatment and her husband’s rejection.
Small Remedies (2000) explores the relation between memory and mimesis. The narrator tries to come to terms with a maze of intertwined memories. In fact, she is made to recollect events and experiences associated not only with her own life but also of others. The reader is told in a prefatorial interregnum entitled “Prologue”: “This is Som’s story. Or rather, Joe’s story as related to us by Som. To me the two men, narrator and object, are equally part of the story; to remember is to think of both of them” (SR, 1). Joe is both a father and a figure, a dead presence that must be laid to rest. But he wasn’t, isn’t alone. His lineage includes, on the one hand, pupils who cannot help imagining themselves as his children, and children who cannot stop seeing themselves as his pupils.

Shashi Deshpande’s latest novel Moving On has a complex narrative structure that embodies several strands, using memory, experience and written texts, the diaries of a deceased in a palimpsest self-history that is layered and entangled in a filial drama. Of course, any reading is an act of violation. Manjari, the central character and the reader of her father’s dairies, feels as if there is a message for her: “… like Baba saying, ‘This is for you’. The way he had left them, displaying them to me almost, I knew that reading them would not be an intrusion” (MO, 18). The diaries as a supplement and their contents unfolding surprises concerning the image of
her father Badri Narayan, affect memory, cease to remain external and magnetize the internal. As Deshpande herself maintains: “Memories and pictures of the past, dreams, hopes and plans for the future – these are as real to us as the present”. (The Hindu, 2004)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A brief review of the literature relevant to the study is given here. There are only limited studies which are directly relevant to the study concerned. The researcher has made an attempt to present a brief review of the literature available.

S.P.Swain, in his critical study, “Articulation of the Feminine Voice: Jaya in Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence”, remarks that the reminiscences of Jaya evoke a deeper and more tragic sense of vanished time, fleeting moments, personal losses recounted in a quiet and calm voice characterized by sobriety. It follows the natural movements of a mind experiencing moments and expressions that become meaningful spots of time. Jaya’s unruffled stream of consciousness symbolizes the flow of mind that registers experience in a prose of recollection and nostalgia. Shashi Deshpande has made the story self-propelled without the novelist acting as a meddler and as an omniscient narrator.
Santhosh Gupta in “The Binding Vine of Relationships in Shashi Deshpande’s Novels” says that Shashi Deshpande’s novels present a social world of many complex relationships. Like the densely carved architecture of Indian temples there are, in Deshpande’s works, many men and women living together, journeying across life in their different age groups, classes and gendered roles. Related through marriage and other forms of kinship these persons are bound by a deep awareness of the presence and pressure of their social world. These crowded novels are placed in a cultural scene where many important changes of attitudes, norms and goals give these people a curious feeling of groping in a new world. The young and the old are equally caught in a world of transition, faced with constant search for new moorings and guidelines. Doubt, anxiety and often a feeling of void of values push characters in Deshpande’s novels in intense self-examination. The women are particularly caught in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationship within their given social world.

S. Indira in her article, “A Bond or a Burden?: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine”, suggests that Shashi Deshpande strikes a note of realism and optimism in her portrayal of the Indian middle class
educated women. Her gift to contemporary women has been to write novels which show women engaged in the complex and difficult social and psychological problem of defining an authentic self. But unlike the women protagonists of Anita Desai’s novels who in their quest for self-hood lose their ability to live in the community and maintain human relationship, limiting themselves to individual freedom which damages their ultimate understanding of life, Shashi Deshpande’s women characters seek their self-hood within the orbit of family and relationships. Her novels explore important problems of our time without offering a facile recipe for their solution. She further remarks that Deshpande’s latest novel *The Binding Vine* touches a chord in every woman as she responds to it with a recognition of her own doubts, complexes, fears, desires and suffering being mirrored in the narration of Urmila, the protagonist.

Kailash C. Baral in his essay “The Body in Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors*” and Arindam Chatterji’s essay “Psychoanalytic Regression and the Finding of the True Self in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*” consider two different but interrelated aspects of the same theme. Considering the ‘body’, as a central concern for feminism as well as for Deshpande in that ‘the ultimate human reality… (is) the human body’, Baral discusses the theme of ‘body’ and its two important aspects - love and pain -
in the context of the text. His study of the text demonstrates how the body becomes the very medium through which femininity is spatialized and sexualized. On the other hand, Arindam Chatterji takes a Winnicottian view of the protagonist’s search for her True Self that has been shadowed by her False Self. He argues following Winnicott that the True Self is the theoretical position from which springs the spontaneous gesture and the personal idea of one’s own authentic self.

In exploring the narrative pattern in Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*, Guru Charan Behera uses the metaphor of “patchwork quilt,” to describe the way women’s narratives are woven by successive generations of women where each succeeding generation keeps on adding to the patchwork, a collage of skills, experiences and emotions. Behera maintains that the narrative of *That Long Silence* is like a “multicoloured patchwork quilt” that configures multiple stories, situations, shades of experiences and feelings, reminiscences, fantasies, reflections on life and writing employing the artifice of a self-conscious narrative. The novel is symbolic of women’s struggle in general through the story of a single woman in a patriarchal society.
A.G. Khan reads Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* as a projection of women's solidarity, against a male dominated society, contesting some of the positions taken by western feminists and revealing how women too are the causes of their own subjugation. The novel "mirrors authentic female experience," as Deshpande examines lives of half a dozen women to drive home the point what makes women to become hysterics, escapists, sacrificial goats and what compels them to be silent, drives them to commit suicide or to death. The novel, according to Khan, is built around multiple misunderstandings among women characters, particularly between mothers and daughters, causing misery and unhappiness to several intimately related other women in their families. By the time the misunderstandings are clarified, it is too late. Eventually, either they overcome the misunderstandings or move beyond it and establish a kind of solidarity among themselves.

Contrary to the view held by Khan, Vijaya Guttal posits in her reading of Deshpande’s *The Binding Vine* and *A Matter of Time* that the community of women with a “common heritage of oppression” try to understand themselves and work towards a positive social change. Deshpande’s novels, featuring female protagonists, reconstruct aspects of women’s experience and attempt to give voice to ‘muted’ ideologies, registering resistance.
Instead of raking postcolonial issues such as nationalism, imperialism, hybridist, etc. Deshpande explores the nature of the “female world and outlook” and reconstructs “the lost or suppressed records of female experience.” She identifies, Guttal maintains, femaleness as a thematic base and traces the subtle shifts of focus in feminine goals and aspirations in giving voice to the silenced as part of the decolonizing feminist project.

Liza Das and Merry Baruah attempt a study of Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time* from a cognitive perspective. They sketch out “some of the implications of recent work in cognitive science for narrative theory” and explore “current modes of narrative-theoretical inequity based on research in the cognitive sciences” in analyzing the narrative mode and structural organization of *A Matter of Time*. Instead of reading *A Matter of Time* as a cumulative sequence of the ‘functions’ of its dramatic personae - Sumi, Gopal, Aru, Kalyani and others - they target a deeper reading of the work that incorporates not just character- functions but also source inputs, transformed schematics, and authorial control.

Usha Bande in her reading of *A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies* reinvents the emerging Indian women with a shift in the perceptions of relationships, aspirations and motherhood. In her view, Shashi Deshpande
evolves a balance between traditional demands and modern compulsions and renegotiates the power relations in an attempt to resolve any crisis. Not that this method always works but at least the novelist probes the individual consciousness of her characters and deconstructs the hegemonic notions about identity and selfhood. In letting her women experience the silence within, get a glimpse of their inner being and empower themselves to confront any challenge, Deshpande's novels become, according to Bande, novels of "becoming." By balancing her rhetoric and mimetic aims Deshpande gives direction and effect to her works in achieving a formal wholeness.

Bijay Danta finds that memory is a recurring theme in Deshpande's fiction. In his reading of Deshpande's *Small Remedies*, he underlines that characters imprisoned in their memories dominate the narrative space. They keep revisiting their past in a manner that threatens their present and future. Writing as re-telling mediates the past and the present in that forgetting and remembering are important vectors that constitute a duality of consciousness for the characters. *Small Remedies* is an allegory of this duality, maintains Danta. Further *Small Remedies* explores this relation in mediating between memory and mimesis in which the narrator tries to come to terms with a maze of intertwined memories. The narrative is woven of several interrelated
stories mapping a larger network of relations, offering genealogies of characters. The result is a nestling of narratives-in-narratives repeating lives-within-lives. To this extent, the narrative in *Small Remedies* attempts to liberate mimesis from memory and memory from its own shadows.

Chanchala K. Naik in her reading of Deshpande’s latest novel *Moving On* maintains that the narrative holds the past and the present together in a dialectical mode in a process of reiteration or repetition. There is a kind of duality, argues Naik, that presides over the narrative of *Moving On*, as Deshpande explores the principal character’s “double consciousness,” for she tells her own story while telling the story of her parents. These two stories move parallel and intersect each other taking the form of a man’s and a woman’s story. Considering the narrator as an individual, a daughter and a woman, Naik probes in her essay questions such as what does the narrative voice speak of herself and of others? What authority does her voice command? Naik attempts to find answers to these questions in centralizing the issue of women’s autonomy from a feminist perspective.

This dissertation is on “The Image of Modern Indian Women as Projected in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande”. It is in Five Chapters.
The First chapter entitled "Introduction" discusses in detail the development of Indian fiction in English from the times of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, the three great pillars of Indian fiction. The second part of the chapter takes up the latest developments in Indian Writing in English, particularly after Independence. It throws light on the contribution of Shashi Deshpande to Indian Writing in English. It also attempts a review of literature.

The Second chapter entitled "Modern Women and Traditional Society" deals with the women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande who are caught between tradition and modernity. For example, Jaya in the novel That Long Silence is tolerant and submissive. She goes through great emotional turmoil and suffering due to the conflict between traditional life and modern life. Sarita in the novel The Dark Holds No Terrors depicts the journey of modern women towards independence, emotional balance and social recognition. She is in sharp contrast to Jaya. She is confident, competent and knows how to manage her problems relating to her marriage and family. She refuses to yield to the pressure of male dominated culture and finds her own way after a long struggle.
Chapter Three entitled ‘Balancing Family and Career’ analyses how a woman's commitment to career reflects her desire to fulfil her own potential. Today women are coming forward to bear the burden of work along with their fellow-men in every walk of life. They are trying to balance family and career at the same time ensuring that their profession does not affect their married life. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists- Indu (Roots and Shadows), Saru (The Dark Holds No Terrors), Jaya (That Long Silence) and Urmila (The Binding Vine) are all career women.

Chapter Four entitled "The Problem of Marriage and Affirmation of Self" highlights the problem of marriage for middle-class women. Getting the daughters married is not an easy thing for parents. Shashi Deshpande, through the character Mini in the novel Roots and Shadows, gives the authentic facts about marriage experienced by a middle-class family. Indu, another woman protagonist, has nothing but contempt for traditional marriage which makes a woman lose all her individuality and gradually become nothing. Marriage makes a woman sacrifice her own freedom and happiness for the sake of her husband and children. It leads a woman to subjugation and slavery. But Indu in the novel Roots and Shadows is uncompromising and lives to see life with the possibilities of growth. She discovers the meaning of life in her journey to individuality.
The concluding chapter recapitulates the views discussed in the previous chapters. It has been proved beyond doubt that Shashi Deshpande's novels have thrown light on the problems of women in life and how her protagonists, unlike the heroines of Anita Desai, brave their stormy lives and prove that they can stand on their feet independently. Her fictional creations rise above the ordinary ideological subscription and become serious reflections on the human condition with particular focus on the predicament of the female in the world. Though her novels reflect the unhappy realities of Indian women's depressing and gloomy world, the final impression of her world provides a glimpse of hope for women for arriving at a compromise and sense of balance in life.