CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Indian woman is the focus of this study. How and to what extent she has been given expression by Shashi Deshpande is to be seen through the eyes of Feminism.

Shashi Deshpande is an Indian novelist writing in English. Her focus in the novels written so far is on woman belonging to middle-class and her urges, frustrations and compromises, as certain critics choose to describe. They ascribe a conduct as compromise in the light of expectations from a role-model on behalf of ‘feminism’, taking it as a revolt against anything dear to the moves in the family. There is no doubt that this is a subtle but crafty way to be partisan, yet seemingly objective in a pedantic style. Most of the literateurs in India, who are charmed with the so-called ‘liberating’ effect of industrialisation and its corresponding value-system, are doing it customarily as they stand conditioned by education and practice for long. Then, one associated problem is to know the role played by education today, in the interest of an objective analysis of the issue at hand.

This study is to be accomplished through a given outlook i.e. feminism which is a definite philosophical category developed to guide a movement by protagonists of ‘women’s liberation movement’, as it took shape in American conditions of post-world war era. Its basic tenets were given shape in the light of existentialism as the highest manifestation of individualism as a product of industrial mode in the West.
Feminism is distinct from feminist concerns in general which is a cause with many people, including males for centuries as a response to patriarchal moss. But feminism, on the other hand, is a very recent growth, comparatively. However, many confusions are generated by now over conceptual frames involved. It seems essential to clearly state what stands for what in this regard. This study has tried to recapitulate the essential points in their historical context so that these concepts do not confuse the issues involved in this connection.

There is a good number of comments and reviews on the works of Shashi Deshpande till date. While there is appreciation of her literary style, critical comments on her contribution to the cause of woman through fiction, are many who hold divergent opinions on her philosophy. Among them none disagrees about her calibre as a novelist of deep sensibilities to the world of woman. There is no doubt that she has a keen eye on Indian middle-class woman-- her strength, her failings, frustrations and aspirations in the world of haste. She may or may not have provided viable answers to all her problems, yet the woman has been treated with sympathy and care by her in the novels.

One opinion holds that Shashi Deshpande is an exponent of feminism in Indian context, though not a strident or militant one. There is another opinion that the novels of Shashi Deshpande do not carry the message of feminism on essentials and exhibit a trait of compromise. She herself feels shy to admit that feminism is her philosophy. She makes it clear that
“hers is not the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees the male as the cause of all troubles”\(^1\) of women. Nevertheless, her impulse to write about woman is intense and compulsive. She holds that “I write what I write because I have to. Because it is within me. It is one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that I think, is my contribution to Indian writing.”\(^2\) Neither her novels are sterile nor do they fall in the category of ‘art for art’s sake’. These carry a definite message; her viewpoint on behalf of woman. This requires an in-depth study to determine the nature of this message of the writer in a given social context. Hence this study.

Indian woman is the focus of her novels. How and to what extent woman has been given expression by Shashi Deshpande, and since it is to be seen through the eyes of feminism, the study has to be specific to its basic tenets. The writer, however, explains her disposition:

\begin{quote}
I have heard people saying we should have strong woman characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are.\(^3\)
\end{quote}

In this context, it is also to be seen how far woman characters of Shashi Deshpande represent Indian woman. The main themes that have found expression in Shashi Deshpande’s novels are: inner conflict and search for identity, concept of marriage and sex freedom, parent-child relationship and the institution of family as also freedom of choice. In addition, the themes of ‘silence’ and ‘assertion for self’ in the complex relationship
between man and woman hold a great fascination for Shashi Deshpande. There is a great deal of conflict between the so-called modern trends and the customary practices which find expression in her novels. The whole gamut needs a careful scrutiny to evaluate on the anvil of feminism for a better understanding of her contribution in the field of literature.

In this regard, it is imperative to delineate the basics of feminism first. One may begin to say what feminism is not. Anything and everything concerning woman or feminine, is not feminism. Any one who champions the cause of woman against injustice or gender discrimination alone, does not qualify to be an exponent of feminism. Feminism is a definite philosophical category rooted in the existential mode of individualism which took shape in a particular historical context of industrialisation and finance capital seeking to make an individual anonymous and alienated, in order to bring anything and everything in its reach for commodifying. The essential ingredients which feminism propounds are: quest for self, search for and assertion of identity, unhindered freedom of choice with its immediate expression in uninhibited free-sex, abrogation of institutions like family, community and marriage, independent economic entity and fight against gender discrimination.

Woman, suffered agony for long inherent in a situation, after losing the place of prominence in social structure, which emerged with the advent of the concept of property and literature, specially scriptures, played its role to turn it as 'natural' as possible. It was, however, only at a very late stage
of development in property relations when feminism came on the scene. In Europe the cult of romantic love which considers recognition of woman as individual, started the attempt at feminine assertion as amplified in the book *The City of Ladies* (1405) by Christine de Pizan. It offered a defence of woman and demanded her right to intellectual life. The defence of woman by them had not taken the form of a movement, neither had the concept of feminism taken a shape. The renaissance period in Europe, instilled the urge for 'equality' and women, after a long struggle, got the right to vote in the west. Literature of the period has reflected this dichotomy in the society. Time, probably, had not come for crash individualism to assert in favour of dissolving the institutions of marriage and family which feminism of late variety has come to advocate.

It is an admitted fact that there was no inequality between man and woman under matriarchy. The roles of both the genders then, were complimentary to each other inspite of the accepted leading position to woman for her importance in procreation, in addition to the labour of both male and female in procuring essential things for survival. This was a period of shortage in population. The position started changing with the advent of patriarchy, where female was relegated to a secondary position in this effort for survival within two new institutions of family and the state. In the first stage of patriarchy, however, the status of woman remained largely supplementary for her role in matters of production as also in affairs to maintain the family since the society was passing through the stage of
production for consumption and the stage of commodity production had not come yet. Monogamy had come riding on the shoulders of family, with a necessity for male inheritor. Both male and female were tied to the values of family where female in all her roles, was supposed to be secondary and helping to man. The notion still exists. She invariably had to carry the burden of domestic work, and remained deprived of economic and political role in life. Historically, the need to overcome women's oppression and exploitation and the realisation to overcome the problems of a capitalist world order were closely linked and they merged at the same time, though, during the 18th and the 19th century, the question of woman's problem was part of the larger question of liberation of human beings in general against deprivation and injustice.

In the first quarter of the 19th century a small group of men and women in Britain and France began to question the economic basis of the society which denied the possibility of truly human social relations and if these are to be changed, the political and social institutions had to be changed as well. Henri Saint - Simon (1760-1825), Charles Fourier (1772-1837), Robert Owen (1771-1858), among others, were full of ideas about the way different societies could be happy and live in fraternal equality. They visualized a more harmonious and co-operative society as an alternative where greed, exploitation and cut-throat competition will not be the rule. The thought concerning women's plight formed an important, yet integral part of their thinking because they saw the hypocrisy of
bourgeois monogamous marriage as an extension of the ideology of private property and a sense of private possession as a means to accumulate more and more wealth. They saw this as the root cause of women’s subordination and oppression in the society because property inheritors were men as bread winners in society.

Later, a group of social reformers started a movement advocating a better place for women so that humanity can better survive. It was known as ‘Feminist Movement’. And was deeply influenced by the French enlightenment and British liberalism. It gave woman a voice for gender equality. Later, it developed into a more radical and wider movement in scope. “It is a reform movement aiming at social, educational and political equalities of woman with men which arose during the late eighteenth century.” The sole object of the movement now turned into a struggle as to liberate woman from male hegemony and to make her lead a life of her own choice.

The first major work championing woman’s cause, The Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft demanded equal opportunities for women in the field of education economics and politics. Simone-de-Beauvoir, a radical feminist belonging to the first generation of the movement drew heavily on biology, psychoanalysis, political economy, anthropology, philosophy and history detailing issues like girl’s education, female sexuality, marriage, prostitution etc. Harriet Matineau (1802-87), a contemporary of another feminist Elizabeth Burrett, was a serious feminist. Her and
other English feminist's attempts led to the setting up of Queen's college in England. Prior to this, women in England lacked the avenues of higher education. This establishment of women's college helped in shattering the taboos against the higher, formal education of women in England. Education built up confidence in women and soon a large number of women began to join different fields of social services like working for prison reform, fighting alcoholism cruelty to children, campaigning against slavery and also to raise voice for feminist causes such as reforms in marriage and divorce laws in England.

John Staurt Mill, a male supporter of women's cause, shows in his book *The Subjection of Women*, a serious concern over some of the issues earlier raised by Wollstonecraft. In his belief woman's oppression is due to the system and so he condemns it as 'domestic slavery.'

Another English feminist, Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunch* (1970), suggests that woman ought not to enter into socially sanctioned relationship like marriage. "Because, if women are to effect a significant amelioration in their condition, it seems obvious that they must refuse to marry."5 An Australian born, apocalyptic 'feminist' Lynne Segal, in her book *Is The Future Female Troubled: Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (1987), suggests that to save the world from destruction, feminine values should be given equal significance along with masculine values. In America, Betty Friedan wrote a book *The Feminine Mystique* which defined the subject as it now exists and took the American society by
storm. The book challenges the belief that a woman’s place is at her home and that she should find fulfilment in motherhood and domestic life. Defining the feminine mystique she writes in the preface, "There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives and the image that I came to call the feminine mystique."6

In the radical feminist view, the new feminism is not just the revival of a serious political movement for social equality. It is the second wave against the most rigid class/caste system in existence, the class system based on sex - a system consolidated over the thousands of years, lending archetypal male and female roles, an undeserved sexual legitimacy and seeming permanence. The new wave was viewed as a ‘dawn’ by its protagonists. “The western feminist movement is the dawn of a long struggle to break free from the oppressive power structure set up by nature and reinforced by men.”7 They declare: “woman is made, not born”8 Cultural conditioning is the culprit, not any inherent biological difference.

Cliches apart, women were not always secondary to men even in Indian history. It is under patriarchy along with private property as the driving force that put the man in a position of ascendancy. This period saw the rise of Manus and Bhagwatgitas, quoted often to describe the philosophy of suppression and deprivation of women in Indian society and how it wanted the hilarious, the other half to be controlled and subordinated. The law giver Manu declared ‘women to be impure,’ for example in Bhagwati, ‘women are lumped
together with sinner and slaves.' The scriptures of Digamber Jains hold the view that women can never attain salvation of their description except by being reborn as men. Definitely these are not the views of the period when woman was free and equal to man. It was only in the middle ages down to the present one that the male ordained society raised walls prohibiting equal rights to woman. Again, with the changing times when it needed to come out of the Divine Right of King to rule for a relatively free and relaxed atmosphere in the early decades of 20th century that propounders of renaissance like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jyotiba Phule appeared on the scene with their message for reforming the Indian society with the emphasis to improve conditions for its women. A little later, when Mahatma Gandhi was finding moorings for raising the tempo of India's Independence struggle that he started propounding that woman is the champion with equal mental capacities and she has the same right of freedom and liberty. He dismissed the ideas put forward by the earlier law giver, Manu.

Shantha Krishnaswami contrasts western and Indian situation thus. "In western countries, the women's issue is mostly one of identity, job equality and sexual roles. In India, for the majority, it is a question of stark survival. Even those lucky ones who have escaped the vicious circle through education and better opportunities, find themselves in a constant tussle with social mores, with the oppressive weight of tradition behind all task of transcending biology of colonial reproduction,
polymorphous perversity, burning the bra would be out of place and out of time in an Indian milieu." The priorities here are not the same as in the west. At each economic level, the problems are different. Madhu Trehan and Sunil Sethi explain:

Her own situation is so inextricably interwined with her husband's economic condition, that questions such as why she is being paid half of her husband's salary for the same amount of work on a construction site or why she has to manage all the housework alone after working outside all the day become semantic - only to be considered as finer points in living.\textsuperscript{10}

Indian woman emerges as a distinct, significant figure only in the post-independence period, more so after the Gandhian India passed away as swiftly as it had been created, when there was a rapid decline of the values cherished during the independence struggle.

As an author of this post-independence period, Shashi Deshpande portrays Indian middle-class woman with a message. Her fiction is not sterile, abstract or merely a mirror. She has certain definite ideas and a marked approach. She seems to cherish certain values which she has apparently imbibed from her education and up-bringing in a middle-class milieu of the times. And times are not ordinary. By the time Shashi Deshpande appeared on the scene, the euphoria of high expectations generated during independence struggle in the country, had waned. Individual, as a self-seeking personality, was sharply emerging in competition with fellow citizens where money had replaced labour as a measuring value of one's social
status and woman was pushed in the market where money was scarce and labour force seeking gainful employment was overflowing. Deshpande's reflections thus rest on pulls and counter-pulls of a society in turmoil to find its place in the world of opportunities disappearing fast for most of them. Her novels are pulsating with aspirations of woman, carving for salvation and seeking identity in a frustrating world of compromises. But the author has offered a definite message in favour of feminism through her well-crafted protagonists.

In this study, 'Feminism in the novels of Shashi Deshpande', a critical study of philosophical approach of feminism is sought to lay down a firm basis for evaluation, in its proper context, before one can appreciate the value of asserting the self, as sought to be upheld in her novels.

It may be stated that every specific period throws its own philosophy or the outlook to sustain it while laying foundation for the next period to emerge from its ashes to give place to new. True to the form, industrial revolution brought its own outlook forward in its wake. It is the individual labour that forms the core of industrial mode of production; while it was family-labour which formed the base in agricultural mode as a distinguishing feature. In consonance, the whole socio-cultural, educational and ethical value-system of industrial mode is designed to serve this core in thought and action. The literature is desired to prepare the requisite intellectual receptability accordingly till the core itself starts giving place to new forces for replacement. Individualism is thus the expression of present
socio-economic system to keep it running and preparing the people intellectually to serve this end. Feminism as a concept and as a movement took shape in a phase when labour-power of male, female and the child constitute commodities for hire and sale in the market, giving a sharp edge and solid ground to the growth of individualism based on the 'quest for self'. Eva Bell in her essay on 'Man-Woman Friendship, remarks “Feminist movements are determined to unshackle women from traditional family structures.” This philosophy is to alter every institution of society such as marriage, family, etc. It roused women to their 'absolute right to their own bodies' and ironically, on the ground of reproduction as a private matter. Literature in this phase is largely sought to prepare the society to accept the logic of 'individual freedom' and 'freedom of choice'.

An accomplished literature is a master craftsperson of human relations, visions and passions in the effort to mould the course of social movement, subtly exposing the pitfalls, bearing the odds and extolling the cherished values. Beyond fantasies, literature has come to a mature stage of one grappling with the realities of social life, diverse in nature. Yet a divided society cannot reflect, but, a fractured reality. Only a genius craftsperson is capable to depict this varied reality in its true comprehensive form which is a rare phenomena in modern literature. Nayantara Sahgal discussing the role of an artist opines that a writer “has a mission; he has to create a vision of the future, he has to have a dream of his own and to suggest
possibilities from it. I think it is the artist's job and the writer's job, particularly in any society to show the way." The ability rests with the craftsperson to remain alive to the diverse form of reality and its social bearing. Such a genius is rare phenomenon, which none, not even Deshpande claims herself to project through these novels under study.

Nonetheless, a writer is the product of the type of education one has received and values so inculcated which generally go to form his or her opinion on issues of this fractured reality and form the perception. The current education system in the country is one which independent India inherited from its colonial British masters with little change basically. It was crafted on the roles-model of an industrialized Britain to emulate. In England at the time, the fundamental ideas based on new emerging realities of industrialized mode of life propounded by this resurgent class, had formed the core of this system in education which, later travelled to other continents where these invaders went to conquer and rule. In this scheme, individual and his self became central to the frame. Essentially, individual and individual's freedom, without any reference to his or her family and the community were accorded with a status of sacrosanct loyalty. With the consolidation of a centralised state structure, in course of time, education came to mean as a powerful tool in its hand, apart from coercive organs, to control the citizens within the bounds of a designed course. In the case of India, the concern of education, crafted by these colonial masters has not been different basically. The country
was saddled with a full system of alien thoughts and values on a society undergoing a different mode. It would be interesting to understand what governments do in this connection. Professor Noam Chomsky in his latest treatise, *Power and Prospects* cites David Hume approvingly on the First Principle of any government, saying:

... that the rulers must ultimately rely on controlling thought... this maxim extends to the most military governments as well as to the most free and most popular.

Keeping in mind what governments do, education is not a free field to choose from a variety of ideas. The subtle slants shape the mind of the receivers and perceptions are formed, mostly fed on partial reality and half truths. So one is hardly a free agent of a vision he or she decides to sell through the literature. In this complex world one has to take a critical view of the situation and see the cut of a literateur with a pinch of salt, to remain objective in evaluating the truth.

Shashi Deshpande is a writer of repute in English with a strong middle class trait. Her understanding about the experiences, frustrations, aspirations and 'compromises' of women is essentially about middle class women of post-independence India when the country passed into a situation dictated by world capitalist system of post-second world war with its nationalist characteristics. The earlier atmosphere of high ideals and superb expectations aroused by the independence struggle against foreign rule and inhuman exploitation soon lost its sheen and countrymen found
themselves in the whirlpool of self-centred struggle for existence, where old family values have not died down and new ones still shaky ground to take roots. At this stage the situation was not ripe for institutions of family and marriage to dispense with as feminism nurtured in industrialised west demands whereas stepped up efforts to implant industrial mode of existence increasingly find previous social mores totally incompatible to adjust. The major novels of Shashi Deshpande are the products of this double-bind situation, specially of the middle class section of Indian society and its women.

Another notable feature of the situation is that this middle class represents a section of society which is the product of a socio-economic, political cultural-educational system crafted to serve the colonial masters and now called upon to serve the new ruling forces after independence. The conditioning effect of this education for long, is now overwhelmingly visible among the intellectuals when they seek to propagate the mores of this industrial mode of life as it took shape in the West. Individual liberty and freedom is one such tenet, which, mutatis mutandis, forms the base of feminism and its thought. Shashi Deshpande is one such writer of this post-independence India who rose to heights during this phase and represents this trend of thought in the context of its specific conditions relying on this tenet of individual liberty and freedom as her creed.

Shashi Deshpande has been careful in providing a realistic background in her novels while projecting certain definite views on woman’s life. The delineation of main characters in her
novels brings out clearly certain issues which the writer seems to raise concerning woman's life. Evidently, her perception of the issues involved took shape through her interaction with social realities and the influence of formal education she acquired in her time. She is the product essentially of the ethos gained from her times which found an expression in her novels, yet she remains quite conscious to the pulls and pushes of the family as an institution of the social existence.

In the novels of Shashi Deshpande, though milieu is not the thing of ultimate significance, it provides a situation which evokes a variety of responses from her characters. Her women, confronted with conditions uncongenial to their needs, urges, hopes and aspirations, tend to conduct themselves in different ways evincing varied attitudes and temperaments. For example, some of her women characters accept their lot passively and they have neither sufficient awareness, nor courage enough to struggle for a perceived status in society. Jaya in That Long Silence suffers silently. Indu in Roots and Shadows revolts against family ways and marriages a boy of her own choice in search of freedom and love. She then finds herself in turmoil and suffers inner conflict in search of the same illusory freedom. Here the question is as to who teaches the raw young ones about 'freedom' in the first place and on whom such young souls put their heart. In what way this gambit helps to develop one's personality as a composite whole in society. Self-seeking freedom devoid of obligation to none, is a philosophy of a depraved who can find no solace or peace anywhere. Shashi
Deshpande seems quite conscious of this truth, when her disenchanted characters tend to compromise with 'old' values and are subdued. The wisdom of 'grey' period in the life of a person, when uncritically borrowed 'idealism' fails to click, is amply depicted through the characters of Shashi Deshpande. In fact, a question arises if this is a case of wrong choice for a wrong cause sold to unsuspecting and uncritical souls at a stage of raw emotions.

There does not remain any ideal in the Indian family today, except that of pursuing easy access to wealth and move wealth for self. This institution of exceptional importance in Indian history of social development has been facing turbulations for a long time now. Many things have changed in it for worse. Certain tenets of its code of conduct evolved through a painful process of learning by practice do come in conflict with an alien mode of social production where individual calibre is more decisive in gathering affluence than collective labour which had been important in pre-industrial phase. This conflict of two different cultures i.e. within the four-walls of a family, is giving rise to tensions which results in its break-up or serious compromise on fundamentals, robbing it of its dynamism. 'This raging war of two cultures among members of a family is a common feature in the novels of Deshpande, though she also describes it, as a conflict between 'tradition' and 'modernity'.

Any term in language carries a definite meaning and a message. This is true of the term 'tradition versus modernity'
which is used by the English writers from the West to describe the conflict of values in the Indian family. It pushes an underhand message to opt for 'modernity', since by nature, human being stands by a forward movement in struggle for life. In this case, anything and everything un-conventional is put to be modern while inherent message is to discard anything which one follows by convention. Right or wrong cannot be judged by such use of counter-feit terms. This study proposes not to fall prey to use these terms to avoid unwanted confusions. The proposition is to seek an understanding in a relative context to recognise its social necessity, as a touchstone to one's motion forward. It is generally recognised that life is more complex today than it was yesterday, and a more careful approach to reality is demanded to arrive at conclusions.

Analytical studies of social history suggest that the present conflict in the family, centring around two sets of basic cultural values i.e. trade and family values arose with the advent of industrial revolution having production for trade as its essential motif replacing the slow-motion of patriarchal society of feudal set-up having production for consumption mainly centring around agriculture. Money over-threw the patriarch in the family and started asserting its regulating power in social relations and new values were brought forward to subserve the resurgent force out to consolidate against the over-thrown set-up, alongwith its value system. The humanity all over the world has the experience of this 'new' adventurous set-up alongwith its values in social and familial relations for more than two
centuries to arrive at few important conclusions about their efficacy. The protagonists of both camps in Shashi Deshpande's novels are fighting a war of ideas on respective merits, demerits and caution opponents on motives. The importance of this on-going war of ideas can hardly be overlooked by anyone, since it concerns the life of everyone today or tomorrow. The profession of academicians, literateurs and every practitioner of social action lays down an obligation to remain alive with the basic issues in this conflict at his or her door. One cannot close one's eyes to this reality. Shashi Deshpande as a conscious writer of Indian middle class women, belongs to the generation of literateurs in English who are charged with ideas while living with this conflict between the two cultures.

No doubt, Shashi Deshpande is a sensitive writer. Though her novels have a broad commonality with other writers on this on-going conflict between the two sets of cultures in a family, yet Deshpande has certain distinct features in her novels which demand study in-depth for better judgement. One such aspect is the deep concern which she shows for woman and her surroundings, her sensibilities, her relations with other members of civil society, her urges, aspirations, her inner conflict, her instinctive response for survival and her compromises with the realities of life. Though novels of Shashi Deshpande are free from ideological cliches, she offers certain ideas which go to form a base for feminism as a guide to change relations in social set-up.
On two counts Shashi Deshpande counters on being described as types by commentators. She resents being called an ‘Indo-Anglian’. Though she does not write in any recognised Indian languages, she insists, “I do not like to be called an Indo-Anglian. The language is only an accident and is as Indian as any of the regional languages. I use English in the same way I’d have used any Indian language.”

On the second count, she asserted “I certainly do not think my novels are men versus women” on being described as protagonists of feminism. She said: “I believe that the female of the human race and species has the same right to be born and survive to fulfil herself and shape her life according to her needs and potentials that live with her.” She is uneasy if labelled to be a ‘type’, yet her concern for woman, her turbulations, is abounding. All her novels have women as central characters; stories are woven around them.

In this context, it is important to note that the blooming period of Shashi Deshpande as a novelist was when women’s liberation movement, called ‘Women Lib’ in short, took western industrially - developed countries by storm, slowly traveling later to East and Middle East through print and electronic media, as also literature. It took strident note in the socio-economic conditions in America which was facing serious problems of revival at the end of second world war. Shashi Deshpande, like other writers of the time, could not have remained detached from such issues thrown up by this trend in feminist writings. The subject of the present study is to rate her
contribution as a fiction writer to clean up issues of feminism to her conviction in Indian conditions.

The locale of her novels is in India. Her concern is Indian. The ideas making up her outlook are western imbibed through educational pattern on western model. The selection is south Indian middle class families. This selection limits her vision and gives it a sectional frame. Nevertheless, the subject demands in-depth study at a time when the country is looking up for a major role in the region with her eyes on international horizon, while taking pride in its ancient civilisation, particularly its reverential references to its women.

It is admitted that Shashi Deshpande is a recognised name in the field of Indo-Anglian literature. Her women characters are ordinary middle-class or lower middle-class creatures. Main characters in her novels are torn between two sets of cultural values, aspiring for the recognition of their selves. They are living amidst the pulls and counter-pulls of this conflict in a family setting.

It is also understood that in order to understand better the works of a writer, it is essential to bear in mind the social reality which serves as a backdrop for those works. Like other Indo-Anglian writers' works, Shashi Deshpande's novels are written against a social background. The country was awakened to aspiration for independence from colonial rule involving the masses. Participation of ordinary women in numbers was a hallmark of this struggle, specially after the end of first world war. It released a new wave of awakening throughout the length
and breadth of the nation. Second world war and its aftermath, however, brought a radical change in the balance of political-economic forces, bringing new alignments world-wide and released fierce economic responses which were never seen before. Colonial masters left Indian shores after almost three hundred years of repression and plunder.

This liberation movement in India, as elsewhere, had released tremendous energy of the masses; womenfolk gained fresh definition of social relationship with a promise of liberation from the deadening chores in the house-hold.

It is recognised that in the wake of second world war, many changes had occurred. With the liberation of many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, nationalism rode high and participation of women in social interaction increased to a large extent. The colonial possession of developed countries came to an end. America also faced serious economic crisis at the termination of war. The rising prices and unemployment put the country in a social turmoil. This was the period when re-allocation of sectors in economy was undertaken and Marshal plan formulated to inject artificial stimulants in the gasping economy. Alternate sectors like consumer-cum-service sectors were propped forward to maintain the rate of profit. Entertainment, tourism, cosmetics and such like non-essential industries started gaining precedence. It was no mere coincidence that 'Woman Liberation Movement' took shape precisely at this juncture, in America, which later engulfed
The comments from Bharat Jhunjhunwala are interesting:

The genesis of modern movement for gender equality lies in the shortage of labour in the United States during World War II. It was then the eyes of U.S. capitalism were opened and it became conscious of the opportunities of more profits that could be made if women could be brought into the work force. The US sold the dream of 'gender equality' to its women. A temporary sacrifice by the US women was converted into permanent sacrifice. The result has been that women have been doubly exploited... Additionally she has to bear half of the burden of bread winning because she claims equality with man.17

This was the backdrop when India got its freedom. Its independence struggle was the hey period of Indian spirit of valour, prudence, where energy and grit of womenfolk in the country got flowered. It happened without any separate or sectional philosophy, approach or organisation on the part of woman. The concept of equality between man and woman, nonetheless, got roots in this period, which was different in content from the one invested by the vested interests in America pin-pointed by Jhunjhunwala above, Sarat Chander Chatopadhyaya (Bengali), Munshi Prem Chand (Hindi), Mulk Raj Anand (English) were among the pioneer-writers of this period who shaped public opinion on issues of gender equality and evils of discrimination against women apart from other issues of liberation struggle.

It is post-independence period which saw a sea-change in the scenario. Inspite of planned development, capitalist mode in industrialisation could not achieve an even growth. Scarcity
and hunger gripped the vast masses inspite of datas and rhetorics on growth. Illiteracy and disease persisted, employment opportunities receded more and more. A ‘room of one’s own’ remained a pipe dream. “The fruits of planned development reached those hands which were already full.” By sixties and seventies the frustration and discontentment and morale of the people had touched a new low. The situation had taken a dramatic turn. Everybody was fending for self in a circumstance of general scarcity and deficit. The status of an individual in society was measured with money and resources that one could muster. End started justifying means. In this mad race, woman found herself cheated; she started the race standing at the tail end. Such was the situation when Shashi Deshpande emerged on the scene giving expression to issues concerning women in the society.

As a result of policies pursued and development strategies undertaken after independence one important feature relevant to the study is that Indian society today suffers horizontal and vertical divisions. The stratification is as true for female population is as to male. For any fruitful study regarding woman and her present status in society, it is necessary to take into account this feature of class differentiation in female population.

The brief recounting of events which Indian social life experienced in recent past provided a concrete background to the issues it is facing today. When a writer gives expression to some current issues of social life, he or she provides personal
expression to a social consciousness. His or her source of knowledge is social interaction in day-to-day life. Shashi Deshpande gave what she chewed from the society at a concrete point of time.

Since no society is a uniform whole today, India of Shashi Deshpande's time is no exception. The divergence of opinion on any one issue is the reflection of this social reality today. There are differing opinions among academic circles on the philosophy of woman in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. One section holds that she depicts some definite aspects i.e. freedom from dependence syndrom, denial of institutions of marriage, family and assertion for self which feminism upholds as basic to its philosophy while others contest this judgement on her.

The in-depth study and conclusive opinion on the subject, therefore, requires a dependable reference - frame; how the subject is to be approached and what are its essential ingredients. This is a question of outlook in a society which harbours different and divergent interests. The subject matter of this study requires at last three components to be clear about. One is the nature and role of fiction in present day society as a part of broad educational effort. Then, there is the question regarding philosophy of feminism and its distinct object - overt or covert. Thirdly, it needs to be examined how feminism or its Indian variant is going to affect the thought-process of the people and influence the social fabric. Moreover, feminism is generally confused with anything and everything feminist concern is associated with. In the midst of differing perceptions
it is worthwhile to bring out the conceptual framework so that a criteria for assessing reality is laid down.

It is noteworthy that Shashi Deshpande has come to acquire a place of distinction among women novelists. She is the subject of much critical acclaim and comments. She was the recipient of Sahitya Academy Award in 1990 for her novel That Long Silence. Deshpande began her writing with short stories which later on developed to novel writing. Her first collection of short stories The Legacy, published in 1972, is now widely read. Other collections of short stories are It Was Dark, The Miracle and it was the Nightingale. By now she has seven novels to her credit: The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), If I Die Today (1982), Come Up And Be Dead (1983), Roots and Shadows (1983), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1993), A Matter of Time (1996).

Clearly, she is a widely read person, well acquainted with other literacy figures. The latest novel, A Matter of Time from her is a clear indication that Shashi Deshpande keeps herself abreast of the current thrust in feminist movement. English writers like Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Erica Jong, Bronte Sisters and Jane Austen have influenced her. Writers like Simon de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer stimulated her writings. She also liked reading Dickens and Tolstoy.

As a notable literateur Shashi Deshpande depicts a society which is torn between pulls and counter-pulls of varied and most of the time contradictory interests, depicts reality of different hues and forms. Her feminist concerns are quite visible
when she champions the individual aspirations of her young protagonists, though her concern is clearly partisan. Like her, much of the literature today seems to plead for partial reality and half truths. As we find, Shashi Deshpande depicts the pulls and counter-pulls of a middle class family and gives vent to aspirations and frustrations of women in such settings. The overwhelming majority of women belonging to deprived and dispossessed sections of Indian society remain beyond her canvass.

In this connection, it is important to underline what literateur Doris Lessing opines that "you cannot write about anything you haven’t experienced or imagined -- it has to be your experience, your imagination ... writers pick up ideas that are in the air -- like an invisible wavelength of ideas." Similarly, Nayantara Sahgal stresses that "everything around the writer is material for a novel... All one’s material comes from real life...one generally draws on one’s own experience or someone else’s experience." This sets the strength and weakness of a writer with a circumscribed vision. Nevertheless, Sahgal discussing the role of an artist admits that a writer "has a mission; he has to create a vision of the future, he has to have a dream of his own and to suggest possibilities from it. I think it is the artist’s job and the writer’s job particularly in any society to show the way."

Philip Stevick in his Theory of Novel states that the novel records the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience. The protagonist of the novel follows a pattern of
disillusionment — from potential fulfilment to actual accomplishment, from a hopeful naivette to a resigned wisdom. Thus, it is distinguished from romance which is essentially escapist literature. The novel leads back to reality. In Shashi Deshpande’s novels too a similar pattern in progress is portrayed in the life of protagonists. All her major protagonists like Indu, Saru, Jaya, Khshma, Manju, Urmì and Aru, are shown to be in a state of confusion in the beginning. Slowly as the novels unfold they go through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realisation. At the end they emerge as more confident, more in control of themselves and hopeful. Jaya, for example in That Long Silence concludes: “There is always hope.”(P.193)

One distinction, however, has to be made; literature is different from any other commercial art. Excepting the segment of light entertainment seekers it is universally accepted by sober sections that art-in-literature has a social bearing which is more effective than any other tool to shape the thought-process of society, leaving its mark on both head and heart. The ability rests with the craftsperson as to how far he or she remains steadfast to one’s projection. The writer may remain detached from actual social movement of the time, his or her creation in the form of literature cannot afford to be sterile with mere depiction of perceived ‘reality’. It is to carry some social value system to touch the sensibilities of readers and remain true to realism. Shashi Deshpande uses her art with ability to convey her side of reality concerning middle class women of her times
with a message, yet, the treatment of issues on some account is partial, imbalanced and incoherent. The question of fidelity between husband and wife is one such issue receiving treatment in a cavalier style. The question of free sex is another subject which needs to be dealt with care. Indu, Saru and Jaya - the three protagonists of her representative novels, *Roots and Shadows, The Dark Holds No Terrors* enjoy similarity in their frank admission of pleasure in the sex-experience. They enjoy sex. Saru declares, "I became in an instant a physically aroused woman, with an infinite capacity for loving and giving, a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved."(p.34) But the same Saru is not hesitant in having an affair with her professor of easy virtues forgetting about her 'loved man'. Jaya has tremendous physical appeal in Mohan - her husband of choice. The same Jaya's relation with Kamat in ease is presented as nothing abnormal. The quote from Saru is a leaf from a highly contested proposition from Sigmund Freud on sex. The case of Indu - a married woman going for physical relation with such ease and facility with her cousin, Naren finding the act very relaxing is like presenting a case for free sex, for enjoyment. The way she finds Naren at the dead of night and the next morning with no feeling of infidelity is the negation of marriage as an institution with no viable substitute for the society to adopt. Moreover, injecting the element of pleasure in sex and proposition for free sex go together to make these two faces of the same coin as the linchpin of sex and tourism as service-industry today. How it squares with the
social fabric to go on smoothly, has been left out of the purview. Nevertheless, by investing sex with pleasure and clearing the decks for free sex ultimately helps in reducing woman as a raw material for entertainment industry, thus paving way for degrading womanhood, and her dignity. Shashi Deshpande, while projecting such a notion as manifestation of woman's liberation through her main protagonists left the subject one-sided and incomplete, for treatment in her novels.

No doubt, woman occupies a central place in the novels of Deshpande. It is fascinating to analyse woman when a woman writer decides to portray female characters in her bid to weave a story of choice specially if there is a message to occupy attention in literature. Like her, woman occupies a central stage in literature by other writers. What is unique in modern literature about woman is the attention it now focuses on problems and issues relating to her personality as a human being. In fact, the thought behind renaissance movement crystallized and helped to initiate concerted efforts by the beginning of 20th century for cleaning the moss gathered during the last phase of patriarchal culture. The country, though was unfortunate to have been put back atleast by two centuries in its natural course of growth by the colonial rule. This was true in the cultural field as it was true in economic growth and political reforms. It was only in the early decades of this century that social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jyotiba Phule could focus on ameliorating the conditions of women. India's independence struggle gave further impetus to the liberating
thought to flower and encourage women for participation in social life along with their male co-citizens in respectable numbers. This brought a sea-change in the attitude of those sections who had come to believe in the sanctity of manuvadi prescriptions about women in the later phase of feudal autocracy, when the edict was:

*Day and night women must be kept in subordination to the males of the family: in childhood to the father, in youth to her husband in old age to her sons... Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be worshipped as god.*

In the first instance, saner opinion refused to regard woman as an object of pleasure which previously had come to stay as an attitude of the rulers and the rich during this period of autocracy. Secondly, this edict proved counter-productive to the very concept of family as it emerged in the early phase of patriarchy, where vedic edicts on attitude about woman, is contrary to the above one. It has never been the same throughout the long period of patriarchy before the advent of industrial mode of social existence. Woman's position in society has never been, nor it could remain static. Like all other phenomenon, it is always in flux. Her position in the family as well as in society kept on changing all through the ages. Indian society is no exception to this law of motion, with variables due to specifics.

In the changed circumstances, the writers of the contemporary world came out rapidly from historical romance.
and mythic stories and started giving expression to the changed realities regarding the position of women. As the image of woman, family and community/society kept on changing all through the years, the writer's views too, were all changing resulting in a variety of realistic images.

The emergence of women writers in English, during the last quarter of 19th century brought a significant change in the scene when a new age of awareness started emerging for Indian women. The battle for emancipation was joined in by some educated women, who in their effort to communicate their own experience as women to carry their views on issues of social reform, turned writers. Professor Alphonso Karkala comments, "They tried to tell the world the obstacles, women faced.... These women writers struggled to give form and to their autobiographical accounts, which attracted publishers both in India and abroad."23 They had an audience to appreciate.

The introduction of English education in India by the British rulers brought significant changes in the life style of middle class and started influencing the minds of younger generation. Young girls and boys were influenced by the themes extolling individual freedom and freedom of choice and yearnings of carnival nature. Women writers began to portray this conflict between the continuing value system upon which their lives were based and the imported values from Britain based on industrial mode of life. Charmed by the imported new values the English educated section of writers painted this conflict of values based on two different modes of life. This
assigned a new role to the English educated class and is produced by literature in the country. It was a fresh twist to the role of literature which the state had sponsored. The conflict between the newly acquired emotion and reason have become more complex with the passage of time. The girls are educated with new woven dreams for their future while they are tossed between the desire and familial obligations. Such problems of adjustment and conflict have been the pre-occupation of most of the women novelists. The women writers, thus, having experienced different phases in the life of females with different roles, do reflect these experiences in their fiction. As Hunter College Women's Studies Collective points out:

In fact, women's literature is personal to such a degree that the confessional style of writing has been labelled 'feminine' even when men employ it. Owing to the circumstances of our lives women writers have often turned inward to explore the private rather than the public sphere.⁴

So is true of Shashi Deshpande who reflects a picture of contemporary middle class woman caught in a bind of such conflict-situation, in post-independence India. She claims that she knows how the women feel and she knows the mood of India. Sarabjit Sandhu in her review of three representative novels, says:

The predominating issues and themes in her novels emerge from the situations that focus on woman caught in the crisis of a traditional society where the shift is taking place from conventional to unconventional. She traces out
the tensions in which the Indian woman is caught which arise in such a transitional world. 25

Several writers and commentators tried to surmise the reasons of Deshpande going for middle class woman in her, novels. One reason they advance is her own middle class background. According to some, middle class in India is numerous and vocal to exercise influence on framing public opinion in general. Some others assign representative-characters to this influential section of Indian society while some others seriously contest this role to them. Whatever be the case, on women issues the thinking trail of Indian middle class is generally taken as authentic for the reason that most of the leadership of women’s movement comes from this section, while the majority belonging to deprived and dispossessed sections remains unorganised and mute spectators, to their own problems. Their voice is no voice so far. Their issues are the concerns of none till now. Ex - parte, middle class women are the will and consciousness of woman here, in India. The woman Shashi Deshpande portrays, is undeniably representative of family elders but is involuntarily adapted to its mores. Even when one is economically independent, her emotional attachment to the family, husband or children is real and graceful. She has not turned yet so formal or mechanical in her relations with other members of the family where emotional faculty is dead wood. The conflict of Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Indu in Roots and Shadows, or Jaya in That Long Silence corroborates this feature about women of this section.
The numerical strength of women, which constitutes nearly half of the global population, is not the only reason that they should attract the attention. The plausible reason in history seems to be of their leading role during matriarchal periods which took shape in the natural course. Anthropological studies of tribes and clans and sociological reasoning say that it was the changed role that males were forced to undertake in social production with the advent of agriculture and animal husbandry taking place as a stable means and its produce or domesticated cattle created conditions for matriarchy to give way to patriarchy, in a slow process but not without stiff, and sometime violent resistance from women protagonists. There is ample reason to surmise that the new ascending class of patriarchs struck a note of compromise by conceding a respectable role and status to women in the social set-up during the first phase of patriarchy. This was perfectly in the interest of continuity in progress. It could not have been otherwise for two main reasons on practical logic, plausibly. The assured status even in the new dissension was a recognition of woman's importance she had acquired by dint of her attributes as a human being and a co-partner in social production. In India, Vedas see the wife not only as a joint ruler but also as a queen exercising sovereignty over all members of the household. (Rig Veda. III, 53.4) Second reason was that in the absence of any state structure which could not have taken roots by then, it was not possible to subdue the parallel physical force of women. Men, naturally compromised
for the sake of stability in social relations. It was only in the second phase of patriarchy, that women came under severe force of subjugation by feudal autocracy. It was in this dark period that woman started losing her glory, though her contribution in family affairs remained indispensable. The problems centring round woman’s life deepened and so were feminist concerns.

The available account of this dark period is explicit that the accumulated wealth during this last phase of feudal dispensation propelled a drastic change, leading to industrial revolution with capital as its driving force, replacing patriarch, with a liberal democratic ideology in front. It was a change to the roots. In basics, it was a shift from a production for consumption to production for trade with a corresponding change from family and community value-system to market-value system. The conflict which Shashi Deshpande gave expression to in her novels is thus the conflict between these two sets of value-systems, two cultures out to serve two different purposes, centring in the family. Previously, males and females were used to live in cooperation harmoniously and share toil in the interest of production merely to satisfy consumption and to discharge their obligations to the community. They were part of collective gain. They were not in race against each other. With the advent of industrial revolution, however, the situation changed this pattern upside down. It released a new set of values to be fought in the family to dislodge the previous set completely for a new regime to take roots. The new and upcoming generation duly charged with the
ideology of resurgent class through education both formal and informal, is in constant conflict with the elders in the family who remain tenuously attached to their own life-long experiences for survival in the ambit of family and community in combination.

Apparently, Shashi Deshpande seems to have taken up this issue of conflict between two cultures in the family as her theme. With slight change in emphasis here and there, all her novels under study, are concerned over issues in this conflict. The young generation in the novels is relentlessly up-holding the ideology of market-value in the hope of better scope of self 'fulfilment' or wholesomeness, oblivious of the inherent law of capital that it tends to stay with the strong. Wealth, the capital to be precise, is never fidel to the weak. And the weak are to perish. In this game of nerves, everybody is to fend for himself or herself. In this fight of unequals, one tends to adjust or compromise, but for mere survival, while the race is released for a status of affluence which remains a mirage for most of them. This is the philosophy of market and market norms.

In The Dark Holds No Terrors, Saru declares decisively, "For me, they (parents) were already the past and meant nothing." (p.34) The seemingly gentle Madhav thinks, "I cannot spoil my life for that boy (his brother who fled from the family) It is my life, after all," (p.189) while Akka - that old lady who commands the family affairs, asks Indu, the rebellious protagonist in Roots and Shadows, "You think your life is none of our business?" Naren, the cousin of Indu, philosophises,
‘It is each for himself or herself.. (p.113). In That Long Silence Mohan expresses, ‘Job. I felt such relief. I was free. I did not have to ask anyone for money any more.’ In The Binding Vine Urmì says , “Girls are not going to meekly accept any man their parents choose for them.”(p.160).

Saru wants to be a doctor, thinking this as a golden ladder to affluence and independence. She marries Manu against the wishes of her parents in search of fulfilment. When she failed to achieve any fulfilment, she left the hospital and returned to her parents caring little for her personal fulfilment. She, again returns to her husband at the end. The wheel, finally comes full circle, “Saru tries to compromise with the situation...”26 comments Sarabjit Sandhu on this. About Roots and Shadows O.P.Bhatnagar says : “The novel deals with a woman’s attempt to assert her individuality and realise her freedom. It depicts how it brings Indu into confrontation with the family, with the male world and the society in general.”27 Indu comes back to her ancestral home from where she had gone out to marry a person of her choice against the wishes of her parents. Indu inherits the property of Akka whom she hated most as a tyrant in the family. But she inherits not only her property, but also her authority. Indu leaves one house and enters another to be independent and complete, but soon she realises the futility of her decision. Her mind opens up :

Go back to Jayant... Now I would go back to and see that home could stand the scorching touch of honesty.(p.205)
An examination of the criticism that Shashi Deshpande strikes a compromise, as her principal characters like Saru and Indu are depicted doing in the novels, perhaps, is over-stated and needs closer study. In the nature of struggle, young generation is involved with their elders in the family like Saru, Indu and others depicted in the novels under study, the compromise is not on the fundamentals of outlook as it should be. At best, it is mere adjustment for survival as middle-class people do when they find themselves unable to withstand stronger forces working in the market for the cherished goals of independence, fulfilment and wholeness.

A critical scrutiny of emerging cultural values, with their accompanying logic and thought, brings forth the authority of market as a regulator and oppressor in the interest of trade in commodities which are there for sale and purchase. It authenticates accumulation of wealth and self-aggrandizement on the strength of capital. This process necessarily leads to differentiation and alienation in society and these values help in giving this process an image of natural growth. As a result of this on-going process, women, as a community, have not remained one; a class among a class is created. And this has affected them in various ways. According to one study by R.S.Varma once in Planning Commission of India, due to this process, now India stands divided where one category of deprived and dispossessed constitute 80% of the population while the other twenty percent consists of haves. This is a neat division among women too, after four decades of planned
development in the country after independence. This block of inheritors, as according to Dr. B.D.Sharma, a former vice-chancellor of NEHA university, chooses to describe them, includes middle and upper-middle class sections. Clearly, Shashi Deshpande has taken up the cause of such women who belong to middle class of inheritors; ignoring the dis-inherited.

One more important change that industrial revolution brought out was in the position of women in a family. She was now a part of consumption unit belonging to an immediate producer who generally was male. Previously, during the whole period of patriarchal socio-economic structure woman was a part of production unit. This shift occurred during the first phase of industrial mode which covered a period almost upto the end of first world war. The wage structure of an industrial worker or employee in the organised sector is patterned on this principle agreed to in tripartite bodies, though in the unorganised rural sector woman is taken as a part of working unit with a depressed wage by more than one half to one tenth. This shift in the position of woman was for the worse, which further alienated her from social interaction.

As a result of events taking place in rapid succession after the first world war was over, certain features emerged affecting the entire gamut of social, cultural, economic and political life, which affected the lives of women adversely in particular. If the experiment in erstwhile Soviet Union which came into being after the first world war and opted out of this chain of capitalist mode, women seemed to have lost the ground decisively in the
first round when capital-centred industrial mode entered its second phase of cyclic crisis. The situation further deteriorated when finance capital took over as the lever of operations, more so after the end of second world war in 1945. The acute crisis set in with rising unemployment and soaring prices with crime-graph galloping. Speculative economy took over on the strength of finance capital. The captains of economy saw salvation in expanding service-sector 'industries' and trade rather than manufacturing sector. Consumer and entertainment industries coupled with modelling, cosmetics and tourism became the watch words for which woman was required in the market as a raw material or a commodity to fire these new avenues of super-profit with ease. It is not mere co-incidence that 'New Woman, 'Women Liberation Movement' sprang up exactly when this situation was ripening in America. Swiftly, it took strident note and crossed borders of European countries before entering other continents, in a planned way. Soon, its contours were defined and a definite ideology took shape to guide its course.

An analysis of this brief discussion of historical sequence of events in the life of society reveals various factors that go to shape the life and conduct of people at different stages of development in its long journey for perfection and affluence. It is observed that in course from one stage to another, passing one era to another, a corresponding outlook developed or faded away to serve a particular object, including the nature of relationship between male and female. So in assessing the efficacy of a trend of thought, it became imperative to study it
in its historical context and to analyse the factors which gave rise to such an outlook. If critics contend that Shashi Deshpande has carried the message of feminism in her novels, this narration gives better insight to evaluate different formulations which are given expression by her in the novels.

There is no dearth of comments on Shashi Deshpande which contend that she is a feminist and has given expressions to definite postulates which go to define feminism through her novels. The situation, however, becomes complex when she avers that her part of the story is not man versus woman. In addition, there is a section of critics who hold that in Shashi Deshpande there is a compromise on feminism but it is not that strident and militant as feminism is known for, while another opinion contends that there is no one frame for feminism nor can there be; it has its variants in different regions and continents with a sort of national colour, so is an Indian version of which Shashi Deshpande is one exponent.

A close look at the historical emergence of issues concerning woman and her relationship in various capacities with other members of a civil society reveals that oppression, exploitation, including sexual abuse of woman and gender discrimination started with the rise of state authority and assertion of property as another power centre to regulate relations. With this, arose problems relating to inheritance, incompatible marriages, divorce, rape and abortions and, a bit later, child marriage or problems relating to widows. Such feminine concerns attracted social reformers, literateurs and
sociologists in their quest for a harmonious outlook on her status and role. These issues were debated in literature and discourses for centuries since then. Renaissance had released a relentless campaign on such issues. What distinguishes these feminist concerns with the present day feminism, is its ideological frame-work, outlook and certain touchstone issues which are supposed to be essential for the liberation of woman.

For historical reason, thus, Feminism, arose as a sectional approach on woman endowed with anti-patriarchy rage. It has a support base in speculative economy and its staple food is freedom from 'dependence syndrome'. Essentially, family, community and institution of marriage are basics in its hit list. Freedom of choice, including freedom of sex is its clarion call while fighting 'taboos' is its constant refrain to keep modernizing on its side of the fence.

An analytical study of feminist movement tells that the philosophy of feminism took shape over a period of time and is not a product of one day. There is no single person who signifies its whole. It is typically a middle-class phenomenon. In this context, its variations with exponents and regions are quite in conformity with its outlook.

It will be reasonable to determine where Shashi Deshpande stands with regard to feminism in her novels keeping in view the essential ingredients of this concept. The issues raised in this connection by admirers, critics and what the novelist herself dealt with have to be analysed critically and assessed in the light of the essentials of feminism before any
conclusion can be arrived at. It is not open to any one to delineate what feminism stands for. It is rooted in its history and a specific movement built in industrially developed countries of America and Europe under a specific situation. And this ‘movement’ had its own outlet, following a natural law which says that ‘any action has its corresponding reaction’. It could not be escaped, it cannot be avoided now. While studying feminism in the novels of Shashi Deshpande these aspects cannot completely be shut off, for a reasonable understanding of the subject in social context.

Shashi Deshpande’s deftness in the craft of fiction writing cannot be under-rated. She has full understanding of her subject and the characters she has built in her novels, depicts a maturity of purpose. She stands by certain important tenets of feminism like freedom of choice and an un-inhibited freedom of sexual fulfilment. Her main protagonists in the novels are young women duly charmed by the liberating influence of western education and when they embark on translating these ideas in practical life they are face to face with harsh realities of life affecting their psyche. Their conflict is with ‘authority’ in the family set-up whether old or their own making. The latest novel from her in the series, A Matter of Time (1996) is an example where her protagonist comes to realise the strength of arguments in others and in one case seems to reconcile with this ‘authority’ happily, in the end. The problem thus is to probe in-depth her attitude toward such issues of feminism.
These and many other aspects are dealt with in the following chapters.

First of all, it is important to understand the role of woman in social life; what it was, what it has been reduced to and what is desired. Likewise her status in society has to be studied and what Deshpande in her novels has said about it is to be analysed. The problem of oppression and exploitation is as old as property and the institution of authority to manage property and conflicts arising therefrom. The nature of oppression and exploitation, however, kept on changing according to the nature of different phases in different eras till date. The third chapter deals with these problems relating to women as a part of deprived and suppressed section of humanity and how Deshpande coped with the subject in her novels. The question of self and dignity of woman is a complex issue. It is now mixed up with individualism as an ideology giving rise to existentialism as its highest manifestation. The mix-up has to be carefully studied and separated. The subject is studied in the fourth chapter in relation to Shashi Deshpande’s contribution on this subject through her novels, while weighing different opinions on these aspects of feminism in the novels under study. The concluding chapter sums up Shashi Deshpande’s understanding and perception of the problems of middle class women and her over-all view about positive action in the future.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. p.12.


16. Ibid. p.15.


26. Ibid. p.31.