CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN IN INDIA AND WOMEN WRITERS IN INDIA

1.1 INTRODUCTION

AN INSIGHT INTO THE WOMEN'S PSYCHE WITH RELATION TO

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

What piece of work is woman!
In form, in moving, how express and admirable!
In action how like an angel.
In apprehension how like a God!1
And at the same time it is also said.
Frailty — thy name is woman.2

The problem of the status of women involves equality between men and women. The women, throughout the world have been considered the second sex — the inferior sex. Equality and status are closely associated with power. Changing status involves the sharing of power on equal footing with men in decision making and its implementation at informal and formal levels. The societal value framework plays an important role in determining the changing status of power equations, and, hence, the status of women involves the distribution and redistribution of power.

Further half of the world's population is female and two thirds of the working force consists of women. In India, the situation is broadly the same. Shashi Deshpande is
regarded both as a contemporary novelist and a writer dealing with women’s problems in her works.

This study is focused on the women characters in Shashi Deshpande’s novels. Hence, references are made in this chapter to the world situation and the Indian situation regarding women. The remaining chapters will focus on the women characters in Shashi Deshpande’s novels namely — Saru, Indu, Jaya, Urmila, Sumi and Madhu.

Also, an attempt was done to distinguish between two kinds of language: father language and mother language. A woman is not accepted on her terms by the patriarchal structure anywhere. If she wants to be accepted anywhere, she has to know the rules of the game that we have to play, then she has to use what is called ‘The Father Language.’ The Father Language is the language that is expository pertaining particularly to scientific discourse and involves talking down to and does not seek any particular response. If you speak the father language, you get absorbed into the patriarchy, no matter what your sex is.

Mother language, on the other hand, is a language which seeks a response. However, mother language can also make use of the head and does not exclude the intellect.
The discourse that distances one from the speaker uses the Father language, and the discourse that binds one to the speaker and involves the other person uses the mother language. Mother language sheds the trappings of intellectual authority. It is the Gynocritics that have considered the divide between the father language and the mother language.  

During the last two or three decades the term ‘Woman Studies’ has become popular. It deals with studies dealing with women. In the Indian situation if we go back to Vedic period we find that the status of a woman was equal to that of a man. After the Vedic period, a flat position for women in society was presented. After independence, we notice a certain improvement in the status of women. Today, we are critically analyzing the position of women. Questions are being raised regarding a woman’s position in every walk of life. Actions are being proposed to change and improve the situations and solve the problems that are being faced by women.

1.2 FEMINIST APPROACH

To understand women characters in Shashi Deshpande’s novels we will first see what the feminist approach consists in. According to Neera Dessai the four feminist perspectives regarding women are: (1) Liberal Feminism, (2) Radical Feminism, (3) Socialistic Feminism, and (4) Eco-Feminism.
Liberal Feminism is more popular in European countries and South East Asian countries including India. Here the feminists do not emphasize a complete equality between men and women. They only recommend that whenever any injustice is done, it has to be reported. Women must have freedom, but not complete freedom to have her own way of life. Liberal feminism emphasizes the unique identity of women. Women should not lose their unique identity and should be proud of it. In certain respects discrimination between sexes has to be maintained and in other respects it has to be done away with. 6

Radical feminism states that the male dominated family system and the institution of marriage are the fundamental considerations for all the problems connected with women. The attitudes of the males and females in the family support the attitude of male domination in society. Radical feminists believe that there should be no marriages. Men and women should remain liberated and they can have sex with whoever they want. Radical feminism is a firebrand feminism.

Socialistic feminists demanded that women should be paid for the work that they do within the family. Women, who work as housewives, should also be paid. In the Marxian theory household work has no economic value. It is not considered as labour, but as an essential part of family life. But the socialist feminists believe that women should be paid for the household work and their activity should be considered a proper economic activity.
Eco-feminism tends to view the woman in the context of the environment. The logic behind this idea is that a woman relates to the environment more than her male counterpart. It asks us not only to look at the urbanized or the trained woman trimmed by society, but at women who relate more naturally to the environment. This approach perceives the issues pertaining to women, related particularly to the human relationship with nature.

In the Indian situation we find that the culture that created a Sita and a Gandhari has denied any other existence to a woman except as a daughter/sister, a wife/daughter-in-law, and a mother/mother-in-law. The Hindu Society has denied woman the possibility of being a “SHE,” a person capable of achieving individuation. She is a non-person and as described in Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope*: “Women should not be.” Man’s relationship with woman is most often the bond that exists between a master and a slave. Woman is an object and she is essential to man because “it is in seeking to be made whole through her that man hopes to attain self-realization.” It is in such a culture, in recent times, that voices of dissent are heard. 7

One of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to declare that a woman is a being. She is not an appendage of man. A woman is not the “other”; She is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and error, finding her own way to salvation. 8
Some feminist writings say that there must have been a time in the cradle of humanity when there were no different issues for men and women. Over the movement of civilization, issues have tended to be different for women and women never remained at the centre of anything. They became marginalized. Man has remained at the centre for many centuries.

Male dominance has three basic ingredients: (1) Control of female labor, (2) Control over female sexuality, and (3) Control over female fertility. It is women alone who are caught in the interface between production for the needs of human existence and reproduction of new human beings themselves. This has been the universal situation about women.

1.3.1 INDIAN SITUATION

In India, we have a situation in which there is a rapid growth of population and mass unemployment of varying degrees. Coupled with this general economic problem there are demands for dowry, violence against women and a general devaluation of a woman through various forms of exploitation. Brides are burnt for non-fulfillment of dowry, and female foeticide is on the increase to satisfy the preference for a son. Hence, women are underdeveloped in India.

Many women are in agriculture and in the unorganized sectors. There is also a lot of female migration due to marriage, or in search of work due to widowhood, or due to
desertion and destitution. Rural women face adjustment problems when they migrate to cities. Problems like the deterioration of their social status, and the perpetual insecurity in a squatter settlement are important considerations in determining the social status of women in India.

In the patriarchal Indian social structure one observes five expressions: (1) Women workers are treated unequally, (2) There is less endowment for women, (3) Women are subordinated through violence, (4) Media's negative portrayal of women, and (5) The support systems for women sometimes prove to be traps for women.  

Women do stereotyped jobs such as school teachers, typists, clerks, telephone operators, midwives and ayahs. While married women have a low social status and security, unmarried women are vulnerable at the place of work, and have to take extra care to ward off advances by men. Sometimes in the absence of sons, some daughters stay unmarried to support their old parents. 

1.3.2 STATUS OF WOMEN

According to Feminists the improvement of the status of women requires a change in the attitudes and roles of both men and women. Women's development and empowerment should not only be viewed as an issue in social development but should be seen as an essential component in every dimension of development.
Equity, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest and co-operation among all states should be the basis for the improvement of the status of women.

1.3.3 WOMEN IN INDIA

There were distinct stages of rise and fall in the status of women in the Indian context. It is stated that in the Vedic period women participated in all the fields like men and took active part in every sphere of human life. Woman was man’s friend, his co-worker and never his inferior, she had enjoyed the property rights and had access to the property of her father and husband, she struggled against the political as well as social problems freely with man. Women went to the Gurukula to receive education and married only after getting education. During the Vedic period, women occupied a high position in society and used to move about freely in society.

It is stated that women had equal rights with men in selecting the life partner in marriage. Marriage was well established in the Vedic period, as a social and religious institution and a necessity. It prevented sexual immorality to a great extent. 12

In the middle ages, women’s social status deteriorated considerably. The son came to be considered more important in the family compared to the daughter because religiously and economically the former was thought more useful. Not only does the son perform funeral rites necessary for salvation, but he is also a potential wage earner and the support of his parents in their old age; he is an economic asset.
whereas the daughter had no economic importance. Instead she takes money away from the family in the form of dowry during her marriage.

In recent times education, particularly formal education, played a very significant role regarding the social status of women. Education is a major avenue of upward social mobility. "Education is the key that opens the door to life which is essentially social in character."\textsuperscript{13}

The sanctity of a Hindu marriage is well known. Marriage is a sacrament with the Hindus and the religious knot is tied once for ever. Attempt was never made to untie the knot, even when it proved to be most oppressive. The manner in which the minds of young persons are made ready before the event of marriage and are kept tuned thereafter is a guarantee for the uninterrupted happiness of the married couple.

1.3.4 THE INDIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Indian social structure, its strength and stability is clearly and unequivocally vested in the family. For women, the greatest accomplishment is motherhood. Everything prior to marriage is preparation; everything after motherhood is reward for fulfilling her destined role.
Whether Jain, Buddhist or Hindu, *Dharma* is a conspicuous plinth on which the entire structure of society is built. You destroy it, therefore, at your own risk – *Dharma* has been described as a very pregnant word: it has meanings at several different levels, though the overall impact of the word gives Hindus the injunction to follow a religion-oriented way of life. This underlying body of ethical behaviour, related to the continuity of the universe as a recognized scientific reality, applied to married life, gives woman as the *sahakarini* or worldly protector of her husband’s life and the one who holds things together, a meaning that is very different than the rights of women demanded as human justice in many parts of the world. What is a far more dominant theme in the life of Indian women is a form of endurance that is hard to define. Yet which exists and is manifest again and again in the lives of simple women, often with no formal education, yet whose basic spirit retains a fire, firmness and unclouded determination in the face of the worst odds.  

When Hindu women marry and become mothers, it is tacitly understood that to be really fulfilled they must bear sons. Spread like cream in hot milk is the belief that a family with sons is a family uniquely blessed. With a son, the continuity and safekeeping of the father’s soul is assured.

Women still glorify male children above female and with sex determination it could represent the most profound revolution in a system of family life that has survived intact for over five thousand years.
Marriage is probably the most unreliable of human institutions from the viewpoint of the individual, unless it is firmly anchored in values other than love. Sexual attraction is all too often mistaken for love. Those who marry befuddled by such attraction generally break up later. But there is another kind of attraction, also based upon instinctive response, as opposed to the purely sexual, which brings two people together which to the observer often makes no sense at all. This has often been called the attraction of the opposites and in India is termed “an old karmic bond.”

Hence it is in the institution of marriage that one can find comfort and security during old age. In the Indian society and context the institution of marriage will live on. Most Indian women are not rebels but they learn to cope with the harsh realities of life and male domination.

Gandhi once addressing a group said, “women are not abala...weaker sex. You can change the face of the country today. You must have the courage to use the great strength to suffer without inflicting suffering and to resist wrong so that you would break but not bend.” Another time he said, “God has blessed woman with the strength of faith in a measure that is not given to man. So long as we cannot dispel the ignorance which makes women put male offspring above female, it won’t be well with us.” Mahatma Gandhi has aptly seen the Indian situation and has seen the solutions of the problem.
1.3.5 WOMEN IN INDIA AND EDUCATION

There are various reports which throw light on the position of Women's education during the last two hundred years. Neera Desai has presented a very useful picture of this. The position of female education during the 19th century was very bad. "It was an age when the mass of people were steeped in complete illiteracy. Education was restricted even among boys only to a smaller section. Education among girls was still more meager." 17

Gandhiji's philosophy was that a woman has a right to education. Education, according to him, develops and sharpens one's intellect and it increases one's capacity for doing well. Though men and women are regarded as equals, in actual practice when it comes to the question of giving education to the girls, there is a tendency among the parents to prefer a boy's education to that of a girl's. The illiterate mother in particular has very little chances to realize that she should guarantee better education to her daughter at least. 18

The National Committee on the Status of Women observes that the Constitutional directive to provide free and compulsory education for all children upto 14 years has remained unfulfilled till now. Educational experts admit that this failure is mainly due to the slow progress of education among girls. 19
The Indian society is undergoing a basic metamorphosis. The achievement of independence has in some ways quickened the process of westernization which began to cut at the root of the traditional value system of the Indian society. This process of change was further accelerated by the introduction of new technology and scientific innovations. Industrialization, which was a concomitant of technological innovations, brought about sweeping changes into the way of life and the traditional social order in India.

The social changes have not left the woman untouched. The traditional position the woman enjoyed in society, the roles she was expected to perform, and the status she carried in her family and the society have all been affected by these factors influencing social change.

1.3.6 SOCIAL REFORMS AND JOBS

In India, specific activities to enhance the status of women were initiated in the 19th century, and we can call it ‘reform movement.’ The 19th century saw reforms in all fields including women’s role. In the nationalist movement, women acted as vehicles for National Independence. There was no specific attention given to change the status of women. With the blossoming autonomous women’s groups, things started changing.20
A process of transformation has begun in the field of women's social status. Three major trends are discernible in this process of transformation. First, in the social-economic sphere, the continuing absorption of women into the work force has continued. Further access to higher education is expanding the boundaries of women's social roles which result in an increased sharing of responsibility within the family, more continuous employment in jobs, lower fertility patterns and greater participation in social and political activities. Second, science and technology in relation to birth control and reduction in their drudgery will minimize the present imbalance in capacity for personal decision and action between the sexes. Third, the present redefinition of moral and psychological assumption that a single parent family as the only legitimate form of sexual cohabitation is likely to continue. These three emerging trends in the Indian society are likely to generate specific and continuing courses of action, particularly on the part of organized women's group, governments, and large private corporate organizations. The extension of equal treatment to women and equal consideration would go a long way in ensuring equal social justice, the struggle for which has been a basic theme of political and social movements for the past several centuries. For a long time yet, this goal will best be achieved by organized women action.  

Social values of the people change with changes in the economic structure and ideology. The Committee on the status of women in India observes that patterns of Women's activity are greatly affected by social attitudes and institutions, which
stem from the social ideology concerning the status of women. These may differ according to the stage of economic development.  

On the one hand, women had been kept out of the occupational activity as a bread earner and on the other hand, on the pretext of the biological ground, she has been compelled to become a wife and mother. The responsibility of child rearing has always been allocated to the woman. Margaret Polatnick argued that child rearing “is no sacred fate of nature, but a social policy which supports male domination in the society and in the family.” Men, as the subordinate group, don’t want child-rearing responsibility, so they assign it to women. Slowly the working woman has taken over part of the bread-winning activity but the man has not as yet taken over the child rearing activity.

The social reforms and the economic developments are gradually changing the man-woman relationship and the fixed nature of roles assigned to them by prevalent social structure.

1.4 WOMEN WRITERS IN INDIA

Education has brought in an important change in the social status of women and has offered them job opportunities in new fields. From time immemorial, Indian women, have been showing their worth in each and every discipline of knowledge. Gargi and Ansuya in scriptures, Sita and Rani Durgavati, Rajia Begum and Noorjahan in history and Ruth Parawer Jhabvala and Arundhati Roy, Manju
This ‘Great Event’ in the very onset of the creation contains the germ of disparity between man and woman. Man boasts and brags, domineers and dominates over women only because woman has come out from man, she being one of the ribs of man. In Hindu religion, the social stature of women is not certain, sometimes upgraded and sometimes degraded.

In modern time, women have shown their mettle in every field. If we dive deep into the history of Indian authors in English, we come to the conclusion that Indian women have shown their worth both qualitatively and quantitively and are displaying their worth even today without any full stop.

The history of Indian women novelists in English begins with Toru Dutt who died at the early age of 21 at a younger age than John Keats of the Romantic School of poetry. Both her novels- Bianca and Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers deal with the autobiographical projections of the novelist- the experience, sweet and sour, she gathered in her very short life. The agony and catharsis arising out of sisterly love and bereavement in these two novels are very beautifully projected. Though the characters are Spanish and French, yet the delineation is entirely Indian, full of love and affection, sincerity and purity, which characterize the core of an ideal Indian woman. The autobiographical note of the novels reminds us of John Keats’s later poetry, which is richly influenced by the poet’s carking cares and corroding anxieties he faced due to his failure in love and the ultimate death of his brother.
Cornelia Sorabji, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Santha Rama Rau, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Geeta Mehta, Rama Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapoor are some famous women writers, but many other women novelists have left their indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English.

Cornelia Sorabji

Cornelia Sorabji, a Parsi Christian, is a great figure in the realm of novels. She is mainly famous for her three important works- *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), *Sun-Babies in the Child Life of India* (1904) and *Between the Twilight* (1908). She reveals in her novels the various moods and vestures going in under the 'purdah'- the ecstasy, tragedy, comedy and many more things which are unnoticed even by a feminist philosopher. She seems to satirize the hypocrisy and domineerings in a male dominated societal framework. To her, women are no longer an object of pleasure but a reservoir of all the healthy values of life. Her realistic and miserable picture of the Indian women is really superb and it reminds us of what Plato, the classicist, holds:

> We shall have to train the women also, then in both kinds of skill, and train them for war as well and treat them in the same way as the men.36
In short, 'Purdah,' which plays a very important role in an average Indian woman’s life in both Muslim and Hindu communities, though more conservatively observed in the Muslim than in the Hindu community, is the core of Sorabji novels.

Kamala Markandaya

After the Second World War the Indian women novelists seem to have taken a different route, a new vision. In this period, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala are unquestionably the most outstanding personalities in the field of social and artistic novels. Kamala Markandaya’s first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* made her a lovable writer of great fiction in both theme and technique, matter and manner. So far as the vision and vesture of this novel is concerned, she is very close to Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth* and K.S. Venkata Ramani’s *Murugan the Tiller*. The novel deals with a realistic picture of the Indian villagers, their customs and cultures, rites and traditions. The villagers or the down trodden have to work night and day in their field to earn their living. They try their best to churn nectar from the mother earth. But the irony lies in it that the churned out nectar is bound to be placed in the sieve. Rukmini, the narrator heroine has to face so many ups and downs, ‘fret and fever’ of life like her husband’s infidelity, her daughter’s sacrificial going to the streets to save the family from hunger and starvation; the premature death of the child Kuti, the ejection from the kiths and kins, so on and so forth. Here the piteous plight of Rukmini reminds us of Elizabeth Jane in Thomas Hardy’s famous novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Ammu, the forsaken lady in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. But while Ammu transgresses the age-old norms of societal
morality and develops her weakness to Velutha, an untouchable, Rukmini is never seen doing this. She, like an average ideal village woman, worships her husband like God. She says: “It was my husband who woke me up—my husband, whom I call Nathan, for that was his name although in all the years of our marriage I never called him that, for it is not meant for a woman to address her husband except as husband.”

But in spite of many unbearable and undeserved suffering faced by the heroine, the novel does not tend to be pessimistic or fatalistic as we generally see in Thomas Hardy. The last portion of the novel reveals that Rukmini finds peace at last.

Kamala Markandaya’s *Nowhere Man* depicts the East-West encounter suffused with racial discrimination. The stoical attitude of Srinivas, his death while saving Fred who wanted to destroy him: the racial madness and the existential dilemma have been well stated in the novel. The harmony and the tolerance – the only solution to the ills of racial tensions have been analytically and objectively dealt within the work. Kamala Markandaya’s tragic vision of the world gets expressed in the novel.

Kamala Markandaya’s other novel which earned popularity all over India and abroad is *Some Inner Fury*. It shows the protagonist Mira’s recollection of the past, her emotions, passions and ecstasies. K.R.Srinivasa lyengar holds the view: *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 bludgeonings of economic or political mischance and assert the unconquerable spirit of humanity. 

*A Silence of Desire*, the third novel by Kamala Markandaya, has neither to do with economics as in *Nectar in a Sieve* nor to do with politics as in *Some Inner Fury*, it unfolds the layers of spiritual reality and mystic vision of India. It is the story of Dandekar, a government servant, who gets tortures and sufferance because of his wife, Sarojini whose attitude is just opposite of her husband. She is suffering from a tumour and so she goes to seek a spiritual solace from the "Swamy." Dandekar doubts the ‘faith-cure’ belief of a Swami. Thus, through these two characters- the husband and the wife, Kamala Markandaya the novelist, presents an age-long confrontation between mind and soul, between intellect and emotion, between science and poetry.

*The coffer Dams* (1969) by Kamala Markandaya is a fine blending of art and truth, feeling and form. It shows a new style entirely original suffused with ‘oblique and convoluted expression.’ It is the story of the British engineers who construct a river-dam in independent India. It portrays a very fine picture of the Indo-British encounter resulting in despair and disappointments.

*The Nowhere Man* deals with the theme of the anti-immigrant wave of the sixties, which engulfs the life of Srinivas, an old Indian widower and a Londoner, who is
persecuted mercilessly by a number of fanatics. In this novel the image of disease is very suggestive. The disease 'leprosy' suggests the protagonist's sense of isolation and disintegration.

The other novels which Markandaya has to her credit are *A Handful of Rice; Two Virgins; The Golden Honeycomb; Possession*. Kamala Markandaya is undoubtedly an important woman novelist in recent times.

**Ruth Prawer Jhabvala**

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, the contemporary of Kamala Markandaya has also left a mark in the history of women novelists in English. It is, indeed, a complex task to decide whether R.P. Jhabvala belongs to India or Germany, insider or outsider. She was born of Polish parents in Germany and got her education in England but married an Indian and lived in India more than twenty four years. Most of her writings deal with the various shades of Indianness, apart from many other things. If we read her novels minutely, we come to the conclusion that in spite of her claim as an European, her novels in comparison with E.M. Forster and Kipling reveal much longer and greater involvement in Indian society, which compels a reader to consider her an Indian.

The novels of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala ring the note of two things- urban middle class Indian life tinged with domestic problems of an average joint Hindu family and an ironic study of the confrontation between occidental and oriental attitudes.
Her first novel; *To Whom She Will* presents a very beautiful picture of the Indian society- its rites and customs, taste and temperament and above all, marriage and love with an element of illicit relationships. This novel also deals with a truthful portrayal of the fatal consequences arising out of partition which uprooted millions of people. The novelist gives a fine picture of the piteous conditions of a large number of refugees in New Delhi who came to settle there after partition:

They had lost almost everything; their houses, their business, many of their valuables, all had to be left behind. It was complete disaster, absolute ruin; if it had happened to one man alone it would have been unbearable. But there is consolation in numbers and there were hundreds of thousands of them. Their relatives, their friends, their neighbors, all were ruined with them, all had to start life afresh: there was no individual disgrace attached to this ruin: it was spiritually bearable (*To Whom She Will*). 30

It is to be noted that R.P. Jhabvala focused most of her attention on the upper class North Indians where people are indolent, sensuous, violently emotional. The novelist doesn’t like to write about only one or two persons. She is in favour of writing the corporate life of two or three families. Her novels are generally saturated with the
drab realities of day to day life so much so that they tend to be repetitive. But her repetitions are always full of colour and beauty.

*The Nature of Passion* deals with a modern young girl, Nimmi, who wants to discard the age-old customs and rites, myths and tradition. She fights for the cause of woman’s emancipation. She attends club regularly, plays tennis, keeps bob-cut hair, and attends lectures on English Romantic Poets. But on the other hand, her community is dead against all her western activities. Through Nimmi, the novelist, wants to satirize these silly youngsters who have false pretensions to modernism and independence. The youngsters should always bear in their mind that their sentiments, emancipations, individuality, anti-traditional responses, mental processes are all conditioned by a social structure of parental affection.

Both *Esmond in India* and *A Backward Place* ring the note of east-west encounter. *Esmond in India* tells the story of Esmond Stillwood, an Englishman, who marries Gulab, the beautiful Indian girl. But the marriage fails due to the different nature in both the characters—Esmond is selfish and mean, Gulab is rough and unsophisticated.

In *A Backward Place*, Judy, an English girl, marries an Indian actor Bal. But this marriage also does not succeed because of their different mentality.
The Householder is a domestic comedy which shows Jhabvala’s acute perception of remote village life—the conflicts between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law—the one with domineering accusations and the other with taciturn enmity. The novel revolves round the life of Prem, a sensitive young man and a teacher who is absolutely surprised by the strange city and also by an early marriage. 

The novel which matters most in the literary career of R.P. Jhabvala is Heat and Dust which won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1975. It deals with the sad and moving story of two English women, the victims of this country. The narrative technique of the novel is equally important. It moves backward and forward from 1923 to the present with ease and felicity. It reminds of The God of Small Things, a novel by Arundhati Roy. The narrator of the novel is unnamed up to the end. Through diary and journal, the novelist speaks of the past and the present. It has what T.S. Eliot means by his famous phrase ‘historical sense’ and ‘tradition’. The story tells us how Olivia and her husband Douglas come to India. Olivia falls in amorous spells of Nawab and consequently she manages to elope with him. This leads to the pregnancy and later on, abortion of Olivia. She is given a cottage in the hills near the Nawab’s palace. She earns the title of the mistress of the Nawab.

The other woman who has to suffer a lot without any rhyme or reason was the invisible narrator herself. She develops her weakness for Chid, an Englishman turned Hindu. She helps him night and day during his sickness. This sympathy turns into sexuality between them. The narrator, consequently becomes pregnant,
but unlike Olivia, she doesn’t get herself aborted. She is a lady of strong hope and patience. So, she joins an Ashram and there suffers quietly. Thus, both the ladies become the silent sufferer destroyed by the ‘heat.’

The portrayal of India in *Heat and Dust* is somewhat strange in the sense that Jhabvala who always thought herself foreigner is seldom seen appreciating the cultural heritage and spiritual significance of this country. Nissim Ezekiel in his famous article “*Distorting Mirror*” views that Jhabvala has made the country stranger in her imagination overheated by hatred. As a matter of fact, if we judge her works, we come to the conclusion that her early works are richly devoted to India and she can be seen loving this country. But later on, she becomes blunt and cold to this strange land. She observes:

I suppose it could be put down to my change of attitude towards India. I lived every thing during my first years here- really loved it and was wildly excited by it and never wanted to go away from here. But later that changed, I saw a lot I didn’t like. I’ll go further: a lot that horrified me.32

**Nayantara Sahgal**

Nayantara Sahgal, in her many textured novel, *Rich Like Us* (1985), winner of the coveted Sahitya Akademy award and Sinclair Prize, portrays the hopes, ambitions,
failures and frustrations of the people in the Indian sub-continent. It is a novel whose action dates back to the period of India's National Emergency during 1974-75. Nayantara Sahgal, niece of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and daughter of Vijyalaxmi Pandit, is a novelist dealing with politics. She is also known as a successful political columnist for different newspapers. Her writing is generally characterized by simplicity and boldness. Her writing is also famous as it keeps in touch with the latest political ups and downs with a tinge of western liberalism. Her novels truthfully mirror the contemporary Indian political theme. She herself declared that all her novels "more or less reflect the political era we are passing through." Her attitude in the novels is like that of Nehru, that is, co-mingled with the western outlook. Unlike the political writers, she never professes any specific political ideology or favours any political creed or political movement. Her novels only portray the contemporary incidents and political realities saturated with artistic colour and objectivity. All her major characters of the novel are centripetally drawn towards the vortex of politics. But besides politics, her fiction also focuses on Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self realization.

Her first novel, *A Time to Be Happy* has references to Congress activities and the events of 1942. The structure and pattern of the novel seem to be somewhat loose. *This time of Morning* is a purely political novel which deals with what happens in the corridors of power, in the drawing rooms of the political figures. Some of the characters of the novel are so beautifully and symbolically portrayed that they are equated with the contemporary political personalities. The portrait of Kalyan Sinha
has the resemblance to V.K. Krishna Menon. In *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), we see the aftermath of the division of Punjab into the two states of Punjab and Haryana.

*The Day in Shadow* (1971) is richly inspired by the political movement of the society. Though the main theme of the novel is politics, yet the problems of divorce and disintegration of the marriage in a typical Indian setting is also beautifully dealt with. *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) points out the Naxalite movement and student unrest and, above all, the aftermath of Nehru’s death. Very often in her novels there is no gap between the private world and the political world; both the worlds are reciprocally treated and actions and characters commingle.

**Anita Desai**

Anita Desai (1937) is satisfied to dive deep into the inner working of the protagonists and brings into the hidden depths of human psyche. Her fictional world is just like an iceberg hidden and partly visible; it is overcast by mist and fog, half revealed and half concealed. Her inner voyage of characters in the novels is greatly influenced by Virginia Woolf. 34

Anita Desai deals with the mind and the soul of a character, his inner workings and hidden and silent thoughts rather than his outer appearances. Her main business as a fiction writer is to expose the truth. In this sense she is very near to great writers like Dostoevsky, Proust, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Henry James. In order to capture the prismatic quality of life in her fictions, she uses the stream of
consciousness method and interior monologue which become coincident with consciousness. 35

*Cry, the Peacock* is a tragic story of Maya who is haunted by the astrological prediction of the death of either wife or husband. In other words, she is the victim of fate and providence, that is, an uncannily oppressive sense of fatality. To crown the effect, she has no children and thus this leads to Maya’s isolation. She is so much segregated by society and astrological dilemma that in a fit of insane fury, she kills her own husband.

In *The Voices in the City* the scene shifts from Delhi to Calcutta. Here the Maya-Gautam duo is re-enacted in the form of Monisha-Jiban marriage. Monisha has to undergo unbearable tyranny and injustice, insult and abuse in her husband’s dwelling. In the long run, she commits suicide. Nirode, the brother of Monisha and Amla her sister, are also in Calcutta and all of them have to fight against the rigid conventions of the middle class life. Amla is shocked and heart-broken when her love is rejected.

*Bye-Bye Blackbird* is a symbolic novel in which Anita Desai presents the East-West encounter. It is an irony that the British characters in the novel seem to be more realized than the Indian protagonist. *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, as the title suggests, shows the tragic inner reality of Sita, the main character, who is stifled by
the cruelty and callousness of urban life. Fed up with the burden of children, she runs away to a small island, and persuades her husband to return.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Anita Desai presents the psychology of two different women characters—Nanda, an unsentimental old widow leading a segregated life like a recluse in a segregated hill hut, and Raka, a shy, gentle and lovely school girl by nature and instincts. The tragedy begins when Illa Das, Nanda’s bosom friend and a social worker, is raped and strangled. This incident so powerfully overcasts its dark shadow on Nanda Kaul that she makes up her mind to lead a life of a saint in the lap of a lonely place, far from the din and bustle of city life. The imagery of the book has reached the height of Shakespearean tragedies where metaphor plays a significant role in the plot and structure of the plays.

In *The Clear Light of Day*, Vimala’s attitude is somewhat similar to that of Nanda in the sense that she also preferred to live in a decaying house surrounded by a neglected garden containing a dark and mysterious well. The beauty of the book lies in the poetic and psychological portrayal of the hidden depth of the protagonist who is haunted by numerous nostalgic events of the past.

In her fiction, Anita Desai has heralded a new era in the realm of the psychological portrayal of the character. She herself observes:
My novels don’t have themes— at least not till they are finished, published or read, do I see any theme. While writing I follow flashes of insides, I veer away from or even fight anything that threatens to distort or destroy this inside, and somehow come to the end and look back to see the pattern of footprints on the sand.36

Anita Desai’s Journey to Ithaca stirs the myth of Odysseus’s journey and his Ithaca. It stirs creative imagination across time and space. In Desai’s novel, the myth receives a fresh treatment and acquires newer significances. Anita Desai’s Bye-Bye Blackbird gives an objective observation of the crucial problem of the feeling of alienation. The characters like Adit, Sarah and Dev suffer from restlessness, attraction-detraction, attachment-detachment. Sarah feels attached to India even before going there, but she feels restless at the thought of leaving England. On the other hand, Jasbir-Mala, Summer-Bella have no such problem. They acclimatize themselves to the English life without any inner pinch. Anita Desai effectively shows the theme of identity crisis. Many a times her characters travel through a world of fantasy in order to come to terms with the reality of the situation.

Shobha De

Shobha De is a modern novelist who is famous for portraying the sexual mania of the commercial world. In narration of incident she is very frank and straight
forward. Like Anita Desai, she has the gift of exploring the subdued depths of women psychology. In 1988, she shot into literary limelight with her first novel, *Socialite Evening*, which is Lawerencian in expression. Her other works are *Starry Nights, Sisters, Sultry Days, Strange Obsession, Snapshots, Second Thoughts, Shooting from the Hips, Small Betrayals, Surviving Men* and *Speed Post*. She believes that a man’s personality can be judged in a true perspective only when one goes into his interior more than his exterior behaviour. Today we see that sex which is the root of all our energy, plays a very vital role in a man’s life. Perhaps this is why most of the novels of De analyze the various aspects of sex, a great urge of human beings. This in turn appeals to most of the readers of modern scientific and commercial world where a large section of people are wildly hungry for power, wealth and sex.

It is to be noted that Shobha De, like D.H. Lawrence, has openly discussed sex in most of her works. But they are not easily termed as pornographic works. Her books have some fine images and symbols, words and phrases which make it attractive to the connoisseur of art. In art, it is not the matter that matters but manner that matters. Moreover, Freud, a great psychologist, has expounded a highly revolutionary theory of sex. So, now sex is not a taboo but part and parcel of life.

In Shobha De’s *Sisters: Not a Junk but a Novel*, though there are some sexy nude painting passages verging to soft pornographic ones, are realistic flashes of the
momentary passion of sex-starved men and women in the commercial business world.

A study of Shobha De’s novels shows the novelist’s perceptive portrayal of the secret depths of the human psyche; her accurate characterization; her saucy, racy and captivating style which invokes vivid images and compels the reader to identify himself or herself with the characters and situations. In short, Shobha De has tried her best to expose the moral and spiritual breakdown of modern society in which a hapless and forsaken woman longs for pleasure and wants to fly freely in the sky of freedom. Though she has been severely criticized by some critics on moral ground, we should not forget that whatever she has penned down are all fine pieces of poetic and metaphoric exactitude which haunts our mind long after reading.

**Manju Kapur**

Manju Kapur, the author of *Difficult Daughters*, succeeded in winning the famous Commonwealth Writer’s Prize for the Eurasia region. Manju Kapur is presently a professor of English in Delhi University.

The novel is autobiographical like Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. It presents a woman who considers marriage as the journey’s end of her life. It is about the three generations of women with the emphasis on the protagonist’s mother. It presents the picture of Amritsar and Lahore between 1937 and 1947. It is
the story of Virmati, the protagonist who is sandwiched between the duty towards her family and her illicit love for a married professor.

About the book *Difficult Daughters*, she observes: "Nothing is planned in a big way, but eventually things may take a grand shape. Writing this novel was not very difficult for me, but it took eight long years before the book finally saw the light of the day."[37]

Dr. Indira Bhatt, in her scholarly article, *Marriage- the Sumnum Bonum of Woman's Life* deals with the problem of marriage and love in Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters*. She opines that the woman in a male dominated societal framework, tries to move out of the caged existence and asserts the individual self. But she never wishes to break up the family ties.

**Arundhati Roy**

Arundhati Roy's debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, the winner of Booker Prize, has registered a tremendous sale all over the world. The book has been translated into more than 40 languages in the world. Earlier V.S. Naipaul had bagged this Prize in 1972 for *In a Free State*; Ruth Prawer Jhabvala got it in 1975 for *Heat and Dust*; Salman Rushdie was given the Booker Prize in 1981 for *Midnight's Children*. However all the above authors are only of Indian origin. But Arundhati Roy has got the credit of being the first entirely home grown Indian to have this prestigious prize. Unlike other Indian novelists, Roy is born, educated and brought up in India.
*The God of Small Things* is somewhat autobiographical in nature. It deals with a pale reflection of the haunts of Roy's own childhood on the limpid backwaters and the society she lived with caste prejudices. In this novel, Kerala, the most educated state with many different castes and classes, has been beautifully represented. The whole story revolves round the village, Ayemenem near Kottayam. In theme, the book peeps into the life of Keralite society, their rites and customs, traditions and patriarchal domination; a caste ridden mentality of a certain section of people whom Roy terms as 'Laltain,' the fatal consequences arising out of divorce; the child psychology; the naked exposure of the malpractices of Marxism and Police administration; the persecution of the untouchable, the 'Mombatti' and so on. In style, the book is moulded in such a way that it gives a jerk and jolt to an average reader. She has the credit to invent a new style- a style that turns and twists language to conform to the feeling particularly the jolly and jocund mood of the twins; a style that has paradoxical coinages, ungrammatical constructions, unconventional rhythm, bizarre phrases, uninvited capitalizations and so on. In both matter and manner, feeling and form, the novel leads us into the realm of a new style- a style that turns and twists language to conform to the feeling. It reminds us of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, James Joyce and Faulkner, Virginia Woolf and Salman Rushdie. It has what T.S. Eliot means by his famous phrase "Objective Correlative" or "Emotional Equivalent."

Arudhathi Roy's second book *The End of Imagination*, though short but revolutionary, deals with the author's strong revolt against nuclearization in India
and abroad; her mild satire on the arrogance and dominance of politics and, above all, the drawbacks of nuclear arms and ammunitions. In tone and temper, this short book reminds us of *Countdown*, a recently published book by Amitav Ghosh on the same theme. Here the thought-provoking observation of Arudhathi Roy clearly shows that she is not in favour of war and killing. She seems to be a great follower of Mahatma Gandhi who believed in the theory of truth and non-violence.

Rama Kundu in her essay, *The God of Small Things: As a Confessional Novel* analyses the plight of a woman in an entirely aversed society. It also points out the tyranny and injustice, insult and abuse the untouchable of India have to tolerate sometimes with cause and sometimes without any cause.

**Vimla Raina**

Vimla Raina is known for her best selling novel, *Ambrapali*, a historical novel which presents the history of Vaishali. Ambrapali in history was the first woman to be admitted in the fold of Lord Buddha.

**Rama Mehta**

Rama Mehta’s first novel *Inside the Haveli* (1977) has to her credit the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979. It deals with the confrontation between culture and civilization, between city and village. It shows how, Geeta a modern Mumbai girl has to lead a secluded life under the purdah in the Haveli. *Inside the Haveli* gives a lively and vivid picture of the traditional life, particularly of women in the
haveli. She points out how a modern girl of Mumbai has to live under the haveli as a daughter-in-law, thereby causing ripples of conflict and tensions in the suffocating and stagnating life of tradition.

As this thesis is going to deal with Shashi Deshpande's novels, she has only been mentioned here in this chapter and is dealt with at length in the next chapters.

It is wonderful the way Indian writers are using English, exploring its possibilities, adapting it for their own use. It started with Rushdie, who is a magician with words and the contemporary women novelists have continued this trend.

This is not a complete survey but a modest one. It is hoped that a brief reference to women novelists' achievement will help understand Shashi Deshpande's novels and the women characters in her novels better. Women novelists and writers have given a certain treatment to women and the background has been prepared by these women novelists, hence they have been referred to. In the past few years the social context has been changing rapidly and there is an obvious correspondence between the characters in the novels and the changing social context. The social developments are reflected clearly in creative writing. A writer writes in a social context and a certain tradition.

This brief survey of Indian women novelists in English clearly shows that women have made their permanent mark in the field of English fictions. They are conferred
not only national but international awards also. In most of their writings they have tried their best to free the female mentality from the age-long control of male domination. Today whatever political, social, cultural and individual awareness we see in women, is partly a result of these fiction writers who heralded a new consciousness in the realm of traditional thinking.
Chapter – I

1. Shakespeare.
2. Ibid.
4. Ibid., pp. 70-80.
5. Ibid., pp. 10-20.
6. Ibid., pp. 70-80.
9. Ibid., p. 69
11. Ibid., p. 54.
16. Ibid., pp. 80-95.
19. Ibid., pp. 56-79.
20. Ibid., pp. 56-79.
21. Ibid., p. 82.
27. Ibid., p. 6.
29. Ibid., pp. 1-18.
30. Ibid., p. 8.
33. AmarNath Prasad, p. 11.
34. Shyam M. Asnani, p.102.

36. Ibid., p. 380.

37. Ibid., p. 325.

38. Ibid., p. 327.