CHAPTER – I  
INTRODUCTION

Since times immemorial the search for identity has been an integral part of the Indian consciousness. Under the impact of the inherent spiritual leanings of Indian culture, this search has traditionally taken the shape of a spiritual quest. Innumerable stories in the oral narrative tradition survive to substantiate this claim.

The search for identity is regarded widely as being the major concern of the twentieth century European novel. It is an outgrowth of the existential philosophy which preoccupied the European intellectual’s life, a sense of spiritual vacancy, and attempts to discover some meaning from the barrenness. Such concerns do not appear to be of great significance given the Indian-Socio-economic contexts where survival itself is problematic. Consequently, the search for identity in the Indian English novel, although sharing its nomenclature with the European novel, takes on a different form.

The problem of alienation is intimately related to the loss of identity as well as quest for one’s identity. Donald Oken rightly suggests that it is the loss of identity that results in alienation. One would probably fail to realize adequately the magnitude of the problem of loss of identity unless we bear in mind that it is in the centre of all problems including alienation.

A sense of identity is a perennial sustaining creative force in a writer. Samuel Butler has described the pathetic condition of one who loses his identity, in his novel, *Erehwon*. As Pathak writes in the article “Indo-English novelist’s quest for identity” in the book *Explorations in Indo-English Fiction*, lost in the south Islands, Higgs feels; “It is a dreadful feeling that of being cut off from all one’s kind . . . One begins doubting one’s own identity” (Dhawan 10). The dispossessed personality’s search for
identity is, in fact, a common place theme in modern fiction, but for most Indo-English novelists the quest ‘has a peculiarly Indian immediacy’.

The issue of Indo-English novelists’ search for identity has been variously treated. Their exploration and organization of it have aroused different responses in different persons. C.D. Narasimhaiah states in *Explorations in Indo-English Fiction*, for example, discusses it that a creative literature and its language reflect. He remarks:

One does not, surely, mean one ought to deal with literature from the national standpoint…… what one has in mind is a shared tradition, a community of interests, and a set of values that a people live by, all of which give a sense of identity to individual and nations. The individual artist has to ‘discover’ as well ‘create’ his own identity. He does not find it ready-made. Of course, in the process he discovers and creates his national identity too. Indeed…. The two are connected and not mutually exclusive. (Dhawan 21)

Disgust with the super-facilities of upper-class urban existence propels the protagonist into a search for roots. The search for identity mirrors the compelling realities of a cosmopolitan consciousness. The search for identity on the part of the protagonist is marked into three distinct phases. The first phase is one in which the protagonist undergoes a crisis of identity due to several factors. This leads to the second phase of negation and total loss of identity. The final phase is one of reconstruction as the protagonist attempts to establish an identity on his own terms.

Existentialism is defined in the web page *all about philosophy* as, it in the broader sense is a twentieth century philosophy that is centered upon the analysis of existence and of the way humans find themselves existing in the world. The notion is
that humans exist first and then each individual spends a lifetime changing their essence or nature.

In simpler terms, existentialism is a philosophy concerned with finding self and the meaning of life through free will, choice and personal responsibility. The belief is that people are searching to find out who and what they are throughout life as they make choices based on their experiences, beliefs and outlook. And personal choices become unique without the necessity of an objective form of truth. An existentialist believes that a person should be forced to choose and be responsible without the help of laws, ethnic rules or traditions.

Existentialism is the search and journey for true self and true personal meaning in life. It is generally focused on the condition of human existence and an individual’s emotions, actions, responsibilities and thoughts or the meaning or purpose of life. Existentialistic ideas came out of a time in society when there was a deep sense of despair following the Great Depression and World War II. There was a spirit of optimism in society that was destroyed by World War I and its mid-century calamities. This despair has been articulated by existentialist philosophers well into the 1970s and continues on to this day as a popular way of thinking and reasoning with freedom to choose one’s preferred moral belief system and life style.

An existentialist could be a religious moralist, agnostic relativist, or a moral atheist. Kierkegaard, a religious philosopher, Nietzsche, an anti-Christian, Sartre, an atheist, and Camus an atheist are credited for their works and writings about existentialism. The early 19th century philosopher Soren Kierkegaard is regarded as the father of existentialism. Sartre is noted for bringing the most international attention to existentialism in the twentieth century. By the end of 1947, Camus’ earlier fiction and plays had been reprinted, his new play Caligula had been
performed and his novel *The Plague* was published. The first two novels of Sartre’s *The Roads Freedom* trilogy had appeared, as had Beauvoir’s novel *The Blood of others* works by Camus and Sartre were already appearing in foreign editions. The Paris-based existentialist had become famous. Existentialism involves the attempt to make meaning in a chaotic world ‘Man makes himself’. As a form of literary works, with special emphasis on the struggle to define meaning and identity in the face of alienation and isolation.

A novel is a long story but it is not a sequence of stories. It dramatizes life but it is not drama. It is written in prose but it is not prose. A novel can be defined in broad terms as a piece of prose fiction, which dramatizes life with the help of characters and situations. It presents some aspects of human experiences and creates real life atmosphere. A novel is prose ‘fiction’, that means it is an imaginary story. Even though it is imaginary or fictitious, it is life-like. A novel is a ‘long’ story but it is difficult to determine its length. The accepted length is usually more than fifty thousand words. Anything shorter than that is called a ‘novelette’. A novel is an extended narrative and distinct from the short story. In most European literature the word ‘roman’ is used for the novel, ‘Roman’ means ‘romance’. The earlier narratives were associated with the romantic adventures of the heroes and the heroines. The novel now has achieved a wider scope and is no longer a ‘romance’ though the term ‘roman’ stays on, the English name ‘novel’ is derived from the Italian ‘novella’ meaning ‘a little new thing’. Primarily, one reads novel for entertainment and also to learn about life. Novels provide us insight into the different aspects of human existence, human psyche, social and familial relationships and the philosophy of life. One shares the author’s experiences and learns from them. A novel is an artistic creation of life. Art cannot be didactic, so it does not purport to teach directly. One
has to learn from it. It helps us indirectly by extending our consciousness and making us aware of the immense possibilities of life.

By Indian English writing, we mean that body of literature which is written by Indians in English. It could be in the form of poetry, prose, fiction or drama. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Indians were able to read western literature that was available in English. They found the language and the literature versatile and some intellectuals took to conveying their social and religious thoughts in this language. The writings of people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and others started pouring in and gave rise to a body of prose literature having great socio-cultural relevance. Soon poets like Ramesh Chandra Dutt, Toru Dutt and many others took to writing poetry in English. But this literature was highly influenced by the style and content of English literature. Then came the Question of giving some name to this writing. In the early decades it was called ‘Anglo-Indian’ writing, to cover all writing in English about India, whether by Indians or Europeans. This Umbrella term did not fit well to the Indian setting. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar’s book Indo-Anglian literature gave it a distinct name and the literature written in English by Indians’ came to be known as Indo-Anglian Literature. Later, it was called Indian writing in English and now the popular term is Indian English Literature.

The novel came into existence in India in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indians started writing fiction in the Indian regional languages as well as in English. Members of the Dutt family (who published their poetry in the Dutt Family Album, 1870) are credited with writing the earliest Indian English Fiction. Kylas Chunder Dutt’s *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the year 1945* was published in the Calcutta Literary Gazette in 1835, while Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s *The Republic of*
Orissa: A page from the Annals of the 20th century was published in 1845. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s first novel, Rajmohan’s wife (1864) is the first full length Indian novel in English. He then took up writing in his mother tongue and all his other novels are written in Bangla. Other early novels written in English include Lal Behari Day’s Govinda Samanta, or The History of a Bengal Raiyat (1874) and Shoshee chunder Dutt’s The Young Zemindar (1883). Toru Dutt, better known as a poet, can be considered the first woman novelist- her unfinished novel, Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden was published after her death as a serial in Bengal Magazine in 1879. Rabindranath Tagore is for the many the author of the English Gitanjali, a poet incarnating the spirit of India, a prophet of the Religion of Man. Tagore was a very considerable novelist also. After one or two pieces written under the giant shadow of Bankim, Tagore achieved his first success with choker Bali (1902) now translated into English as Binodini by Krishna Kripalani. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) also went through a Bankim stage, produced his best work in Srikanta, Grihadaha, pather Dabi, Bipradas and Ses prasna. Srikanta has been translated into English by K.C. Sen. and Theodosia Thompson, and some other novels too have appeared in English. S.K. Ghosh’s The prince of Desting (1909) focus on the theme of east-west encounter.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the number of those writing increased rapidly. The children’s writer Dhan Gopal Mukerji’s only novel for adults, My Brother’s Face (1924), is the first expression in fiction of the quest for identity, a theme that has concerned many later Indian novelists. K.S. Venkataramani’s Murugan the Tiller and kandan the patriot were published in 1927 and 1932 respectively. Slowly, the Indian English novel started taking root. However, it was only after the emergence of the big three that the Indian novel drew the attention of critics and scholars. The big three were- Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.
Narayan. Mulk Raj Anand’s *untouchable* published in 1935 *coolist* Published in 1936 were acclaimed for portraying the searing reality of the life of the down trodden and the deprived sections of society. Anand came to be known as a committed writer. Raja Rao’s inclination was towards Indian metaphysic and the philosophical strain became the hallmark of his novels. R.K. Narayan created the famous Malgudi as a setting for his novels, which he gave us consistently from *Swami and Friends* (1935) to *The world of Nagaraj* (1990). He was loved for his ironic vision of life. It is, indeed, not possible to think of the Indian English novel without these three novelists who can be called the Principal triumvirs blazing Indian novelists in English.

The development of the Indian novel in English was initially weak, arid and hesitant. It was not technically strong, nor innovative. In the web page *egyankosh* according to Meenakshi Mukherjee “Traces of both, the prescribed novels and the Victorian pulp can be found in a curious amalgam in the early novels in the Indian languages”. In the web page *egyankosh*, H.M. Williams, another critic felt that the history of the Indian English novel was a “development from poetry to prose and from romantic idealization to various kinds of realism and symbolism”. From 1920’s till the 1940’s India witnessed a turbulent period in her history. The novelists found different themes for their stories like the freedom struggle, Gandhian ideology and its impact on society, need for social reforms, eradication of social evils, India’s modern destiny, the partition, the emergence of the new Urban India, the problems of rural India and so on. When one looks at the novel from this angle, one can find rich material having socio-cultural relevance.

By the late 1950’s and early 1960’s the second generation writers came up. Writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Manohar Malgonokar, Khushwant Singh and Bhabani Bhattacharya gave new direction to fiction. They started dealing with new subjects.
Nayantara Sahgal took up the political theme, while Malgonkar gave a historical perspective. Arun Joshi and Anita Desai ushered in the era of psychological fiction. By the 1980’s the novel had language, style and technique. At present writers like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, Shashi Deshpande and many others have earned name and fame.

From the day of Indian independence, Indians have progressed in many fields; in the field of writing too there has been a great flowering and the contribution of Indian women writers, especially novelists, which is really remarkable. Fiction is one of the most powerful and characteristic expression. It is the latest of literary forms to be evolved and the most dominant in the twentieth century. Many women wrote fiction in the late nineteenth century. It was with Kamala Markandaya that women’s writing came into the limelight. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, Anita Desai, Gita Mehta, Gita Hariharan, Namita Gokhale, Bharati Mukerjee, Nina Sobal, Shashi Deshpande, Uma Vasudev, Shobha De, Kalindi Sen Gupta, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapoor, through their writings, very successfully and skillfully capture the Indian ethos. At the same time they show their deep insight into human nature and their understanding of day- to- day problems. They deal with the various themes of clash between tradition and modernity, identity crisis of their protagonists, Indian woman’s quest for independence, the East-west conflict, freedom struggle movement and traumatic effects of partition. Their books portray the complexity and different colours of life in India. In more recent years, generations of talented women writers have emerged. They have their own different styles, but these writers share one common characteristic: that is in their hands, the English language becomes refined and they use it effortlessly.
Critics hailed Markandaya’s first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* published in 1954 as an ‘Epic of the Indian village’. She was a social-realist and depicted the realities of life in South India. Nayantara Sahgal gave political themes. Ruth pawar Jhabwala looked at India from the angle of a westerner. She is the first woman novelist of India who won the prestigious Booker prize in 1975 for her novel *Heat and Dust*. Arundhati Roy is called a ‘One-book wonder’ because she has not written any novel after *The God of small things* which won the Booker prize in 1997. Shobha De’s best selling but superficial novels depict the richer section of the modern Indian metropolis, Shashi Despande writes about the educated Urban middle-class woman in search of her identity. All women writers are not feminist writers. They write about women’s issues because being women they understand the problem of women which they project in their works. Shashi Deshpande also says in her interviews that she does not see herself as a ‘feminist’. Writing is spontaneous and should not be segregated on a male-female basis.

These Indian women novelists have successfully projected the urges, dreams and desires of Indian woman, in particular, the middle-class house wife who refuses to be suffocated by her environment. They depict woman in the context of the contemporary world, as an individual with freedom of choices. However, their canvas is not limited to women only, they depict a wider cultural scene, and the problems and difficulties, joys and sorrows of human beings which have universal significance. The writers of the postcolonial India portray life in all its depth and complexity in their novels. They have poignantly conveyed the predicament of people who are engaged in the struggle not only with their circumstances, with their limitations and failure, but also with their own self. The novelists show a deep insight into human nature, and at the same time they catch the epiphanies of life in their
They view life with a keen perception, sharp sensibility, an acute sense of observation and a fine sensitivity. Their achievement is recognized not only in India but in the world level.

Certain recent Indian novelists in English have made significant efforts to delineate the predicament of the modern man. The works of Arun Joshi in particular read like the spiritual odyssey of the twentieth century man who has lost his spiritual moorings. Pathak states in the article “Quest for meaning in Arun Joshi’s novels” in the book *The Novels of Arun Joshi*, despite some differences in their approach, all of Joshi’s heroes are “men engaged in the meaning of life” (*Dhawan 46*). The novelist has tried to project through their experiences the crisis of the urbanized and highly industrialized modern civilization along with its dehumanizing impact on the individual who is ever eager to find out and reaffirm the value of meaningful relatedness in life.

Arun Joshi is one of the leading Indian novelists who have been actively writing in the second half of the present century. Arun Joshi was born on July 7, 1939 at Varanasi, is one of the noted novelists of Indian English literature. He has had no mean Intellectual heritage. His father, A.C. Joshi was one of the eminent Botanists of the country. He served many prestigious institutions of the country and was associated with several national level learned committees. Professor A.C. Joshi was then the Vice Chancellor of Punjab University and he was also later appointed Vice Chancellor of Benares Hindu University, where he had also worked as a Faculty member of the Department of Botany. Arun Joshi was sent to the United States to receive his higher education where he studied at various centers of education. After passing his B.S. from Kansas University in 1959, he got his M.S. Degree from M.I.T., United States in 1960. After receiving his higher education in the United States, he
joined D.C.M. in 1961 as chief of its recruitment and training department. In 1964, he married Rukmani Lal, the daughter of a D.C.M. share holder and subsequently held several positions in the company, such as in the D.C.M. corporate performance Assessment cell: Secretary, D.C.M. Board of Management; Executive Director of Sri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, and he set up his own separate industrial establishments to manufacture diesel engines. He has to his credit five novels: *The Foreigner* (1968), *The strange case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *The Apprentice* (1974), *The Last Labyrinth* (1980) and *The city and the River* (1990) and a collection of short stories *The survivor* (1976). Besides novels and short stories collection, he has written also a book on business history *Lala Sri Ram: A study in Entrepreneurship in Industrial Management* (1995). He was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 1982 for *The Last Labyrinth*. He presents the aspects of Indian life so skillfully that it becomes universal in his creative smithy. All of his novels are splendid, serious and powerfully disturbing.

In an interview, Arun Joshi has confessed that he was prompted into writing to explore ‘that mysterious underworld which is the human soul’. In another statement Arun Joshi has said that he ‘essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of himself’. In the fictional world of Arun Joshi, the questions of the self and its existence are the points to be probed. He delves deep into the dark recesses of the mind which are the inscrutable region of uncertainty and inscrutability. As R.K. Dhawan writes in *The Novels of Arun Joshi*:

> Reading Joshi’s novels is not always a smooth experience; there are moments when one is assailed by doubts and questions. There is “something” that attracts one’s attention and then grips. Joshi delves into the inner recesses of human psyche where he finds instincts and
impulses at work; he seeks a process of the apprehension of reality
which may lead him to the world of the core of the truth of man’s life.
He realizes man’s uniqueness and loneliness in an indifferent and
inscrutable universe. (8)

The fictional world of Arun Joshi postulates the clash between alienated self
and the socio-cultural forces. The protagonists of his novels are subjected to extreme
social, cultural and psychological pressures. The inter-generational tensions
engendered with the changing ethos make increasing demands on the individual and
contribute in creating a void which is nothing but a chaotic feeling of rootlessness in
life, incessantly haunting their psyche and corroding every sphere of their life. This
awareness of rootlessness and consequential anxiety is the keynote of Joshi’s
existential vision of the plight of modern men. The protagonists discover the meaning
and value of life probing through the dark mossy labyrinths of the soul. Their search
for identity is the leitmotif of Arun Joshi’s novels.

Joshi’s protagonists are confused men who find themselves participating in a
wild rat race with no clear goal in mind. The economic drudgery, social pressures, the
dissolution of old faiths and dogmas and uncertain loyalties mercilessly crumples
their life and wounds their psyche. So they adopt a cynical attitude towards life and
the established social norms and values. They rebel against the socio-cultural
pressures and pursue their quest for identity. Through self-probing, self-exploration
and perceptions of the past and alienating experiences of the present, they discover the
higher values of life.

His first novel The Foreigner is thematically based on the lower depths of
human sufferings and existential agony of human psyche. The protagonist, Sindi
Oberoi, is a product of social situation of the west and the East, who lives in a socio-
psychological dilemma. He was born of an English mother and an Indian father. After his parents died at the age of four, he was brought up by his Uncle in Kenya. His formal education was completed in East Africa, London and America. Living deprived of parental love and care, he has apparent indifferences towards his parents. Sindi, June and Babu and their interrelation forms a triangle revealing their true characters. Babu, an Indian boy, is seen in passionate love with June, who finds herself unable despite being already in love with Sindi, to refuse him due to his genuine and passionate devotion. When Babu comes to know that June is yielding towards Sindi, he commits suicide. Sindi’s relationship with Anna, Kathy and June fails as he is unable to surrender completely with devotion to any relation. When Mr. Khemka’s industry is ruined, Sindi decides to come back to Bombay. He takes over the management of the imprisoned Khemka’s business and is fully devoted to the task of looking after the sinking business. He is finally settled with the business with sheela and also with himself.

The strange case of Billy Biswas is Joshi’s next novel, is narrated by a narrator Romi (Romesh Sahsai) who is a friend of the protagonist Billy (Bimal Biswas). Billy has first of all met him as a student in the New York. He always feels himself like a fish out of water while living in New York. Billy, who is an engineer and an anthropologist, feels alienated in the western world. An inner force within himself forces him to leave so called civilized western world. Billy hears the voice of his soul. Billy is married to Meena, an usually pretty, aristocratic girl. But soon after having a son by her, the primitive urge in him, which he has always pused into background becomes irresistible. Billy’s attraction to Bilasia, a tribal woman is not sexual lust but it is the primitive element in him which gets an upper hand. And it is in this life that Billy finds fulfillment and identification and the essence of human
existence. The effort to capture him leads to final catastrophe; only his ashes reach
the civilized world from which Billy opted out.

_The Apprentice_, the third novel of Arun Joshi, is the story of a young man who
out of sheer exhaustion of joblessness and privation is forced to shed the honesty and
the old-world morality of his father to become an apprentice to the corrupt
civilization. Ratan after his initial hesitation, yields completely to the corruption of
modern society and thrives on it. In spite of all the material comforts available to him,
discontentment becomes a way of life. He leads a frustrated and exhausted family
life. The more money he accumulates, the more dissatisfied he is. He feels restless.
His corrupt deal at the end costs the life of the Brigadier, his closest friend. He
realizes the gravity of his sin. His quest to understand the meaning of life, he
undergoes the sternest apprenticeship in the world. Symbolically he starts at the
lowest dusting the shoes of the congregation outside the temple every morning on his
way to the office. He learns the lessons of humility. He seeks fulfillment in this
symbolic act.

Joshi’s fourth novel _The Last Labyrinth_ shows the dilemma of modern man,
living in turbulent and groping in the darkness of life, existence and reality. The hero,
Som Bhaskar is young, educated intelligent and millionaire industrialist. He is a type
of a character who wants to become a business tycoon but he is never content with his
lot. He was educated in foreign universities. His scientist father researched on
psychological truths and the first cause of the universe. He is also a plastics
manufacturer and after his death, Som Bhaskar is married to Geeta, who is a chaste
Hindu wife; but Som Bhaskar runs after several other ladies such as Leila Sabnis in
Bombay and Anuradha in Benaras. Som Bhaskar’s contact with Anuradha in Benaras
causes an upheaval in his life. Anuradha is a model of an antique life and is endowed
with liberated views. Som Bhaskar hungers for possessing not only Anuradha for ever from Aftab Rai but also to acquire his shares in the plastics market. He is also plagued by his love and lust for her. Anuradha’s disappearance is a mystery to him. In the end Som Bhaskar attempts suicide by taking his grandfather’s revolver from the cabinet, he takes it casually to his temple. His wife Geeta prevents it from getting fired, “shaking me gently as though rousing a man from sleep” (TLL 107). The Last Labyrinth explores the pains of alienation and the intensity of quest with a greater force and complexity.

Joshi’s latest novel The City and The River strikes and entirely different theme from Arun Joshi’s earlier novels. The city represents the city state governed by the Grand Master, who runs it with the assistance of a council of Advisers. The river passing by the city symbolizes the endless flow of life. The real sons of the river are the boatmen living in mud houses that lie scattered by the river on the outskirts of the city. The brick people have all lost their authenticity and are not concerned with what goes on in their city state. The mud-people on the other hand, are all deeply involved in the anti-repressive measures adopted to subjugate them. The Grand Master with his advisers creates a reign of terror and the state terrorism is let loose. The Grand Master assisted by his son and advisers use the latest scientific equipment to suppress boat men’s rebellion. Boatmen are tortured; their head person, who is woman, is imprisoned and blinded. There is much destruction of life and property including the Grand Father’s Rose Garden and the inmates in it. Finally, nature has its own revenge as the river rises to an unprecedented level and washes away the entire city including its buildings and inmates, leaving no trace of any habitation. Yet out of the ruins of the old city a new one rises up; and it has all the ways of life that had been there in the old city. Out of the flood only one person survives, and he has been simply called
nameless-one, who is an illegal child and who is sent to the city with the mission to re-establish it. In the end, they compromise but not with life and creativity but with death and destructivity.

Shashi Deshpande occupies a significant place among the contemporary women novelists who concern themselves with the problems of women and their quest for identity. She had a very sharp brain. Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, a small town of North Karnataka, India. She is the daughter of the renowned Kannada writer and Sanskrit scholar, the late Adya Rangachrya popularly known as ‘Sriranga’, a cerebral and intellectual man who was dedicated to the writing of plays. His identity was acknowledged as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada Theatre. His literary creed and intellectual horizon was a major influence in the life of Shashi Deshpande. Speaking of the influences that shaped her sensibility as a writer, Deshpande said that her father’s liberal and sometimes radical ideas played an important role in shaping of her sensibility as a creative artist. Her father never imposed the limitations of gender bias existing in society. From her father she inherited intellectual and unconventional bent of mind.

Shashi Deshpande got her education in Bombay and Bangalore. At the age of fifteen, she went to Bombay where she graduated in Economics from Elphinstone College, Bombay. Later on, she moved to Bangalore where she completed her graduation in Law from Government Law College, Bangalore. Subsequently she took a course in Journalism and for a short span of time she associated herself with a magazine. Later on, she took a post graduate Degree in English from Mysore University. She was married to Dr. D.H. Deshpande, a neuro-pathologist in 1962. These diverse influences from the cross stream enriched her vision and moulded her creative sensibility. She said that there are three things in her early life that have
shaped her as a writer. They are: that her father was a writer, that she was educated exclusively in English and that she was born a female.

Shashi Deshpande is one of those artists who instead of adhering to any established tradition of fiction created her own tradition of fiction that provided her ample spaces to explore the inner world of female consciousness. Under the influence and inspiration of her father, she started her literary career in 1970. In one of her interviews she confessed that she began writing most casually and without any intention of settling down to career in writing. Ever since her visit to England with her husband in 1969, she felt an internal compulsion to express her inner experiences in the form of creative writings. In an interview with M.D. Riti on her curiosity about the genetics of her creative impulse, Shashi Deshpande revealed that she entered an Eve’s weekly short story competition in 1971, and won a consolation prize. That was her very first short story. Later, she was working for onlooker, they asked her to give them a short story for their annual. She was hesitant at first. Then all the stories started pouring out, as if they had been dammed in for a long time. She has never experienced that spontaneous flow again. It has always been conscious writing after that. This observation makes it evident that like Wordsworth and Hardy, creative writing was an internal compulsion with Shashi Deshpande. She wrote several short stories that were published in the reputed magazines. Her first collection of stories, published in 1978, was entitled The Legacy and other stories. Her other collections of short stories are: It was Dark and other stories (1986), The Miracle and other stories (1986), It was the Nightingale and other stories (1986), Stone woman and other stories (2000). In between, Shashi Deshpande tried to make experiments with detective writings and was successful in producing three detective serials. Out of them, two were subsequently expanded as regular novels- If I Die Today (1982) and
Come up and Be dead (1983). These two are short crime novels. She also published several children’s book in English.


Shashi Deshpande through her novels has tried to represent the suffering and attitude of average upper middle class Indian woman who has no pretension of exceptional idealism. Her female characters are anxious to have a realization of their individuality and identity. In the web page Shashi Deshpande: The confident voice, she says- “Basically mine is a quest for the human self within the woman.”

Anita Desai was the first to explore the modern Indian sensibility. Shashi Deshpande moves further and catches on the subtle psychological complexities of the individual mind. She possesses a keen insight into subtleties of human behaviour, probes oneself more than the other self, identifies herself with the crisis of times or day-to-day life, in search of meaning and purpose of life and analyses why and what an individual is? We also notice in her novels two parallel streams in Indian thought and thrust- the individualistic and the socialistic and she seems to contribute to the former notion. The word ‘alone’ is characteristic to note as if it haunts her and finds the most favoured treatment in the world of words carrying only one meaning everywhere: ‘alone each is and lives by oneself’.

The identity question, Shashi Deshpande deals with, is as old as human nature. Ever since man became aware of his self he made strides towards attaining it. There has been an ongoing search for the unattainably attainable. The chief concern in
Shashi Despande’s novels is evidently self-assessment, which she presents through naturalistic technique - there is fear to face oneself; there is no reason to fear oneself, that is the want to moral courage and possible loss of happiness even though illusory; and there is way to ellude this fear and gain one’s own self, that fear doesn’t exist at all. In all her novels she has written so far, she is in search of meaning and purpose of life in relation to the individual’s existence. But self-psychosis is forceful condition to reckon with as it creates hurdles in the way of gaining one’s own identity, although it is only a one-moment-realization and the person knows what he is. But the malaise is that man does not know what he wants to know indeed or knows that he does not have the courage to know what he is and can be happy only when he rises to the occasion. So he perpetrates the illusion of happiness through material objects and scapegoats blaming others for his problems.

Deshpande has shown her potential as an analyst of human psyche. As her objective is to probe the deeper layers of human sensibility, she shows that man’s basic desire is to be himself, but the pressure of other considerations is so overpowering that it is lost in wilderness. As self-psychosis is her prime concern, death, loneliness and the alienated self become her pastures through which Shashi Deshpande wades towards meaning of life, identity, her own individuality.

*Roots and shadows* first full length novel is about the struggle of the protagonist Indu- representative of the educated, middle-class women- as to how her assertion of her individuality to achieve freedom leads to her confrontation with her family and the male-dominated society. Feeling smothered in an oppressive male-dominated and tradition-bound society, she attempts to explore her inner self to assert her individuality. The novel highlights the mental crisis experienced by the protagonist, Indu. The character of Indu is portrayed as an unconventional woman
who finds herself alienated when she refuses to conform to the rigid codes of life laid down by society. She resolves to marry a man of her own choice. However, the reality existing behind the illusion of marriage only brings disillusionment and suffocation in her life. However, Indu registers her protest against the meaningless customs and rituals that are closely associated with the idea of male chauvinism.

Deshpande’s second novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* seeks to expose the problem of masculine ego that makes harmonious conjugal relationship impossible. Sarita, the protagonist of the novel, in spite of her childhood insecurity makes alternative spaces with her success as a doctor; she enjoys better economic security and social status than that of her husband, Manohar. Her success becomes the cause of inferiority in the mind of Manu and it subsequently converts into sexual sadism. Besides, through the antagonism of the personal relationship of Sarita and Manu, Deshpande recreates the horrible effect of the myth of preference of a male child on the psyche of a sensitive young girl. Saru’s life represents the apathy of the parents and the hostility of the husband but these negative pulls inspire her to construct her identity beyond socially accepted images.

Deshpande’s third novel *That Long Silence* was awarded Sahitya Akademi award in 1990. She achieved the Zenith of her creative career with the publication of this novel. The novel deals with the protagonist Jaya’s passage through a maze of self-doubts and fears towards the affirmation of herself. A crisis in the middle-class family of the protagonist triggers off a chain of events which compel her to view her life in retrospection. In her anxiety to play the role of wife and mother to perfection, Jaya realizes that she does not do justice to her talents as a writer. Jaya represents the predicament of self-conscious educated woman who in spite of having a realization of the addict of life finds herself helpless against the strong hold of tradition. Her fear
even discourages her from acknowledging her friendship with another man. Jaya in the process of narrating the story of different characters unconsciously discovers a voice for her own silence. It is not only the question of the silence of Jaya but also of the silence of entire womankind.

*The Binding Vine* her fourth novel, deals with the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmi to focus attention on victims like Kalpana and Mira. Urmi narrates the pathetic tale of Mira, her mother-in-law, who is a victim of marital rape in marriage. Mira, in the solitude of her unhappy marriage, would write poems, which were posthumously translated and published by Urmi. Urmi also narrates the tale of her acquaintance Shakutai, who had been deserted by her husband for another woman. The worst part of the tale is that her elder daughter Kalpana is brutally raped by her sister Sulu’s husband Prabhakar. Urmi takes up cudgels on Kalpana’s behalf and brings the culprit to book. In the novel, *The Binding Vine*, there is an extension of her vision asserting that woman in order to seek her identity is bound to express her rage against the irrational control of tradition.

In *A matter of Time*, her fifth novel, Shashi Deshpande for the first time enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. Basically, it is about three women from three generations from same family and how they cope with the tragedies in their lives. Sumi is deserted by her husband Gopal, and she faces her humiliation with great courage and stoicism. Though, deep inside, she is struck with immense grief, but tries to keep herself composed for the sake of her daughters. Her mother Kalyani was married off to her maternal Uncle Shripati. When their four-year-old son gets lost at a railway station, Shripati sends her back to her parent’s house. On Manorama’s request, when he returns, he maintains a stony silence for the rest of his life. Kalyani’s mother Manorama fails to beget a male heir to her husband, and fears
lest he should take another wife for the same purpose. Manorama, to avoid the property getting passed on to other family, gets Kalyani married to her brother shripati. Thus Deshpande has revealed to our gaze the fear, frustrations and compulsions of three women from three generations from the same family.

In the novel *Small Remedies*, Shashi Deshpande makes experiment with autobiographical fiction. Madhu, the central character appears as a journalist who undertakes the task of constructing the biography of Savitribai Indorekar, than aged but consummate singer of Hindustani Music. She denies the traditional responsibilities of family life to pursue her mission as a musician. She also ignores her commitment in personal relationship as a mother and as a wife. Along with Savitribai, there are also the references of the life of Leela, Bai’s sister. Leela also adopts an unconventional career and arranges a marriage of her own convenience beyond the traditions of her caste and family. At the centre of this sprawling narrative is Madhu who in the process of revealing the life of Munni, Savitri and Leela starts making introspection of her own life. From a distant observer, she becomes an insider of the whole affair. The entire fabric of the novel *Small Remedies* seems to be an investigation to conclude how far a woman can escape her femininity to construct her identity in patriarchal social structure.

The tallest novel of Shashi Deshpande *Moving On* came out in the year 2004. In this novel, Deshpande presents the struggle of a woman to find out a meaningful definition of her life. In the texture of this novel, Deshpande has portrayed the underworld through the life of Manjari’s uncle Laxmanmama. Along with her concern with criminal world, Shashi Deshpande focuses her attention at the central theme of the crisis of balance in personal relationship. Manjari, the narrator tries to reconstruct the life of her parents as having individual identity. Manjari’s efforts to discover the
past of her parents, helps her to understand the enigma of her own unfathomable self and makes her realize the need to create individual self than being involved in the forced relationship. In the novel, *Moving on*, Shashi Deshpande through the conflict of Manjari presents the riddle of mother and daughter relationship, father and daughter relationship, the issue of female sexuality, man’s conditioning to social images and man’s dependence on gender stereotype.

A deep analysis of her novels leaves no doubt about her genuine concern for women. Her protagonists are acutely aware of their smothered and fettered existence in an orthodox male-dominated society. Caught between tradition and modernity, her protagonists search for their identity within marriage. The realistic delineation of women as wife, mother and daughter, their search for identity and sexuality as well, leaves the readers in no doubt where her real sympathies lie. The contribution of Shashi Deshpande is of paramount significance. She explores new horizons in the realm of Indian English fiction.

After having dealt with the explanation of the thesis title, history of the novel in Indian writing, life histories of the author’s chosen, followed immediately by the synopses of their most important novels, now the researcher goes on to discuss, in the following chapters, how the title of the thesis, that is quest for identity, is very dominant in some of their novels chosen as primary sources.