CHAPTER -1

INTRODUCTION : MELANGE
CHAPTER -1

INTRODUCTION : MELANGE

Humanity recognizes no sex; mind recognizes no sex; life and death, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery recognizes no sex. Like man, woman comes involuntarily into existence; like him she has to pay the penalty for disobeying nature’s laws and for greater penalties she has to suffer from ignorance… like men. She also enjoys or suffers with her country. Like man, woman comes involuntarily into existence. Yet she is not recognized as his equal! (Ernestine: 1881, 1).

Like men, women have all potentialities and abilities, still they are not recognized as equal to men. It is said that the literature of a country is the storehouse of the cultural, political and sociological aspects of its people; but literature has been twisted from the male point of view. In India, women are the victims of the economic, political and social oppressive forces which relegate them to a subordinate position in the society. They are oppressed, suppressed and even marginalized in the matter of sharing the available opportunity for fulfillment of their lives. This is the predicament of Indian women.

Though Indian women constitute half of the population of the country, equality is an impossible commodity for them because all the superior and positive qualities are attributed to men and the qualities associated with women are considered to be inferior.
In a male dominated society, woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent home – maker with various roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are qualities required for her. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society. In the words of Mary Ann Fergusson:

… in every age woman has been seen primarily as mother, wife, mistress and as sex object. Their roles in relationship with men (Fergusson: 1973, 4–5).

Even the concept of an ideal wife is represented in a famous shloka where she is described as ‘Grihini’, ‘Sachivah’, ‘Sakhi’, ‘Mathah’, ‘Priya’, ‘Shishyalalite’ and ‘Kala Vidhu’. That means a woman has to perform many roles in the family and the society. She is not only a wife but also a counsellor and the playmate to the partner. As described in one of the famous shlokas:

“Karyeshu Mantri, Karmeshu Daasi, Rupeshu Lakshmi, Kshamaya Dharitri, Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayaneshu Rambha, Shat Karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni”

(Acharya: 1952, 35).

(A woman should serve her husband as minister while counseling, by her appearance she should be as Goddess Laxmi, like the earth in forbearance, as a mother like feeding and in bed, she must be like the celestial beauty. Thus she has to perform many duties).

Even in great Indian epics, a woman is defined as Goddess and divine mother. She is described as an epitome of patience, suffering and forbearance. For centuries, the Hindu woman has idealized the mythic
models from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and other Purana Shastras. At every stage of her life, she is dependent for her status and survival upon man – her father, her husband and her sons. The man-made culture feels that the goal of the life of a woman is to worship her husband. There are deities who represent power (Shakti), knowledge (Swaraswati), wealth (Lakshmi). But these aspects seem to have faded out in a mythological haze, for women are totally eclipsed by their constant subservient role.

1.1 Women: Then and Now

In Indian society, the status of women has changed from time to time. We can divide the past into three phases to analyze the status of women. They are ancient, medieval and modern Indian period. During the Vedic period, women were treated with dignity and high respect in all the spheres of life – religious, political, social and economic. In Rigveda, the Purusha and Prakruti were considered equally important for creation. We have the concept of ‘Ardhanareshwar’ in the Hindu mythologies, comprising half male and half female. Throughout the Vedic period, woman was given equal status to that of male. She was on an equal footing with man in upholding dharma.

Woman’s education was encouraged. Wives of great rishies took active part in intellectual discussions. They were also permitted to attend important assemblies, religious duties and rituals. In The History of Civilization in Ancient India (1972) Romesh Chandra Dutt opines that woman, during the Vedic period, was the greatest symbol of Hindu womanhood. He further describes:
Women were honoured in ancient India, more perhaps than among any other ancient nation on the face of the globe. They were considered the intellectual companions of their husbands... affectionate helpmate in journey of life, and ... inseparable partners in their religious duties (Dutt: 1972, 67).

She even could fight wars in the battlefields like Kaikayee and take part in philosophic discussion like Gargi, Maitreyi and Lopamudra.

Gargi, Lopamudra, Bhirwara, Ghosha, Godha, Apala, Vishwavara, Maitreyi, Arundhati etc. were highly learned women while scholars like Sulabhai, Vachakanave, Leelavathi were great Mathematicians. During this period, women were also permitted to learn grammar and fine arts like dancing and painting. They were also interested in some of the vocational courses like spinning and weaving, thread making etc. Women took part in the intellectual and spiritual life of the community. Some of the hymns of *Rigveda* were composed by women.

If we look at the ancient literature, we come across many celebrities who associated their names with names of their mothers and not with their fathers. Such names are Satyakam Jabala – the son of Jabala, Sariputra – the son of the lady Sari, Vainateya – the son of Vanita.

Vedic marriage ceremony considered wife as *ardhangini* – a companion. An unmarried man was considered to be incomplete without wife. All religious ceremonies were performed by the husband alongwith the wife. This shows the importance given to the woman in ancient period. The ideal example of this is Saptapadi (seven steps) which
establishes the union between the husband and wife. Both the bride and bridegroom take seven steps repeating the following shloka:

Let us pray together  
For life – sap as we take first step  
For power as we take second step  
For wealth as we take third step  
For happiness as we take fourth step  
For offspring as we take fifth step  
For a prolonged life together as we take sixth step  
And be thou now my mate as we take the seventh step.

Girls had the option of choosing their life partners through swayamvara. They had also right to choose their husband through gandharva vivah. The example of Dushyanta and Shakuntala is a case in point.

After Rig Vedic period, the concept of Pativratam developed in the days of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. For women, Sita, Savitri and Gandhari were models and following the path of these models, women were taught to be shy, gentle and dignified, faithful as a wife and loving and selfless as a mother. Women were encouraged to emulate the epic archetypes of Sita, Savitri and Draupadi, who were symbolic of absolute fidelity. There was an anxiety to preserve the figure of woman as the epitome of all that was pure and chaste. Shanta Krishnaswami, aptly remarks about the real state of Indian women thus:

…as a child, is sold to strangers for bridal price or when she grows up, serves as a supplier of dowry for her husband’s family or who, as a widow in a final act of obliteration immolates herself on her dead husband’s funeral pyre to be acclaimed as ‘Sati Savitri’, as an immortal ( Krishnaswami : 1984 , 2 ).
Sita was considered as a paragon of feminine perfections. Sita has been held as an example to be followed by Hindu women down the centuries to the present day. But in fact, Sita’s story is the story of pain, misery, suffering and humiliation from Rama and also by the society. So absolute *pativratham* is a myth rather than reality.

Another example is of Draupadi from *the Mahabharata*. Though she was confident of her own strength of mind and will, she became a victim of the patriarchal society. She was openly humiliated in the assembly of Hastinapur by Kauravas in the presence of Pandavas.

During the subsequent periods, there has been a gradual decline in the status of women. During the Atharvaveda period, people were seen displaying a strong preference for boys. The birth of a son was welcomed because it was a common belief that the son would save his father from the hell called “Punnama Narkam”. There was not a single word used for the daughter. A wife was also asked to be the mother of sons and not of the mother of daughters. The blessings was also given as “Shat Putra Bhavati”. It was said that a wife is a comrade, a daughter a misery and a son a light in the highest heaven.

During this period, the father was the head of the family. Because of the patriarchal ideology, the birth of a son became a celebration while the birth of a daughter was looked upon with disfavour. Thus, the freedom which women enjoyed during the Vedic period was steadily but increasingly declined.
The deterioration in the position of women began with the Pauranic and Dharma Shastra period because strict laws for the women were established by so called Dharmagurus. They established that women were just the shadow of men. King Manu, the creator of the law in the Indian society, did not advocate equality between men and women. But Manu was not a woman hater or did not intend to give the secondary position to women in the society. He said:

“Yatra Naryastu Pujayante, Ramante Tatra Devata”

This means –

“Where women are honoured, there the Gods are pleased, but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards”. Manu regarded woman as more emotional and sensitive and less rational than man.

The only aim of her life was to obey and follow the command of man in various forms. It was believed that the husband was God for the woman and the devotion to him was equivalent to man’s devotion to God. This enslavement of her to man was by brutal irony of life glorified as Pativrata. The father’s will or the husband’s will is the will of God. As Manu said:

Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere he must be worshipped as God (Manu: 1983, 38).

The woman was excluded from Vendantic learning during this period and had no right to own wealth. The evil of child marriage, the prohibition of the remarriage for the widow and sati tradition were very
prominent in those days. The creator of laws like Marichi and Atri warned the parents against the marriage of a mature daughter as they thought that kanyadan of an immature girl child would bring them to the heaven. As Marichi remarked:

The father, mother, the eldest brother of a maiden seeing her in menstrual course go to the hell ( Thomas : 1964 , 225 ).

Afraid of this religious code, the people of upper caste gave their daughters in marriage before ten. Thus, pre – puberty marriages became quite popular and prevalent.

The second evil given by these law creators was the prohibition of the remarriage of the widows. The life of a widow was an ordeal of fire. Her status in the family was that of an unfortunate woman and she was kept out from some auspicious ceremonies since she was considered inauspicious by the law givers.

Some of the law creators like Angira favoured sati tradition and it was considered to be a holy act for a woman to burn herself alive after the death of her husband. As Angira wrote:

Sati takes out her husband from Hell and enjoys heaven with him for three and a half crores of years ( Thomas : 1964 , 231 ).

The double standard of morality set up by Manu and other law makers worsened the position of women in the society because people did not understand their real intention in presenting women. The position of women became worse, child marriage became rampant, girls’ education tended to be absolutely nil.
But during the Buddhist era, there was equal status of women to men because it allowed women to be educated, to travel as missionaries and even to remain unmarried. Buddha’s respect and compassion for human beings gave respect to women also. In this way, there was the upliftment in the position of women in the society. Child marriage, sati and bride price were discarded. As Buddha believed in individual’s independence and ultimate liberation, women became truly unshackled. Jainism also followed it and gave respect to women. The monastic life of the Jains offered their women the best opportunities for intellectual and aesthetic cultivation.

Entry of Islam into India made the position of women even more precarious, deteriorating and marginalized. Lack of education and increasing number of child marriage during this period worsened the position of women. It was one of the darkest periods for women in the history of India. Women were carried away as “commodities” by the invaders. The purdah system came into existence which prevented women from participating in public affairs. Their work was only confined to the four walls of the house. A feeling of insecurity pervaded among them. They were expected to be devoted, submissive and docile.

At the time of the arrival of British, women’s position had reached the nadir. Women were considered a completely inferior species, inferior to the male, having no importance, no personality. Socially, they were kept in the state of utter subjugation, denied every right, suppressed and oppressed. Custom of polygamy, property structure, the purdah, state of permanent widowhood were rampant.
They were considered as shudra, polluted, untouchable and marginalized. They were also abused, beaten, expelled and sometimes even raped and still they had to be silent. They had no dreams of their own. They had no separate status as the member of the family. Their existence was taken for granted. Their desires, opinions, likes and dislikes were never to be considered.

Most of the Indian women were not conscious of their low status and those who were aware of it were mostly helpless because of social structure and cultural values. Most of the legislations remained on paper and out of the reach of common women. So, women were in the sorry state. The Vedic liberties enjoyed by women were forgotten now.

The birth of two movements during the colonial rule in India created awareness of the need for improvement in women’s condition. These movements were the Social Reform Movement and the Nationalist Movement. These movements brought about a change in the status of women.

Some of the social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi, Jyotiba Phule, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Maharshi Karve etc. raised their voice against the social evils regarding pathetic situation of women. These pioneers preached against the sati, pleaded for the remarriage of the widows, worked for the removal of caste barriers and for the eradication of untouchability. In the words of Indira Kulashreshta:

After centuries of social stagnation, the Indian woman was now encouraged to come back to the main stream
of social life and resume her rightful place  
( Kulashreshta : 1999 , 5 ).

With the growth of educational and vocational opportunities, educated women became conscious of their rights. They became conscious of the fact that they too were humans first of all and therefore deserved equal rights. More and more educational opportunities were provided to them. There was a drastic change in the position and attitude towards women with the exposure of reformist movements, economic independence and also the influence of various western feminist movements. Now, women began to voice their desires and feelings without hesitation. As Meena Shirwadkar observes:

As women received education, they began to feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility with their tradition bound surrounding resentment of male dominated ideas of morality and behaviour problems at home and at place of work or in society – all came up in a welter of projection ( Shirwadker : 1979 ,201 ).

The Indian women began to stir out of their placid stoicism. Their political and social consciousness brought them out into the open protest, marching against discrimination and evils like rape, exploitation and dowry deaths.

During the period of Renaissance in India, the Indian society was under the impact of the west. The nationalist spirit was kindled. There was more emphasis on humanitarianism and women began to voice freely their feelings and experiences. Feminism in Indian English literature is a by – product of the western feminist movement but the western feminist
theory should not lead us because cultural contexts must be considered first. We have a different history, ethos, forms of social stratification and patriarchal domination. The western individualism may prove to be impractical in the Indian context. In an interview, Shashi Deshpande told Lakshmi Holmstrom:

It is difficult to apply Kate Millett or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India. …They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, children or about not being married, not having children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences (Deshpande: 1993, 26).

Free India provided her female population the constitutional right to equality of opportunity and status before law, right to receive education, right to property, reservation of seats in legislative bodies at various levels, right to choice in marriage, participate in public and political life and numerous other rights and privileges. According to Vimla Patil:

Women in India have changed at a faster rate than women anywhere else in the world and their ‘attitude’ has changed the very face of our society (Patil: 2002, 25).

Now the position of women is equal to that of men socially, economically, politically and legally. Today a woman is not a doll in the hands of man. She is being seen establishing her identity in almost every walk of life. She can seek employment anywhere and remains not a domestic slave. Now woman begins to voice her feelings.
However, such women are a few in numbers while the majority of them still conform to the tradition bound concept of womanhood mainly for the fear of ostracism. She is in the age of alienation. The deep rooted and age – old customs and taboos force women to fit into the fixed structures created by male ideology. The deep rooted myths about women have not allowed them to lead an authentically free life. The average Indian woman remains relatively unchanged, shackled by the superstitions and customs that are perpetuated in the name of tradition.

Despite equal opportunities of education and economic independence, women remain a victim of domestic injustice within the family and other legal rights outside. The women have been working indoors and outdoors, but their services remain unrecognized. Although the lot of women in the family and society have changed with the times for the better, but remained invariably inferior to those of men.

Still the number of women enjoying considerable freedom is very meager. For the majority of women, subordination to men and misery are synonymous. From the centuries, the fight for emancipation of women was taken over by a few educated women and they turned writers. The motive was to voice their own bitter experiences as women with a view to influencing the society and affecting social reforms. Prof. John B. Alphonso Karkala in his book *Indo – English Literature of the Nineteenth Century* writes :

They tried to tell the world the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give form and shape to their autobiographical accounts, which attracted publishers, both in India and abroad (Karakala : 1970,78 ).
1.2 Contribution of Indian Women Novelists to English Literature

It is said that those who name the objects, own them and those who rule the word, rule the world. Not only in the text but also everywhere one can see a deep rooted gender bias; but the bias has become part of the textual tradition. In all traditions, women have always been considered inferior and incapable of any serious thinking. The period in which they live, more or less the same perception and sex – stereotyping is seen in language and literature.

The introduction of English education in India not only brought significant changes in the middle class life style but also raised a consciousness of freedom in the minds of women. In India a few women writers in English have attempted to challenge the age old myths surrounding the woman. Some have succeeded in creating an awareness of the existing inequalities in society. The women writers have used the conflict between tradition and modernity. These women writers portray women facing the conflicts and problems issuing from the fusion of the traditional and modern values. They face the conflict between a personal fulfillment of desires and their duties towards family and children. Thus, most of the women writers have taken up the theme of the problem of adjustment and they have shown adjusting themselves to the ground reality. With their increasing consciousness as an individual, they have begun to assert themselves within the family and outside it as well. Sushila Singh rightly observes:

Human experience for centuries has been synonymous with the masculine experience with the result that the
collective image of humanity has been one sided and incomplete. Woman has not been defined as a subject in her own right but merely as an entity that concern man either in his real life or his fantasy life (Singh: 1991, 7).

In modern India, the novel has become one of the most prolific, comprehensive, lucid and sensitive registers to represent this complex social and cultural life.

The novel is the most important of all the literary genres of India today and women writers themselves have made tremendous contribution in the development of novel. Their writing has expanded its social range. They have eloquently voiced women’s side of life – the experiences of man’s ‘other’, society’s marginalized and silenced half. They have brought to center – stage the ignored and unexpressed lives that have been on the periphery from ages.

They have accepted their responsibility to decode women’s silences and bring women out of their invisibility. They have begun to deal with the theme of suppression and oppression of women. But all the women writers are not the carbon copy of one another in presenting the hidden voices of oppressed and silenced. There is a great variety of degree and shade in their respective approaches.

The first generation women writers before India’s independence depicted women who were traditional in outlook. These women writers wrote mainly to voice their concern for the suffering souls – women of India. There was no anger, irritation or tension in their writing because they did not oppose the position of women decided by age old traditions and taboos.
But the post – independence women writers (the second generation women writers) are more realistic in their approach than those of the first generation women writers. They search for possibilities of social situations where women can attain distinctive identity and fulfillment without disrupting or demolishing the family and community. The woman’s writing questions the patriarchal hegemony and the predominance of stereotyped, traditional gender role given to women. Most women writers have deconstructed the popular myths of masculine roles and ideals. Through their focus on women’s side of the life story, these women writers have created a deep response and emotional richness in the Indian novel. K. Sachidanandan in his article “Women’s Writing: Contemporary Trends” writes:

The novels by women present the awareness of the micro political in the society, analyze and expose the tactics used by patriarchy to alienate, control and marginalize women (Sachidanandan: 2000, 6-7).

Thus, the search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self have become the prime feature of women writers in literature in the second generation women writers. Their contribution to English literature in general and fiction in particular is worth noticing and praiseworthy. Leading women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, Santha Rama Rau, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Geeta Mehta, Rama Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Bharati Mukharjee, Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapoor and many more have left their remarkable imprint on the readers of Indian English novel. The Indian women novelists articulate woman’s aspirations, her professional endeavours, her newly formed relationship presented in various modes of
resistance of patriarchal norms. To a varying degree and depending upon the individual writer’s position, these novelists thematized the expediency of self-representation, protested against the limitations of women’s lives and emphasized on resistance.

Kamala Markandaya, undoubtedly the most outstanding among the second generation women novelists, presents a cross section of the Indian society wherein her women characters go in quest for autonomy. Her women protagonists are the repertoire of transitional Indian society. The irregularities in the social system confine her women characters to the taboo ridden path. Her women are conservative and traditional in outlook. But most of her women manage to be independent in thinking while performing their traditional roles. Her works are a realistic delineation of the double pulls that the Indian women are subjected to between their desire to assert themselves as an individuals and their duty in the capacity of daughter, wife and mother. She also points out how the socio-economic conditions affect the women most.

Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, one of the leading Indian English novelists, finds life in India to be an overwhelming burden to European women. In fact, her novels are articulation of her own bitter experiences in an alien land. Preoccupied with the travails of the white woman in India, her delineation of the Indian women becomes limited and narrow which only leaves the impression of being pathetic. She is well aware of the changing values of Indian society and so portrays the predicament of the modern urban life which is twisting between the traditional Indian way of life and the western modernism. Though a majority of her women characters begin their married lives as non-conformists, very soon they learn to
conform to traditions. She emphasizes on Hindu religion although Christianity is reflected here and there.

Santha Rama Rau believes in the strength of the traditional Indian culture even when it comes in contact with the western culture. Her characters have mostly international background. Her women characters are always in search of fulfillment. Most of her women are aware of injustice done to them. They are mostly depicted as victims of political incidents and they are declared as war criminals. They aspire to have the experience of ‘living’ and so they go in pursuit of artistic careers. Like Jane Austen, she is quite at home in portraying women characters. She also attempts to probe into the feminine psychology.

Born in a family of freedom fighters, which had politics in blood and with knowledge of politics and political figures in India, Nayantara Sahgel is indeed capable to write political novels of high quality. Her novels portray contemporary political realities.

Besides politics, the characters of Mrs. Sahgel reflect the changing facets of man – woman relationship in India. Her women characters are solitary individuals striving for self – assertion. Her fiction focuses on Indian women’s search for sexual freedom and self realization. She presents the problems and suffering of women in marriage who feel entrapped, oppressed and doomed to the care of husband and home. Her women continue their fight against the hostile environment. They are positive in their attitude and refuse to accept defeat. Most of her women are aware of the injustice done to them in marriage. Some of them accept their fate voluntarily or involuntarily while most of them crave for freedom. In the views of Jasbir Jain:
[Nayantara Sehgal seeks to] interpret the rigid concept of virtue and chastity through her women characters who have a kind of untouched innocence and integrity (Jain: 1999, 67).

In fact, Nayantara Sehgal shows the need for a new morality in which a woman is treated as man’s equal. According to her, true marriage is a relation based on mutual trust between two human beings. If the partners of the marriage do not enjoy mutual love, trust and understanding, there is no point in their staying together as husband and wife. So, Nayantara Sehgal stresses living relationship between a man and a woman. In a way, she is a champion of individual freedom in women protagonists.

Kamala Das finds the traditional definition of women in relation to the social, cultural set rules and norms already prescribed by patriarchy. What is important in her representation of woman is that she at times places woman in a highly polarized world and at others redefines woman afresh once more from the feminine point of view; not on the basis of traditional assumptions about woman. In this way, she dismisses the stereotypes of woman in a culture and literature, but rather is bent on exploring the world of women. Female identity is redefined in an entirely new context and the old cultural definition of woman is ignored. She honours the individuality and dignity of woman as woman on an equal footing with man. The female characters in her novel are in quest for identity in a male-dominated society. The protagonists let themselves exploited sexually in their assertion for emancipation and search for identity. Even her autobiography *My Story* (1976) reveals her struggle for emancipation and search for identity.
Anita Desai is considered to be one of the most accomplished novelists. Her novels are peopled with women who are in perpetual quest for meaning and value of life. Her female characters refuse to surrender their individual selves. She is primarily interested in the portrayal of female protagonists as living in separate world full of existential problems and passions. Being hypersensitive, solitary and introspective, each individual is portrayed as an unsolved mystery. Their inability to compromise and surrender inevitably result in isolation and loneliness. In their existential struggle, they suffer intensely and tremendously but refuse to be crushed. Anita Desai has graphically presented the turbulent psyche of the modern Indian women. Her protagonists are intelligent, sensible and sensitive, but in an attempt to manage home and children and attain emotional fulfillment, they reach on the verge of mental crisis. She has represented the predicament of sensitive women characters trapped between tradition and modernity. Thus, Anita Desai differs from other women novelists through her method of the psychological exploration of her women protagonists who are essentially lonely.

During the seventies, Bharati Mukharjee alone deserves a remarkable place among women novelists. She is an Indian – American immigrant writer who liberates her women characters for a “New World Order”. The portrayal of her women characters is in fact her own inspirations and experiences in India as well as abroad. Her women characters are sensitive but lack the stable sense of personal and cultural identity. Most of them are victimized by racism, sexism and other forms of social oppression. She represents the struggle for the articulation of their repressed and silenced voice. Her women characters are an embodiment of the old – world dutifulness. Pushed from one disaster to
another, they emerge as determined to change their destiny and explore the infinite possibilities of life.

Gita Hariharan, the recipient of the prestigious award *The Commonwealth Writers Prize* for the Best First Novel in the European region for her *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) represents women in the relationship with men and society. Her female protagonists pass through identity crisis. Her women are the representatives of the present day intellectual women and do not confront them with problems like loneliness and alienation. Her women characters are always thought provoking.

Shobha De, a realist, represents women as sex – idols and playthings. Her popularity as a writer is her intimate understanding of the psyche of women and their problems. She has tried to expose the moral and spiritual breakdown of modern society in which a woman wants to fly freely in the sky of freedom. She also talks about lesbianism. In her novels, she deals with the life of the upper class of society and examines the institutions of family and marriage. She describes the hollow, empty lives of the ladies of the wealthy classes of the Indian society and shows how the institution of marriage has been breaking up in the rich stratum of the Indian society.

Arundhati Roy talks about both women and untouchables. She shows how women and the untouchables are treated as impersonal objects in this social structure, how all things are decided for both by the patriarchal ideology. She goes to the extent of dealing with incest, masturbation and genital organs.
Shashi Deshpande’s approach is different from that of other feminists. She has emerged as a prominent woman writer of the nineties. She occupies a significant place among the contemporary women novelists who concern themselves with the problems of women and their quest for identity. Her protagonists are modern, educated young women, crushed under the weight of a male – dominated and tradition bound society. She has honestly portrayed their sufferings, disappointments and frustrations. She also deals with the excesses committed upon the female fold for centuries leading to their passive resignation. She reveals how the women revolt against it and try to search their own identity in the hostile world of male chauvinism.

But she has also consideration for a home – a home of peace and love that can provide security to the woman. She feels that security is also an important requirement of woman. So, if a home is there in a position to provide her safety and individual identity, she may not revolt against the home in that case.

Thus, the Indian women novelists writing in English clearly show that women writers have made their permanent mark in the field of English fiction. In most of their writings, they have tried their best to free the female mentality from the age long control of male domination. In short, in their novels, the protagonists are mostly women characters isolated by the hypocritical and insensitive male domination. The women novelists have made tremendous change in the social, political and cultural fields and heralded a new consciousness in the realm of traditional thinking. If this tireless efforts on the part of women for women’s sake go on, the days are not far when they will establish their own identity in the society.
1.3 Shashi Deshpande and Her Fictional World

Shashi Deshpande, an award winning Indian novelist, was born in 1938 in a Brahmin family. She is the second daughter of famous Kannada dramatist and writer, Sanskrit scholar Shriranga. She was born in Dharwad in Karnataka, South India and educated in Dharwad, Bombay and Bangalore. After marriage, when she was living in Bombay, she did a course on journalism at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and worked for a couple of months as a journalist for the magazine “Onlooker”.

She is a good story teller. She published her first collection of short stories in 1978. Her short stories were published in magazines like ‘Femina’ and ‘Eve’s Weekly’. Her short stories have been widely anthologized most recently in “Best Loved Indian Stories” published by Penguin, India.

She is the author of four books for children and also the writer of essays. Her collection of essays is available in a volume entitled Writing From the Margin and Other Essays (2003). Her short stories have been collected and published in four volumes. They are The Legacy and Other Stories (1978), It Was Dark and Other Stories (1986), It Was Nightingale and Other Stories (1986), The Miracle and Other Stories (1986). Her collection of short stories The Legacy and Other Stories (1978) is prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University.

Besides this, she has written essays and translations from Kannada and Marathi into English. She is one of those versatile writers who have successfully handled different forms of literature. Like any great artist,
she is not yet fully satisfied with what she has achieved till today. She told Geetha Gangadharan in uncertain terms:

None of my books has so far realized my dream of a good novel. I wish one such book which will survive the test of the time. My best book is yet to come (Deshpande: 1993, 11).

This would explain Shashi Deshpande’s serious efforts to venture into fresh fields. She also wrote the screen play for the Hindi feature film ‘Drishti’ in 1969.

Shashi Deshpande occupies a distinctive place in contemporary Indian English literature because she raises her strong voice of protest against the male dominated Indian society and against man made rules and conventions. She wrote a number of novels which put her at a unique place in the history of Indian English literature. Her novels are deeply rooted in India. The characters, settings and conflicts are inherently Indian. Her works have drawn critical attention because of her detailed, sensitive and realistic representations of the Indian middle class woman in the domestic sphere.

Most of Shashi Deshpande’s characters deal with problems most women would not want to talk about – rape in marriage and lust and breaking free from traditions and stereotypes. According to Shashi Deshpande, it is difficult for women to break away from stereotypes. Her works have helped to break the silence on a number of issues, which were once a taboo to talk about. Each novel by Shashi Deshpande is worth a thousand pictures. That’s what makes her a celebrated writer.
In the development of the life of Shashi Deshpande as a writer, her father and husband play a very important role. They encourage her a lot. Though she denies any direct influence on her writing, Shashi Deshpande has acknowledged the lasting impression of Jane Austen and Bernard Shaw’s works upon her. Deshpande also endorses her debt to feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer. However, they have added to her understanding of the socialization and marginalization of women. It may however be noted that the trajectory of feminist concerns that Shashi Deshpande travels doesn’t necessarily correspond to that of the feminist women writers in the West, in her case, these concerns are essentially relational whereas for most feminist women writers in the West they are individualistic. Her perceptions of women’s liberation and autonomy, for instance, are deeply entrenched in the Indian women’s situatedness within the socio–cultural and economic space and paradigms of the country while the western women feminist writers often stay independent of them.

Russian. She shot into prominence when her *That Long Silence* (1989) was published by the British Publishing House, Virago. The novel has been translated into French and Dutch also.

She writes about women negotiating their identities within their families and society and finding their voice in the process. She presents the crisis of professional middle class woman and raises some questions like – Are they really happy with the modern situation? Can economic independence make them individual in true sense? Can they live independently? Her women firmly refuse to become prisoners of orthodoxies, fossilized traditions and stereotypically idealized identities.

All her novels are somewhat similar. They are all stories about middle class housewives and their psychological states. Her concern for women and their oppression is reflected strongly in all her novels.

Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) explores the myth of man’s superiority and of woman being a paragon of virtues. It tells the story of a married woman reflecting on her small town upbringing, a domineering mother, a failing marriage, a jealous husband, waking up to the releasing knowledge that there is more to life than dependency on husband, parents and social acceptance.

Sarita, the protagonist of the novel, is a successful doctor during the day time and at night a terrified and trapped animal in the hands of her husband – Manohar who is an English teacher in a small college. The novel begins with Sarita who has returned after 15 years to her father’s house. She once proclaimed that she would never come back to her father’s place. She returns because it is not possible for her to bear the
sexual sadism of her husband. The rest of the novel is what Sarita remembers and a brief confession to her father about her trauma. Sarita’s story in her father’s house gives her a chance to review her relationship with her father, husband and her dead mother. She has a better understanding of herself and others. This gives her the courage to face reality.

Though she witnesses and suffers from many ups and downs in her life, she is no longer a skeleton in the cupboard. She is a human being throbbing with life with a reawakened individuality. Once the realization comes, all other things that cause problems melt away. Thus, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), Shashi Deshpande brings out powerfully the psychological problem of a career woman and discusses it artistically without crossing the barriers of art.

*Come Up and Be Dead* (1983) is a psychological thriller which demonstrates Shashi Deshpande’s versatility of her award winning literary skill. Shashi Deshpande derives the title of this novel from the classic statement made by Jenny Wren from the novel of Charles Dickens *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). The whole story revolves round the death of a school girl Mridula who becomes a victim of patriarchy. The head mistress is not able to cope with the situation especially when all the rumours are pointing at Pratap – her brother.

*If I Die Today* (1982) and *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983) were detective serials which have been expanded and published as novels by Shashi Deshpande. *If I Die Today* (1982) brings out the problems of the patriarchal society in a very subtle way. The setting for *If I Die Today* (1982) is a girls’ school where a series of murders take place. It is set in a
resident quarters of a large charity hospital where there are a series of killings beginning with the murder of the patient - Guru. Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the female character’s frustration and disappointments, their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities. Deshpande is best in portraying the inner turmoil raging in the minds of her female protagonists who are unfairly treated by their parents, husbands and society in general.

Manju, the narrator of this novel is quite different from the average woman of India who opines matrimony and motherhood as the ultimate happiness in life. In her views, motherhood is an obstacle and children are a barrier to her happiness. Injustice to daughter by patriarchy is also reflected through the character of Mriga. Deshpande also lays bare the feeble male ego which cannot tolerate the idea of female superiority. Thus, Shashi Deshpande exposes the inner turmoil and sense of unfairness experienced by her female protagonists.

There is a rumour that Mridula has committed suicide, but the fact was that she was murdered. The remaining two murders were also linked with her murder; and the murderer was a man – Mr. Varma because he carried hatred for young women in his heart as his own wife had deserted him soon after his marriage. So, one painful experience in his life forced him to avenge the whole female race. Thus, biological exploitation is realistically presented by the author here.

*Roots and Shadows* (1983) is a hopeful, optimistic novel empowering the young heroine to dismantle the past seen in the novel in the form of a disintegrating old house. Indu, the central female character of the novel, emerges fully as a successful woman of determination. She
is the representative of thousands of Indian women who are torn between age old traditions and individual views. Being an educated woman, she is very much aware about the society and its critical problems like love, marriage, sex, individuality etc. So, this novel explores the inner struggle of Indu.

It is a novel about Indu’s attempt to assert herself as an individual. The novel begins with the marriage of Mini, Indu’s cousin which forces Indu to think retrospectively about the events which led to her returning home after a gap of eleven years. In the span of the eleven years, Shashi Deshpande has presented the agony and suffocation experienced by Indu in a man – made society. Throughout these years, she has undergone a great mental trauma when she refuses to play the role of a traditional ideal housewife imposed upon her by the society. She feels that the man whom she married is no different from the other less educated and conservative Indian men. In her quest for identity, she even develops an extra – marital affair.

She has been a determined girl who always desires freedom and independent life. She goes back to her parents’ house in search of roots, but she only finds shadows there. She tries to listen to the voice of her own soul. But because of cultural hegemony and tradition, all her efforts are in vain. Thus, through the character of Indu, Shashi Deshpande reflects the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women.

*That Long Silence* (1988) gives a realistic picture of contemporary middle class women. The central theme of the novel is the quest of a woman for identity. Jaya, the female protagonist, is an ideal housewife
who maintains her silence throughout her life. She suffers in isolation despite her marriage to Mohan and subsequently becoming a mother of two children – Rahul and Rati. Jaya, however, learns to assert her individuality and seeks to break the age old silence by finally refusing to dance to the tunes of her husband.

Jaya despite having played the role of a wife and mother to perfection finds her all alone. She realizes that she has been unjust to herself and her career as a writer, because throughout her life, she has been thinking about the needs and happiness of her husband and children only. Her constant fear of displeasing her husband and inviting the censure of society, not only makes her give up writing but also discourages her from acknowledging her friendship with a man. Now, she realizes the need to think of herself, her own life.

Jaya emerges from the stifling claustrophobia of a seventeen year old marriage grinding to a halt and the disappointment of her failure as a writer. The moment of crisis pushes her into introspective mode. Thus, a stereotyped housewife initially nervous fights her own battle and comes out as a winner. It is also shown how new and confident Jaya receives self assertion without rejecting the cultural and social background.

In *The Binding Vine* (1993) Shashi Deshpande represents a woman as a spineless, wooden creature, subjected to male domination. The central female character Urmi was grieving over the death of her baby daughter and surrounded by the loving care of her mother Inni and her childhood friend and sister – in – law Vanna. Through her grief, Urmi is drawn into the lives of three different women.
The first woman is Urmi’s mother – in – law Mira who is dead and exists only in the notebooks that she has found from a dusty storage trunk. Mira’s writing reveals her pain, suffering and unhappy arranged marriage. Mira in her solitude of unhappy marriage wrote poems which were posthumously translated and published by Urmi. The second woman is Kalpana who is the survivor of a brutal rape. She is a young woman who has been silenced by male. As she hovers between life and death in the hospital ward, Kalpana is watched over by her impoverished mother, Shakutai, the third woman with whom Urmi forms a bond of mutual comfort. Shakutai has been deserted by her husband for another woman.

Through the personal tragedy of the protagonist, Urmi who focuses attention to other victims of the traditional bound society, Shashi Deshpande exposes man’s lust and woman’s helplessness. She, in this novel, has touched upon a new theme – marital rape which has not been touched upon by any other Indian writer in English. The novelist handles the juxtaposition of two situations – marital rape and rape of an unmarried girl. Through the lives of three women, Shashi Deshpande reflects on the bondage or threads of life and hope – binding vine of love, hope, concern and connection that spreads across chasms of time, social class and even death.

* A Matter of Time *(1996) is about three women from three generations from the same family and how they cope with the tragedies in their lives. The whole story revolves round Sumitra and her three daughters – Aru, Charu and Seema who are deserted by Gopal – Sumitra’s husband. Gopal who is haunted by the feelings of emptiness walks out of his family. Sumitra accepts this decision even if she does not
understand it and still concentrates to live the life with her three daughters.

She faces her humiliation with great courage and stoicism. Though deep inside and struck with immense grief, she tries to keep herself composed for the sake of her daughters. Sumi retreats into a shocked silence while eighteen years old Aru tries bitterly to search for her own reasons for this calamity. Shashi Deshpande here gives a true to life saga of the trauma faced by Sumi – deserted wife. As soon as she recovers from the shock, she picks up the threads of her life and tries to readjust her life style to suit the situation.

Kalyani, Sumi’s grand mother has led a macabre married life. Throughout her life, her husband has not talked to her for decades and leads a solitary life in a room which is built on the top of the house. But for her, only the presence of her husband in the house lends respect to Kalyani in the society. Thus, in this novel, Shashi Deshpande brings together women of three generations and shows their different outlook in life. She has revealed fear, frustrations and compulsions of women from the same family.

In Small Remedies (2000), Shashi Deshpande explores the lives of two women, one passionate believer in communism and the other obsessed with music who breaks away from their families to seek fulfillment in public life. Like Indu, Sarita, Jaya, Urmi and Sumitra, Madhu is also an urban middle aged and educated woman. Through the character of Madhu, Shashi Deshpande gives a stark picture of the patriarchal mind set of men and suggests that in our society pre – marital sex could lead to disintegration of marriage.
It is also a story of Savitribai Indorkar, a well known singer of classical music who avoids marriage and completely dedicates herself to her music. She has led the most unconventional life through which she undergoes great mental trauma due to the opposition by the society that practices double standards – one for men and the other for women. Even in her childhood she was a victim of gross gender discrimination.

Madhu arrives in Bhavanipur to interview Savitribai to write her biography. Savitribai, though she is married and has a daughter named Munny, lives lonely life in Bhavanipur. Madhu grudgingly takes up writing biography partly to escape from the memory of the tragic death of her teenage son and partly to uncover the truth behind the beautiful and mysterious Savitribai. In order to write biography of Savitribai, Madhu tries to make sense of the life of Savitribai and in doing so, seeks to find a way out of her own grief. It also tells the story of Leela, who gives up her respectability in order to gain love and unhappiness in equal measure.

*Moving On* (2004) is the story of Manjari (Jiji), a widowed woman who after the death of her father, discovers her father’s diary and sets out to evaluate her life retrospectively. She searches for clues in the childhood spent with her anatomist father who shares his fascination for human body with Jiji. She also finds out from the diary that the life in a household was ruled by her beautiful but reserved Mai who writes romantic stories for popular magazines. The reserved situation of her Mai is also realistically brought to light. Jiji is also driven alone by her husband Shyam to struggle for life in the patriarchal society single handedly for her children for whom she has left her education.
In The Country of Deceit (2008), Shashi Deshpande’s latest and recent novel deals with new landscapes of love and goodness. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande has deliberately taken the character of Devayani from her earlier novel Come Up and Be Dead (1983). This novel explores the slippery treacherous terrain that love takes people into. According to Shashi Deshpande, love is the basic and universal human emotion. The betrayal of love gives a lot of pain to human being. In the Country of Deceit (2008) is a novel about the ordinary life of a woman who lives a humdrum existence, mainly jobless. Devayani, the female protagonist of the novel is only twenty six but carries the burden of the world upon her shoulders. The suicide committed by her father and the suffering and ultimate death of her near and dear mother are responsible for her indifference in marriage. Devayani chooses to live alone in the small town named Rajnur after her parents’ death, ignoring the gently voiced disapproval of her family and friends. She starts teaching English and developing a garden and making friendship with Rani, a former actress. In order to come out of this situation, she falls in love with a married man – Ashok Chinappa, Rajnur’s new District Superintendent of Police and becomes his mistress. But it is a relationship without any future from where her long journey of gloom and guilt starts in the ‘country of deceit’.

Ashok showers passionate love on her but Devayani can not accept the role of a ‘whore’ or a ‘floozy’ and decides to stop this. With the help of Devayani’s sister Savitri, her husband Shree and Sindhu, she thinks about honourable marriage with an other man. The warm love of her relatives pulls Devayani out from the love affair of Ashok. At last, she does break off with Ashok though she loves him desperately. It is not clear whether it is a result of feeling ‘cheap’ or because he does not tell
her that he has been posted out of Rajnur. The novel ends with putting Devayani back where she was at the beginning of the novel; however, Devayani has changed for the better at the end of the novel. Devayani leads her life towards individuality and self – fulfillment.

All these novels reveal Shashi Deshpande’s commitment and skill in voicing the concerns of the urban educated middle class women. Most of her protagonists are women who are typical middle class housewives. Her novels depict the anguish and conflict of the modern educated Indian woman caught between patriarchy and tradition on one hand and self – expression, individuality and independence for the woman on the other. Trapped between tradition and modernity, her sensitive heroines are fully conscious of being victims of gross gender discrimination prevalent in a conservative male dominated society.

Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists struggle to find their own voice and continuously try to define themselves. Her fiction explores the search of the woman to fulfill herself as a human being, independent of her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother. While revealing the woman’s struggle to secure self – respect and self – identity for her, the author bares the multiple levels of suppression and oppression including sexual oppression experienced by women in the patriarchal society.

In her novels, she has addressed various social issues like human desire, gender discrimination, marginalization, rebellion and protest, man – woman inequality, rape, marital rape, the predicament of middle – class educated Indian women, their inner conflict and quest for identity, parent – child relationship, marriage and sex of contemporary Indian society. She is deeply concerned about the marginal status of women.
Her novels are described as alternative narratives of women’s experiences. The mode of resistance in her novels takes the form of redefinition of women’s culture and identity in the Indian context.

The predicament of women – especially those who are educated and belong to middle class has been most prominently dealt with. Many of her women characters are frustrated either sexually or professionally. Her novels generally centered round family relationship – particularly the relationship between mother and daughter and also between husband and wife and their dilemmas and conflicts. According to Deshpande, everyone has to live within relationship without losing individuality. In an interview with Vanamala Viswanath, she remarks:

It’s necessary for women to live within relationship. But if the rules are rightly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing what I don’t agree with is the idealization of motherhood – the false and sentimental notes that accompany it (Viswanath: 1998, 13).

In her novels, Shashi Deshpande explores the patriarchal social set up of India and most of the protagonists, located within this social reality, reach out to define ‘self’ in an attempt to free themselves. In their quest for self — realization, each protagonist breaks free of the religious and social codes that circumscribe and undermine a woman’s spirit and deny her an identity of her own.
1.4 Chapterization

The first chapter deals with the condition of women from ancient to the modern time. It also reflects the contribution of women writers in general and Shashi Deshpande in particular in Indian literature. Shashi Deshpande, through her writing, reflects the present condition of women and has given voice to thousands of suppressed women.

The second chapter *A Poetics of Difference: Towards the Definition of Gynocentricism* gives a short introduction of the history of feminist writing, the problems of women and their situation in the patriarchal society. It also presents how they wrote under the male pseudonyms.

Elaine Showalter, in the United States, has identified three historical phases of women’s literary development. The ‘feminine phase’ (1840 – 1880) during which women writers imitated the dominant tradition. It is also called the ‘imitative phase’. The ‘feminist phase’ (1880 – 1920) during which women advocated minority rights and protested. It was a reactionary stage where women began to protest against the literary, social and legal patriarchal manifestations. This phase has also been called the ‘reactive phase’. This phase was marked by extremist activities. The ‘female phase’ (1920 - till today) during which women have been in search of self – discovery and self realization.

Feminist movement took U – turn and women writers and readers turned towards them. This was the ‘self – fulfilled phase’. These three phases of women’s literary development will be discussed in detail.
Showalter describes the fourth phase where women writers have tried to know about womanly experiences and their writings. They have woman centered approach.

By the publication of *Imaging a Self* (1976) by Patricia Meyer Spacks, the direction of feminist movement changed and then it began to find out peculiarities of womankind. From that book, Elaine Showalter coined the term “Gynocentricism”. The distinction between ‘Feminist Critique’ and ‘Gynicentricism’ would also be discussed here. The remaining part of this chapter would focus on the four basic models of gynocentricism – biological, psychoanalytical, linguistic and cultural.

As far as biological aspect of Gynocentricism is concerned, certain male critics believe that women are unable to write or not able to produce proper literature. The literature produced by women is inferior because of biological inferiority. Gynocritics reject the notion of biological inferiority by arguing that women’s biological experiences are immense source of energy and power. As far as language is concerned, they leveled the charge that women are not able to express their ideas freely because the present language is the language of oppressors. Gynocritics refute the idea of ‘genderlect’ and suggest that they express themselves best through silences, gaps, euphemisms and circumlocution. The conventional psychoanalytic approach was dominated by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan who opined that absence of phallus in women leads to various complexes like penis envy and so, they are unable to write properly. But gynocritics refute this idea and suggest that mother – daughter relationship is an immense source of female creativity. As far as cultural dimension is concerned, the gynocritics define women’s activities from a woman – centered point of view. The idea of sisterhood and a community
oriented attitude of women are important issues regarding it. Women’s culture, therefore, is not a subculture within the dominant culture but there is a complex perpetual interaction and interfusion between the two cultures. The concluding part of this chapter will highlight how these four models are co-related with each other and create a unified effect.

Both the third and the fourth chapters are important parts of this research. The title of the third chapter is *A Biological – Linguistic Study of Shashi Deshpande’s Novels* where it will apply two important modes of difference of Gynocentricism – biological and linguistic in Shashi Deshpande’s novels. In biological study of texts, female body is in the centre. Both men and women are biologically different and therefore their experiences are also different. Feminist critics argue that women’s writing proceeds from the body that women’s sexual differentiation is their important source of writing.

Some of the male critics believe that women are born with lesser developed cognitive organs and thus they are lower in intelligence. They also believe that women are unable to write. They produce inferior literature because of biological differentiation. Gynocritics reject this belief and say that women’s bodily experiences are the source of immense energy and power for women’s writing.

Feminism takes help of deconstruction while dealing with the problem of language. Language for women is constructed by men. In androcentric society, women do not have access to language to reveal their own views. What should be spoken by women is decided by male constructed culture. Thus, feminism is also a struggle for the right to speak.
Study of language in which women try to express their feelings and emotions is a very important aspect of gynocentric theory. Women try to open an alternative literary and cultural space where they can find their own values, will never have to feel fear or shame of their emotions and where they will not have to apologize to seek permission to use language their own way. In this chapter, Shashi Deshpande’s novels are evaluated from biological and linguistic study of gynocentricism.

The title of the fourth chapter is *A Psycho – Cultural Study of Shashi Deshpande’s Novels* which gives importance to psychoanalytical and cultural aspects of gynocentricism. Women’s writing is ignored in psychology. The conventional psychoanalytical approach was dominated by both Sigmund Freud and Lacan. A gynocentric reading represents a repressed egoistic and ambitious fantasy in women’s writing, but it is not highlighted by the women writers because this type of fantasy of power is outside the world ascribed to women by the social boundaries. Mother – daughter relationship is an immense source of female creativity.

The theory of culture incorporates ideas about women’s body, language and psyche, but interprets them in relation to the social contexts in which they occur. Gynocritics do not believe in the subordination of women in the patriarchal society. The idea of sisterhood would also be discussed in this chapter as it is the symbol of rejection of the powerlessness that women felt because of the patriarchal structure of the society. The meaning of sisterhood is that women, in group, share a common culture incorporating their attitudes and vision of the world. Thus, the aim of gynocritics is to redraw the circle around a new centre focused on women’s own experiences.
The last chapter is **Conclusion** which will be the essence of the whole study. This chapter will express the researcher’s views that though both men and women have different mental and biological get up, they are not separate but complement to each other. And that is the source of true happiness for both men and women.

**Works Cited**


