CHAPTER - V

Conclusion

Indian English novel has come a long way since Bankim Chandra Chatterjee published *Rajmohan’s Wife* in 1864. And Indian English novelists are no longer in need of recommendations in the form of ‘introduction’ or ‘preface’ from British novelists as was the case of Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan to publish their novels. It may be recalled here that E. M. Forster helped Anand and Graham Greene helped Narayan to publish their novels. As the Indian nation-state has moved from village-centrism of the colonial era and freedom movement of the Gandhian era to the city-centrism of post-Nehruvian and post-Emergency era, the Indian English novelists in the last thirty one years (i.e., from 1980 to 2011) have made ‘a voyage within’ as well as a ‘voyage without’. Now we get three categories of Indian English writers: one, those who writing English and live in India (for instance Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur and a host of others), two, those who write in English and divide their time between India and abroad (for instance, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh and a few others) and three, those who live abroad but are of Indian origin or diaspora (for instance, Salman Rushdie, Uma Parameswaran, Bharati Mukherjee and a host of others).

Shashi Deshpande belongs to the first category who imbibes indigenous tradition. As an Indian English writer she faces a two-fold challenge: one at home from Bhasha writers and two, both at home and abroad from English language writers. The Indian regional writers (called ‘Bhasha’ writers, a term coined by G. N. Devy in his Sahitya Akademi Award winning book, *After Amnesia*) accuse Indian
English writers of lacking in authenticity. Some critics also support the view that these Bhasha writers are more authentic and original than Indian English writers. This is an untenable argument. One cannot be a lesser Indian just because he writes in the second language. Examples of native Urdu writers writing in Hindi, Gujarati writers writing in Marathi are plenty in this country. Shasi Deshpande refutes the argument of the Bhasha writers and says:

I believe that English writing in this country is a part of our literatures; I consider English as one more of our ‘bhashas’ as Ganesh Devy calls them... I use English in the same way I’d have used any Indian language... (Indian Literature 110)

History is also replete with examples of non-English writers contributing immensely to the literatures written in that language. Who can deny the huge influence cast by Polish writer Joseph Conrad on English literature? Again the term ‘Bhasha’ can be questioned. Bhasha means language. All literatures are written in languages. Just because Indian English literature is written in English, which is primarily the language of the British, it cannot be less authentic or original than Bhasha literatures. B. K. Das makes a very pertinent comment on this issue:

...if the national sensibility, outlook and the socio-cultural matrix of the people get reflected in a literature, it becomes a national literature... It is in this sense that the Indian English literature is our new national literature, in the same way as our Bhasha literatures are supposed to be. It is high time that the boundary line between Bhasha literatures and Indian English
It will not be out of place to mention here that English has already been accepted as an Indian language and every year, award is given to Creative Writers in English along with writers of Bhasha literatures by the Sahitya Akademi. Aijaz Ahmad substantiates this view when he says,

The reason why the English language should be taught is that it has simply become, for better or worse, one of the Indian languages, even the key professional language and certainly the main language of communication between the schooled sections of the different linguistic regions. (*In Theory* 282).

In addition to these, there is another fallacy at work. To divide Indian literature into two groups by saying that one is an indigenous Indian literature and the other is an acquired Indian literature is unwarranted. If the World Literatures written in English language in different countries are known as African literature, Australian literature, Canadian literature, Caribbean literature, American literature and so on, the nomenclature being taken from the native countries, in the same way we can say that literature written in several languages in one country can be taken as one literature. What gives identity to literature is not language but culture and native sensibility. It is in this sense that Indian English literature is as much Indian as any other regional literature. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her essay "The Anxiety of Indianness" contested this stand taken by the Bhasha writers:
When it comes to English fiction originating in our country, not only does the issue of Indianness become a favourite essentializing obsession in academic writings and the book review circuit, the writers themselves do not seem unaffected by it. (*The Perishable Empire* 168)

Another question arises about the percentage of readership with reference to Indian English literature. They say that only two per cent of Indians read and understand English. So it is the literature of the elite class and therefore not the literature of the mass, hence non-Indian. If the Bhasha literatures with only a minimum percentage of regional readers can be Indian, Indian English literature can establish its rights too.

The postmodern Indian English writers (especially the writers of fictions) have subverted the standard “English” of the Imperial centre and have given it a new identity. As discussed in the fourth chapter they have authenticated the “English” language in which they write. B. K. Das makes a perceptive comment on the achievement of postmodern Indian English fiction:

> The postmodern novelists have discarded the grand narratives of earlier writers- Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, and adopted a form of narrative which has come to be known as ‘narratives of disintegration’. (*Postmodern Indian English literature* 149)

In their over-enthusiastic zeal, the critics often tend to blow the achievement of these novelists in the post-1980 era out of proportion. Nowadays books are being commissioned by big firms and publishing company. A fabulous amount is given as
advance royalty to the writers like Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy. Not only that— all
the major writers organize a book-launching ceremony to announce their new title to
get publicity. The media too plays a role in this regard. Before the books are read by
the readers or even before they reach the readers, an opinion has already been
formed and highlighted by the media about the book. This takes us a step ahead of
Ronald Barthes’ announcement of ‘the death of the author’ for it heralds a new era in
which the reader is supposed to be dead and the opinion is formed by the media. In
other words, both the author and the reader being dead, the text has now been
taken over by the media. Texts have been given canonical status by the publisher,
media and the award-deciding committee. This is a serious loss. As Deshpande
rightly says in her essay “Critics and Reviews”:

Media attention also affects reviews. In today’s world, the
importance and the influence of the media are so pervasive and
so strong, that it is bound to make a difference to the reception
to a book. Interest in a book or an author or a theme can be
created by the media without actively intervening. The market
place, let us remember, has entered the literary world. The
forces of the marketing work through the media and the
otherwise to create an idea of a book. And once reviewed, the
power of the printed word being what it is, an idea of the book is
created, which it is hard for a reader to go against. (The Hindu,
Oct 27, 2005)

Our writers who are mostly expatriates or who spend half of their time abroad are
highlighted by the media and the internet and they are placed even above the
canonical writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan. The supporters of these writers praise them for their mastery over the language and treatment of the subjects which transcend the national boundaries. There is some element of truth in their appreciation of post-1980 Indian English novelist but to place them above all the earlier writers is to miss the wood in the trees. Two important critics named C. D. Narasimhaiah and Alstair Niven, one at home and the other abroad, seriously question such kind of estimation. According to C. D. Narasimhaiah, “... we should take the greatest possible care in our praise of writers so as not to be posterity's laughing stock … We should summon all our faculties to ensure a discriminating response ...” (The Swan and the Eagle 242). Alstair Niven also raises a similar objection: “I feel rather sad that R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, G. V. Desani and Kamala Markandaya are sidelined today” (The Hindu Literature Review III). The true merit of Indian English novelists in the nineteen eighties and nineties lies somewhere between the two opinions expressed above.

The novels of Shashi Deshpande can be profitably analyzed from the standpoint of feminist and post-colonial criticism. She writes back to the West, transcends the limitations of nationalism and, above all, makes a new use of English language which contributes to the creation of an Indian English idiom. As the title of the thesis suggests, the novelist faces a two-way marginalization. First, being a woman writer and second, because of the language in which she chooses to write. As for the first point raised, women's writing has become a separate category and women writers are always bracketed with other women writers and never with writers in general. Deshpande laments that women's writing is most of the times
labeled as “domestic literature” or “kitchen literature” and raises such vital questions in her essay “Writing from the Margin” as whether writing by women is for women alone or whether women’s writing is a separate genre, separate from men’s. In an interview with Aditi De, she said:

I should be able to consider myself a senior writer by now. The books I’ve written are not insignificant. But when the media talks about writers in English, you’ll find my name was most often omitted, until maybe two years ago . . . Or they put me among the women writers. Invariably, I get asked: ‘Is your next novel about women?’ I think that’s ridiculous! If you’re writing about domestic things or the family, they immediately put you in an inferior slot. Somehow, women’s writing is always the zenana. Criticism has not learnt to deal with writing by women as just writing, whether it’s good or bad. I think it’s deprived me of my true place in literature. (The Hindu, Aug 28, 2003)

In an essay, “An open letter to some fellow-writers”, she points out that the charge that thinking, or writing in English prevents the Indian writers to penetrate the psyche of the people, is weird. She argues that a language can never close the doors on imagination or feeling:

I must admit I’m slightly confused: is it my writing that is rootless and lacks authenticity, or is it I? This is our home, as it is yours; we did not drop out of the skies when we started writing in English. . . . An equally weird charge is that by thinking, or writing in English we do not penetrate
the psyche of the people. I am puzzled. How does the language prevent me from understanding the people I write about? Can a language close the doors on imagination? On feeling? As for superficiality, yes, some of us may be superficial; but then, so are some of you. Mediocrity or shallowness is not the monopoly of any language.

More interesting is the accusation that it is hard to express an Indian experience in English. Let me be honest: occasionally, rarely, this does happen, however, trusting in my writer's skill, I cope the best I can. And like Sunil Gangopadhyay said, replying to the charge that Indian languages have a limited vocabulary, 'I have enough words for what I want to say', I will say that I am able to express what I want to, though at times I have to work hard to reach where I want to be.

http://www.articlesbase.com/literature-articles/827600.html

Shashi deshpande's inclusion of untranslated words and phrases in Indians languages within the English text has a two-fold impact upon the reader. In the first place it illustrates the multilingual reality of the Bombay / Bangalore she portrays.

As the author points out –

I do not use Indianisms to make my writing look Indian. I never try to make India look exotic. I do not think of a Western audience at all. (The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande 240).

Moreover, by making no concessions to the reader with either translation of glossary and reflecting the co-existence of languages within his English text it engenders a shift from the margins towards the centre. Deshpande's awareness of
contemporary Indian social reality, and her not aiming at any western audiences is reflected in her use of the English language. Her use of this medium is totally unselfconscious. Reading her novels, one tends to forget that they are in English. Commenting on this aspect G. S. Amur in his preface to *The Legacy and Other Stories* writes:

> The naturalness of her language, it appears to me, is a result of her identification with contemporary Indian writing and the Indian audiences for whom she writes. – (32)

In an essay ‘Critics and Reviews,’ Shahsi Deshpande talks of another form of marginalization. A great deal of weightage is given to books which deal with the grand narratives of nation a la Rushdie. Deshpande writes:

> Later, post-Independence, cultural authenticity became a looked for quality in a book, because once again it had to find its place in the world, not in the country of its origin. Post-Rushdie, the nation and nationhood were the themes that marked books as significant and books that spoke of these things were taken seriously. Others, if not ignored, were given scant attention and therefore became less significant. In our languages, I think it is the class and the caste struggle which matter, not only politically, but in literature as well. A great deal of weightage is given to books which deal with these issues.

http://www.articlesbase.com/literature-articles/827600.html
The novels of Shashi Deshpande can be profitably analyzed from the standpoint of feminism and postcolonial criticism. She writes back to the West, transcends the limitation of nationalism and, above all, makes a new use of English language which contributes to the creation of Indian English idiom. Shashi Deshpande espouses a tradition of post-colonial modernism more than most Indian writers writing in the English language today. She has projected a distinctly modernist aesthetics in her fiction, which has amounted to an implicit and silent critic of the dominant tradition established by Rushdie and others. This is also no doubt the reason behind her marginalization in the current hype and attention Indian English writing has been receiving of late, as such aesthetics as writers like Deshpande espouse in their fiction is clearly disfavoured by the current Rushdie – Jameson tradition of postmodernist post-coloniality. The Bombay and Bangalore of Deshpande's fiction is as really rooted and sensually evoked as some of the most memorable locales in the vernacular literary traditions of India.

Without the use of any overt feminist political propaganda, the texts confirm the author's commitment to the feminist ideal. By creating protagonists who move from victimization to self-assertion she portrays the paradigm shift from margin to centre. As she writes in “Writing from the Margin”,

When I first begin writing, I leave a huge margin, a large blank space which I know I will soon fill up with alterations, corrections, new ideas and so on. And sure enough, in time the margin is full, the words begin creeping into the centre of the page, the margin and the text merge and finally, what I am saying comes mostly from the margin, it becomes the real text. (165)
In their well researched book, *Women Writing in India Vol II: The Twentieth Century*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita have rightly observed that "Feminism drew attention in quite spectacular ways to the subtle strategies of power written into the shaping and differentiation of the feminine in the everyday practices of the family, of education, of the workplace... (36). Deshpande being a feminist depicts women in different spaces- inner and outer, home and outside the home with insight. To read her fiction is to see women in real life in our society, it is to see them as they are- not as what they appear to be. They make us aware of their space in our society and evoke both our sympathy and empathy. Shashi Deshpande is unique in one sense that she never incorporates anything foreign into her fiction. Her characters are Indians in blood, colour and thought. She lays emphasis on the characters and their movement in fiction. She writes: "All my novels are like this: there is no plot, I only have the characters, characters with whom I live for years, about whom I know almost everything before I begin to tell their story" (*Writing from the Margin* 19).

Deshpande, apart from being a feminist novelist is also a humanist. Human composition is the metaphor with which she weaves her stories and builds her characters. Like Nissim Ezekiel in his last stage giving a humanistic touch to his poetry, Deshpande becomes a passionate observer of human relationships. She writes:

'What is it that inspires you?' I am often asked. Human beings. I find them, I find us, fascinating. Our endless variations, our essential sameness. Our strengths, our frailties. And above all, our
relationships with one another. Each novel is a voyage of discovery
for me, a discovery of myself, of other humans, of our
universe. Writing is for me part of the endeavour... to articulate the
human struggle, the human triumph." (29)

Novels, however great they are, cannot change or erase repressive social
structures; but by posing questions, by suggesting re-assessment and re-definition,
they can help in formulating a consciousness which can perhaps ultimately bring
about a constructive change. The eight novels explored in the previous chapters
have, in their own way, created such a consciousness. The novels of Shashi
Deshpande can be read as novels of women's self quest and the chapters of this
dissertation posit the view that women in these novels have established themselves
as autonomous beings, not only free from the restrictions imposed by society,
culture, nature but also free from their own fears and guilt.

For a long time, woman has existed as a gap, as an absence in literature,
whether Western or Indian. This is not only true of the fiction created by men, but
also by women, who have mostly confined themselves in dealing with the
experiences of women in a superficial manner, creating the same kind of
stereotypes of women which they find so reprehensible in the writings of men.
Women writers have also fallen prey to that prescriptive feminist ideology of creating
strong women characters. Against this backdrop, Shashi Deshpande's novels
promise to be a refreshing departure from most of the fiction written by women. Her
protagonists accept their own responsibility for what they are; see how much they
have contributed to their own victimization. It is only through their self-analysis and
self-understanding, through vigilance and courage that they begin to change their lives. What ultimately emerges is a comprehensive exploration of Shashi Deshpande's understanding of the dilemma of the New Woman as well as her courageous attempt to suggest new patterns of feminine existence. Since her novels have succeeded in doing the latter, they are fulfilling the implicit political aim of feminist literature of re-defining the lives of women. This study aims to establish the positive role of this novelist in the vital on-going battle of establishing female selfhood.

Indian writing in English has now entered a new phase- the phase of an imitable representation of the new Indian woman who is dissatisfied with the inhibiting, cultural, natural or sexual roles assigned to her. This new woman of Deshpande's novels views herself as the object of cultural/social oppressions and attempts to rebel against them, consciously or unconsciously, within her living space. But at the same time, she reflects the inability to reject her cultural/social background totally and hence fails to transcend the horizons depicting a revolutionary spirit. She therefore stands at the crossroads between tradition and modernity. Deshpande minglest 'humanism' with 'feminism' in her fiction and so her vision of the Indian woman tends to be optimistic. The image of women in her later novels have undergone a change. In contrast to her earlier novels, these female characters assert themselves and defy marriage and motherhood. Thus she has moved away from portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters in search of identity, who are no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status.
Shashi Deshapande’s novels are obviously concerned with feminist issues. She portrays modern, educated and career-oriented middle-class married woman, who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. She depicts women in myriad roles—wife, mother, daughter, and above all an individual in her own right who breaks loose from the traditional constraints and refines her identity in tune with the changed social ambience of the modern times.

In *Roots and shadows*, Indu, in her quest to be independent and complete, realizes that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. Indu’s decision not to submit herself to anyone’s dictates, not to get influenced by her husband in career matters shows that she is making independent decisions, and matures into an individual who chooses to live life in accordance with her own wishes. She negates all feminine limitations and also acquires the power to change others.

In the novel *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Saru, rebels against traditions, but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. After a long painful experience, she realizes, that escapism is never a solution and that she is her own refuge. Through Saru, Deshpande endeavours to establish woman as an individual, who redefines her identity in accordance to the changed social ambience of the modern times.

Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, experiences an impulsive urge to be empowered, and at the same time with an instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. The protagonist, through the patchwork of her life written, realizes that she alone is responsible for both her achievements and failures. She attempts to break not only
her own silence but also that of women, especially women writers, down the ages. She decides that she will live without sacrificing her identity or individuality. She makes some adjustments of her own volition, taking care to see that she does not lapse into servility. Her decision to have her own way gives a new confidence to her and this confidence makes Jaya face the realities of life and lets her break her long silence.

Urmila in the novel, *The Binding Vine*, not only fights her own battle, but also endeavours to help other women, the poor and the downtrodden. She not only believes strongly that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society, but they must also fight for their rights. *Binding Vine* presents predominantly the woman’s world; the presence of men is felt merely by the power they exercise over the women by wives and daughters. It is the women’s world where they outshine men in terms of their clear perception of things around them. In their efforts to cope with their surroundings and to face their losses they try to create the binding vine of sisterhood.

*A Matter of Time* along with *The Binding Vine* diversifies from the self-realization theme to widen the scope and includes the community of women with a common heritage of oppression and a whole host of complex issues. They struggle to learn to become, “ones own refuge” and value the fellowship of other women.

Madhu, the protagonist in Shashi Deshapande’s *Small Remedies*, exercises her choices, rejects her husband’s ideology of essentialist approach and rebuilds her emotional, creative, imaginative and realistic ‘self’. By writing the
biography of Savitri Bai Indorekar's as a challenge, she exerts her artistic and intellectual capacities. Writing itself is an act of empowerment. The female characters in the novel try to live life on their own terms with their balanced self-assertion and deep involvement in their arts. For Savitri Bai, it is music and for Madhu it is writing.

In Shashi Deshapande's *Moving on* Manjari challenges the essentialised idea of female identity as male, and leaves the door open for social and cultural change. Her engagements with life, allow her to take up the middle path- 'live on your own terms and let others live on their own'. Devayani, too, in *The Country of Deceit*, lives life according to her own choices and does not follow the diktats of the society. *If I Die Today* and *Come Up and Be Dead* are detective novels are not included for study as the very nature of their themes are different from the topic chosen for the study.

Deshpande, brings our clearly that marriage is not the only option for a woman. From the traditional roles of daughters, sisters, wives and mothers, Deshapande's protagonists emerge as individuals in their own right. These protagonists are neither rebels nor conformists. Faced with the dilemmas of life, they seek a path that allows them individual freedom and growth even within the orthodox environment of a traditional upper middle class family. In their reaction to play their role in a patriarchal society, they showed the strength to achieve their goals of self-realization, without succumbing to the societal pressures and without breaking away from the accepted, traditional, social institutions.
Through the depiction of the themes, Shashi Deshpande has raised her novels to a new height. Susie Tharu, in an interview with Srividya Natarajan commented: “When you deal with women's writing you have to break out of essentialist paradigms of aesthetics. One has to search out other frames and contexts of reading”(5). The contexts have undoubtedly been dealt with the sincerity and courage. But ultimately it is difficult to resist “the paradigm of aesthetics” for, above all, the novel is an art form and has to be evaluated as such. While courageously dealing with the sensitive areas of women’s existence, Deshpande has shown an equal courage in the use of different narrative modes to challenge patriarchal ideology. Thus the borders of margin and centre merge and these identities become malleable.

The questions that lurk in our mind are – one, how Shashi Deshpande can influence the Indian English fiction writers in the twenty first century? And two, what is the real contribution to Indian English novels? To my mind, the answers to both the questions are in the affirmative. First, by writing from a women’s point of view she has encouraged the women writer to write about female experiences, love and sex freely.

Shashi Deshpande, though writes in English, brings her knowledge of Sanskrit and Kannada into her writings. In this connection, we are reminded of A. K. Ramanujan who clearly stated that all his knowledge from different sources and languages go to the making of his poem:

You don’t just write with a language, you write with all you have. When I write in Kannada, I would like all my English, Tamil, etc. to be at the back of it, and when I write in English I
hope my Tamil and my Kannada, like linguistics and
anthropology, what I know of America and India, are at the
back of it. (*Uncollected Poems and Prose* 47)

Deshpande assimilates her knowledge of Indian tradition and Epics into
English and writes her novels with both creative and critical insight. ‘Critical insight’
because she is perhaps the only woman novelist who has written substantial body of
bears testimony to her critical faculty. Deshpande, truly an Indian novelist writing in
English, is deeply rooted in the Indian tradition. Though she is well read in western
literary criticism, particularly feminism, she never allows her feet to be swept away
by this. On the contrary she questions why we as Indian writers and critics be
swayed away by western thought, when they don't count upon Indian critical
opinions and thoughts. She writes:

> But I have yet to hear that there is any writer in the West
who is waiting in trepidation to hear that what a critic in
India has to say about her/him. I have yet to learn that an
Indian critic can make or break a book that comes from the
West. (*The Hindu*, Sunday, 2 January 2000: xiii)

But the real contribution of this novelist is in the field of experimentation with
language. We have come a long way from Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* in which the
author pleaded for writing English in our own way. And with Deshpande we find the
logical conclusion of Raja Rao's exhortation to create an Indian English idiom. This
novelist has fashioned a new language for fiction and paved the way for new writers
to make further experiments with both language and theme in the Indian context.
Thus postmodern Indian English fiction owes a lot to Shahsi Deshpande who has broadened the horizon of fiction writing and given a new language to it. Having set the taste for the age, Shashi Deshpande will continue to inspire new fiction writers of Indian English literature for years to come.
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