INTRODUCTION
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I had learnt it too, to create an image of myself for the world to live within it hiding my real self so resolutely that at times I forgot myself it was just a façade.

(The Dark Holds No Terrors 80)

Indian English fiction has its beginning in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya’s Raj Mohan’s Wife (1864), Nagesh Viswanatha Pai’s Padmini (1903), T. Ramakrishna’s The Dive for Death (1911), K.S. Venkata Ramani’s Murugan, The Tiller (1927) and A.S.P Aiyar’s Baladitya (1930). Creative writers in Indian English fiction want to maintain Indianness in all their works of art. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in “Prospect and Retrospect” says “what makes Indo-Anglian literature and Indian literature [...] is the quality of its ‘Indianness’ in the choice of its subjects, in the texture of thought and play of sentiment, in the organization of material and in the creative use of language” (Ramesh Mohan 8). Meenakshi Mukherjee in Twice Born Fiction observes “whatever be the language in which it is written, a novel by an Indian writer demands direct involvement in values and experiences which are valid in the Indian context” (19). However, what the readers want in Indian English fiction is only a feel of the shared experience of the tradition, culture, and heritage. It is as C.D. Narasimhaiah in The Swan and the Eagle observes, “What one has in mind is a shared tradition, a community of interests and a set of values that a people live by, all of which give a sense of identity to individuals and nations” (18). Equally, it is true that a talented writer can bend the language to his/her purpose, communicate the texture of the novel
and create the native atmosphere. Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand have brought world recognition to Indian-English fiction by their traditional Indian form of story telling. Their portrayal of life is realistic and authentic.

Women writers in Indian English fiction attempted their hand in fiction as early as 1879. Kamala Markandaya, the earliest of the top-ranking women novelist, was followed by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai. Markandaya reflects the East-West encounter in different contexts and projects the resultant identity crisis. Jhabvala's fictional world is pervaded by domestic atmosphere. Sahgal is a champion of individual freedom by portraying the various social and cultural changes that affect women in general. Her women characters seek fulfillment and self-expression within marriage and they step out of the bond to live as free individuals. Desai eschews social documentation and moralising by delineating the inner lives of hyper-sensitive women who are in eternal quest for freedom and meaningful life in a way as stated by R.S. Sharma in Anita Desai “To discover, to understand and convey the true significance of things” (12).

In Indian fiction in English, women are portrayed as silent-sufferers. They are presented as the upholder of an Indian culture. They are expected to play various roles as mother, wife, daughter, sister, lady love, prostitute and so on. This is mainly due to the prevailing patriarchal society. Indian women took pride in service and self-sacrifice. They followed the images of Sita, Anasuya, Kantari and so on. However, Indian woman’s freedom from all the shackles of illiteracy, subjugation, and ignorance heralded the dawn of independence for them. The
western education served as the transitional phase, when the Indian woman had to face the struggles between tradition and modernity.

In a patriarchal world, a woman is never regarded as an autonomous being. She has been always assigned to a subordinate and relative position. Simone De Beauvoir in The Second Sex holds:

Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees. She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex [...] absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. (534)

Woman represents only the negative as is defined by limiting criteria without reciprocity. Beauvoir in The Second Sex admits: “One is not born but rather becomes, a woman [...] it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature [...] described as feminine” (267). Considering women as passive and voiceless beings, Beauvoir also says:

A woman can never be angry. She can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There is no room for despair, either. There is only order and routine, today [...] Marriage subjugates and enslaves woman and it leads her to aimless days indefinitely repeated life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose. (500)
Showalter in *Speaking of Gender* admits that "Women's writing necessarily takes place within, rather than outside, a dominant male discourse, through acts of revision, appropriation, and subversion." Further she argues: "Women's literary and critical texts are both double-voiced discourses, inevitably and continuously engaged with patrilineal and matrilineal sources" (4-5).

The emergence of women writers on the Indian literary scene with radical outlook is of the recent phenomenon. They present the idealized image of woman in their novels. It is imperative that they write from women's point of view. They project well the emotion and experience of a woman in the image of a wise-mother and so on. The emergence of women writers in Indian English Fiction is of great importance as they write about woman subordination and emancipation. Alphonso-Karkala in *Indo-English Literature in the Nineteenth Century* says: "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 [...]" (78). The earlier writers presented the traditional image of Sita, an object of pity. Later, due to education, they began to present the realistic image of woman, her sense of frustration and her alienation. The transition from the old to the new/modern presents the conflict created by the opposing forces of modernity and tradition between romantic aspirations and the reality of life and between the personal fulfilment and duty towards family. In fact, the conflict between emotion and reason becomes a complex one as women are tossed between the desire and submission to the patriarchal set up. Women writers have analysed the socio-cultural modes and values that have given women their image and role towards themselves and the
society. In order to achieve the harmony of relationships, the women writers have analysed the psychic and moral dilemmas of their women characters.

Women's narratives in India revolve around the institution of marriage. The institution of marriage is the most glorified and sacrosanct pattern of existence socially, religiously and sexually. The virtues of an ideal wife are encoded. Fidelity to her husband, ungrudging service, enduring hardships for his welfare, ready obedience and sacrifice of her own interests are the essential duties of 'bharya', the wife, towards the 'bharta', the husband. The 'Pativrata' ideal is grounded in Indian psyche and is subtly exploited by man in the dialectics of sexual relations to control woman. In the mythical tales of Savitri-Satyan, Danayanti-Nala, Sita-Rama, Gandhari, Arundhati and Ahalya, women are seen in the contexts of their husbands as paragons of chastity, faithfulness and devotion.

Women writers of Indian English Fiction have significantly contributed to the “Vitality, variety, humanity and artistic integrity” (Iyengar, Indian Writing 430) that embellish the contemporary fictional canvas in India. They are the “natural storytellers” (Iyengar, Indian Writing 435). Ian Watt in The Rise of the Novel points out the sharpness of observation and keen perceptibility of women when he says “the feminine sensibility was in some ways better equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationship and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel” (57). Women writers mostly focus on women characters, on women's lives, and experiences in their writings. They present the detailed account of women's emotions, ideas and preoccupations. Women are in the centre of their narrative.
The culture that created a Sita and Gandhari has denied existence to woman. The society has denied woman the possibility of being 'SHE', a person capable of achieving individualism - the need for autonomy and self-identity as defined by Johanna Kirk Patrick in her “Women in Indian English literature : The Question of Individuation” (121-29). Woman is an object to man because “it is in seeking to be made, whole through her that man hopes to attain self-realization” (Second Sex 173). The problems like adjustment and personal fulfillment led to friction and resultant frustration among them. Hence, the new woman voiced a note of dissent and resented to be stifled under the oppressive restrictions. Promilla Kapur in ..Love, Marriage, Sex and the Indian Women observes “women's education, her rights of citizenship and other legal rights and above all her gainful employment and economic independence have tremendously influenced her outlook on conjugal relationship and attitude towards marriage” (194).

Deshpande was born in a famous educated Brahmin family in 1938 at Dharwad in Karnataka. Her father, Adya Rangachar, was a renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar and wrote plays of ideas like Bernard Shaw. At the age of fifteen she went to Mumbai, graduated in Economics and moved to Bangalore. In Bangalore, she got degrees in Law, English, and a diploma in Journalism. She worked for sometime in a magazine. She was married to a medico man and got two sons. Her writing career began in 1970 with short stories. She was influenced by Maugham, Jane Austen, Bronte Sisters, Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing and Erica John. Her writing was also stimulated by Simone De Beauvoir and Germaine Greer.
Deshpande is one of those contemporary writers who concerns with the people and their inner anxieties and doubts rather than with the externals of life and living. Her characters are always engaged in questioning and evaluating the meaning of ideals, attitudes, actions and reactions of people in personal interactions and relationships. Deshpande is a woman writer, who writes about women and their problems. Most of her writings come out of her own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in an Indian society. Her writing comes out of her own consciousness of the conflict between her idea of herself as a human being and the idea that society has of her as a woman. She believes that all good writing is socially committed writing. It comes out of the concern for the human predicament as women are filled with fear, the panic, the suffocation and the helplessness.

To Deshpande, writing and becoming a novelist is "a kind of claustrophobic existence [...] and that caused the outburst" (Gangadharan, "Denying the Otherness" II). And as a result, Deshpande explores in her novels and short stories experiences of oppression of Indian women in the domestic set up. Such oppressions are rooted in "the presumption that (a woman) is an inferior being, of carrying the burden of being an unwanted female child, of having to battle an ingrained, deeply entrenched patriarchal system – all of which give rise to problems specific to their sex" (Mathews, "Demythifying Womanhood" 8). The western education in a woman awakens a desire for freedom, choice and individuality. And as a result, they begin to negate the age-old traditional images as they feel alienated and discontented. Deshpande attempts to deconstruct the numerous levels of patriarchal and sexist bias employed towards girl and women in Indian middle-class society. The central theme of her no
discrimination which is sensitised by the modern educated and career-oriented middle class women.

As a creative writer, Deshpande is concerned with the women’s struggles in a context of contemporary Indian society and especially to trace her image and identity as mother, wife and above all as a human being. She portrays the predicament of educated middle class women, their inner conflict and quest for identity, issues pertaining to parent-child relationship, marriage and sex and their exploitation and disillusionment.

Deshpande can be called a feminist. Even in her essay on “Why I am a Feminist” she admits: “It took me years to say even to myself, ‘I am a feminist’ [...] Today, when I call myself a feminist, I believe that the female of the species has the same right to be born and survive, to fulfil herself and shape her life according to her needs and the potential that lies within her, as the male has” (Writing from the Margin 83). But concerning her on the feminist stand Shivani R. Upadhyay in “Deception and Dualities of Indu in Shashi Deshpande’s Roots and Shadows” says that Deshpande is “not an avowed feminist” but “she expresses a deep understanding of the female psyche [...] Her attempts to give an honest portrayal of their sufferings, disappointments and frustrations make her novels ‘feminist texts’” (46). Deshpande’s heroines are highly sensitive, intelligent, educated and career-minded. They have a rebellious tendency. They question the concept of love, marriage and sex. Shubha Dwivedi in “‘To be or not to Be’ : The Question of Professional Women in Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows and Small Remedies” observes:
Deshpande's novels encapsulate the tensions underlying women's aspirations and their cultural identities. Their urge for self-definition culminates in the identification of the areas of conflict. They are encased and suffocated in the patterns of androcentric culture and their desire to perform is taken over by the necessity to conform. These women are steeped in the conventions and customs of a patrilineal society which dislocates and alienates them from the process of being and becoming. Deshpande's novels are polemical attacks against the patriarchal world-where women are treated as a kind of non-man. (225)

The main theme in her novels is not the facile one of opposing tradition with modernity or westernization with Indian culture. Her characters grapple with their struggle which drags them through innocence and experience, ignorance and knowledge, girlhood and adulthood, repression and submission/rebellion and joy and sorrow.

The female protagonists in her novels are young girls who can be led astray, married women who suffer silently and working women who are out of the family and come in direct contact with the society. The main themes that have found expressions in Deshpande's novels are inner conflict and search for identity, parent-child relationship, and concept of marriage and sex. Above all, the theme of silence rooted in the complex relationship between man and woman holds a grip in her novels. She deals with the inner workings of the female psyche.

The Legacy, her first book appeared in 1978. Two years later, in 1980, her first novel The Dark Holds No Terrors was published. Throughout the
seventies, she apparently wrote a number of short stories, publishing them in magazines and newspapers, some of which later found place in the collections of her short stories. *Terrors* is however, not really the first novel to be written, the first being *Roots and Shadows* which was completed in 1978, a year before *Terrors*, but published only in 1983 (Holmstrom 243). The year 1982 saw the publication of a crime novella *If I Die Today*, and in the mid-eighties three collections of short stories came out in quick succession— *It was the Nightingale* (1986), *It Was Dark* (1986), *The Miracle* (1986). Today though published in 1982, works in a very different manner from both *Shadows* and *Terrors*. The narrative approach is quite different in each one of them. Later, in 1988, appeared *That Long Silence* which brought her the Sahitya Akademi Award. And in 1993, after a gap of several years, appeared two novels, miles apart from each other in plot construction and thematic thrust, *The Binding Vine* and *Come Up and Be Dead*. The latter is once again a crime novel but stands in between children’s literature and adult fiction as it is a story located in a girls’ school. *A Matter of Time* (1996) and *Small Remedies* (2000) are the other two novels.

Deshpande’s *The Stone Women* (2000) is a book of reminiscence. The novelist relates the past to find its meaning in the present by adopting a new approach. She adopts a mythical approach and she transports the readers into the mythological world of the Mahabatra. In fact, she approximates the myths to the contemporary women’s experiences by interpreting the myths. In the “Afterword” to the book *The Stone Women*, Deshpande avers: “What women writers are doing today is not a rejection of the myths, but a meaningful and creative interpretation of them. We are looking for a fresh knowledge of ourselves in them, trying to discover what is relevant to our lives today” (94).
Moving On (2004) is a story of love and despair. Pallavi Mishra in “Human Relations: Beyond Human Grasp in the Short Stories of Shashi Deshpande” says:

"in the short stories of Shashi Deshpande the characters are not given any name. They remain nameless as if they can be merged with one of the reader, or the reader can associate his own self with any of the character" (272).

Over the years the writer has given several interviews and delivered addresses at seminars and conferences. She has responded frankly to the queries regarding her choice of themes, the organisation of her material, her early apprenticeship and background. The interview also help the readers trace the development of Deshpande as a writer. The interview with Vishwanatha is one of the early interviews and first appeared in Literature Alive (December 1987). For their she gave interviews to M.D. Riti in Eves Weekly (18-24 June 1988), to Lakshmi Holmstrom in Wasafiri Vol 17 (Spring 1993), to Geetha Gangadharan in the Indian Communicator (20 November, 1994) and to Vimala Rama Rao in Journal of Indian Writing in English, Vol. 25 (January-July, 1997). These five interviews are also included in The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande edited by R.S. Pathak (1998). A later interview given to Sue Dickman appeared in Ariel (Vol 29. 1. January 1998) and over and above this there are several direct statements about her works which have appeared from time to time. “The Dilemma of the Woman Writer” which appeared in The Literary Criterion in 1985 (Vol 20. No 4 and included in Pathak) states her own ambiguous relationship to the position of being labeled a woman writer, a category that both limits and liberates.

Deshpande is not talking merely about an individual woman writer but about the whole category as such and addresses the issues of ematic
constraints and readership responses to the writing of women. There was another piece in The Sunday Times of India in 1992 (May 10), "No Woman is an Island", and yet another that throws light on her growing up in colonial India, "Them and Us", which is included in the Unbecoming Daughters of the Empire edited by Shirley Chew and Aniā Rutherford, 1993. An early piece on the making of Shadows "On Writing a Novel" is included in Indian Women Novelists, Vol S. edited by R.K. Dhawan (1991). In March, 1995, Deshpande delivered the keynote address "On Women's Writing" at a conference organized at Tirupati. It is possible to trace the influences on her as well as to discern the patterns of thought as they evolve in her work by carefully going through some of these statements.

Gender roles are concerned, enacted and learnt within a complex of relationships. In the Indian family, there exists, despite its patriarchal character, an independent community of women which evolves as a result of taboo and an interaction between the sexes. The female child is acculturated into her social role of daughter / wife / mother. Sarita in Terrors grows up as a victim of her mother's sexist and gender based bias. In Silence, Jaya notices that her name had not been included in the family tree. Deshpande's novels explore the quest for selfhood undertaken by women who come from harsh environment. They are caught between a traditional upbringing and the longing for freedom in the modern sense. A quest for identity forms the theme of Silence as Jaya, the protagonist, thinks of her past and tries to analyze herself to decide who she really is. Sarita in Terrors revolts against her mother's oppressive dictates and becomes a doctor and even marries a man of her own choice. Indu in Shadows rebels in a similar fashion. A motherless child, her renegade father and Akka, the strict and
disapproving matriarch of the family, leave her to fend for herself in a traditional
family. Indu, Sarita and Jaya, despite their early rebelliousness, cannot quite free
themselves from their early socialization and its effect upon their psyche. In fact,
Deshpande's characters find freedom not in the western sense but in conformity
with the society they live in without drifting away from one's culture. It is due to
Deshpande's support that feminism is pro-woman but not anti-man; she rejects a
separatist stance.

Down the ages, the place of women in the tradition bound, male dominated
society has been very unenviable. The position of women - economic, social, and
cultural - has not shown much change. A vast majority of women are reconciled
to a life of humiliation in the form of gender bias while performing the roles of
wives, and mother in a rigidly custom bound milieu they live in. Even women
with liberal modern education, with an irrepressible yearning to break loose from
time honoured crippling and iniquitous social law, do often lose their mooring
and find themselves in perilously embarrassing situation. Even, economically
independent women have not been able to clear off the besetting pitfalls created
by the custom and beliefs sedulously preserved in the tradition bound Indian
society. Woman is marginalized, repressed or silenced. The role of woman was
restricted by her womanhood and the experiences of her are muted. But with the
rise of feminism, woman became aware of the fact that her inferiority is not
ordained anywhere. The gender is neither natural nor immutable because it is a
creation of patriarchy. Women realize that the system of patriarchy has no longer
served the needs of the rapidly changing society where women are trying to
emancipate themselves and desire their potential. Revolting against their
marginalization, they have started questioning the sexual politics and gender arrangements.

Traditionally women have always been treated as marginalized figures. Ruth Sherry in *Studying Women's Writing: An Introduction* comments: "being regarded as marginal is a source of psychological stress often leading to a feeling of powerlessness and lack of a secure sense of identity" (6). Women have always been defined in terms of marriage, procreation and kinship. That's why, when Virginia Woolf defines women's place, she bemoans the unenviable position of women in *A Room of One's Own* as follows:

> Imaginatively she is of the highest importance. Practically she is completely insignificant, she pervades poetry from cover to cover, she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of Kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was a slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature talk from her lips; in real life, she could hardly read, could scarcely spell and was the property of her husband. (66)

However, women writers of Indian English fiction have significantly contributed to "the vitality, variety, humanity and artistic integrity" (Iyengar 430). It is as Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* admits: "the feminine sensibility was in some ways better equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationships and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel" (57). Hence, it has been noticed that women writers mostly focus on women characters, on women's lives and experiences in their writings.
Women writers writing in English have shown admirable psychological insights in women characters. They concern themselves to probe, analyse and delve deeper into the secret recess of their women. Meera Bai in Women's Voices: The Novels of Indian Women Writers relates that the modern Indian women find no sense in being an acquiescent, suffering and sacrificing. They feel the need for self-expression and self fulfilment. They begin to question the convention and defy tradition. This craving for freedom results in breakup of family and relationships (61). Further, she adds:

If suffering and unhappiness are involved in sacrificing individual happiness, struggling for self-fulfilment at the cost of family and security too is not devoid of bitter consequences. This kind of individuation that results in clash of personalities inevitably results in the breakage of the age-old institution of marriage. (61)

Particularly self-willed and individualistic women have to suffer from broken relationships. Devaki Jain argues that “it is the non-acceptance of role-playing, the uncertainty of behaviour in changing societies that has broken down relationships” (xxi). Women in general are conscious of their emotional needs. They strive for self-fulfilment. They reject the existing traditional and social setup. They long for a more liberal and unconventional (modern) way of life. One of the most common situations where a woman starts struggling for her new identity being tired of her stereotype role is nuclear family. The modern women writers voice their protest against the prevailing male domination and attempt to achieve self-actualisation. Shobha De in Shooting from the Hip: Selected Writings says:
Eventually every relationship is a power struggle either on an overt or subliminal level [...] Control over the situation has been a male prerogative over the centuries. Women's destinies have been determined largely in that context alone [...] It is time they were made aware of the own potential and power. Shakti needs to be harnessed, directed and explored for the furtherance of over all human development. The very concept of the sexes located in eternal battle is negative and destructive [...] when one talks of Shakti unleashed, one also remembers the two connotations of Shakti - the destructive Avtaar is as potent as the creative one. It is in maintaining the state of equilibrium between these two opposing forces one can lead to creative and dynamic harmony [...] men will have to come to terms with women power. (112)

It is equally true that whenever the balance gets collapsed, there is tension in the society and double — dealings and hypocrisy predominate. Indian women writers echo these changes, which are taking place in the contemporary society.

In Indian English fiction, the new woman finds recognition of her own existence and support for her cause being getting her involved in the vortex of life that is complicated, demanding and exhausting. Hence, she makes her appearance as a fully awakened woman who is prepared to accept the challenges in order to live a meaningful life. It gives a distinct dimension to the image of the woman in a family and in a society. It results in the presentation of the sensitive woman surrounded by violent and vicious circumstances, reacting neurotically to the existential problems. The new woman moves towards the world of her own
emotional needs. Hence, the emotional world of woman is explored and analysed with admirable insight and sympathetic perception. It reveals an imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of her own psychology. The new woman fails to reconcile between the inner and the outer worlds, the imponderable gulf between expectation and reality, resulting in the deep anguish of the sensitive soul in eternal search of peace.

Deshpande is a woman writer. She writes about women. It is true that most of her writings come out of her own instance and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman. As a woman writer, she deals with gender-related experiences. However, it is also to be noted that Deshpande feels embarrassed to be called a woman writer as is revealed in her essay “The Dilemma of a Woman Writer” (33-36) and more over, she is not very enthusiastic about the label feminist. However, the women she has created may be called feminists / womanists.

Feminism declares that a woman is a being. She is not an appendage of man. A woman is not the other. She is an autonomous being. The feminist consciousness is the consciousness of victimization. It is a philosophy of life as it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep-seated causes of women's oppression. Feminism is committed to the struggle for equality for women. Feminism has become an intellectual movement charged with the excitement of violating — existing patriarchal / sexist paradigms and discovering a new field of vision by the writings of Virginia Woolf (A Room of One's Own) (1927), Simone De Beauvoir (The Second Sex), (1949), Mary Ellmann (Thinking About Women), (1968) and Kate Millett (Sexual Politics), (1969). Woolf's concept of
Feminist criticism is a new way of reading and thinking about literature. Showalter observes: “Women writers had a literature of their own whose historical and thematic coherence as well as artistic importance was obscured by the patriarchal values that dominate our culture” (1985, 6). Showalter calls women’s writing a sub-culture. The feminists urge the woman writer to be totally herself with everything in the culture that is muted, unrepresented and marginalised in order to subvert the existing systems that repress feminine difference. Feminist criticism can also be assailed as heterosexist, homophobic, racist or guilty of cultural imperialism. Lesbian feminists challenge the heterosexist assumptions. Black feminists believe that they suffer from racism as is evident in Alice Walker’s Meridian and Toni Morrison’s Sula. However, the qualities related to women in literature are formlessness, passivity, instability (Hysteria), confinement (narrowness), practicality, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy, and incorrigibility. The first goal of feminist criticism is reconstruction – unraveling “the tapestry of male hegemony”, “networks of conscious assumptions and unconscious presumptions about women” as Catherine R. Stimpson observes in “Feminism and Feminist Criticism” (277). However, some of the themes identified in women writers are androgyny, which to Schowalter is a flight from fixed gender identities, and is to Toni Moi a rejection born out of recognition of their falsifying metaphysical nature. Woolf is authentically a feminist in deconstructing the binary opposition of masculinity and femininity, of sexual identity. Beauvoire’s The Second Sex is espoused to socialism as it is based on Sartre’s existential philosophy and treats woman as an object for man.
her pursuit of freedom, equality and transcendence, her rebellion and protest against oppression at every level, sex-role stereotyping in society, debates about the double moral standard in society, various aspects of female experience such as domestic violence, rape, pregnancy, abortion, motherhood, being single, and so on, the evolving of feminine consciousness out of female experience, the internal conflict and ambivalence of women forced to choose between new feminist goals and traditional feminine goals, between total independence and the need for forming a sisterhood or a mother-daughter relationships and the alienation of woman as an outsider, as an object, as the other. (Christine Gomez 92)

The feminist consciousness is the consciousness of victimisation. It is an agnostic style against all forms of patriarchal and sexist oppression. The present day feminist thought encompasses a moral vision and emerges as a holistic, anti-militaristic and life-affirming philosophy. Toril Moi in “Feminism, Postmodernism, and Style: Recent Feminist Condition in the United States” published in Cultural Critique affirms that in a non-sexist, non-patriarchal society, feminism will no longer exist. So, Toril Moi uses the term ‘Post-feminism’ (3-22). Feminism is committed to the struggle for equality for women, an effort to make women become like men. Present day feminism is historically specific movement, rooted in French enlightenment thought (Mary Wollstonecraft) and in British liberalism (John Stuart Mill) and consequently wedded in deeply critical style to notions of truth, justice, freedom and equality. Karen Offen in “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach” grouped the different strands of feminism into two arguments”, “Relational” and “Individualistic” (57). The
Relational feminist thought made a gender based but egalitarian vision of social organisation. The individual arguments emphasised the individual, irrespective of sex or gender, as the basic unit. Relational feminists stressed women's right as women and individualist feminist thought emphasised more abstract concepts of individual human rights and celebrated the quest for personal independence. The Anglo-American Feminist tradition advocated the individualist thought as the only politically corrected form. The relational feminism led to the seemingly paradoxical doctrine of equality in difference.

Contemporary Women writers in Indian English fiction express their feminist articulations bringing to the fore an extremely pertinent question of women's equality and feminine autonomy with her male counterpart. The female protagonists, in their novels, venture to redefine and redress their own beleaguered selves discarding the male perception. Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* expressed that women "are simple. So much has been left out. Unattempted" (14). Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* also nurtured the feminist ideology. Beauvoir is of the view that history of humanity is the history of systematic attempts to silence the female. She says: "we open factories, the offices, the faculties to women, but we continue to hold that marriage is for her the most honourable career freeing from the collective life" (167).

Deshpande has feminist conceptions and convictions about feminism. She has a faith in the equality of the sexes and in the equal rights for both the sexes. She believes "until women get over the handicaps imposed by society, outside and inner conditioning, the human race will not have realized its full potential" (Letter to Usha Tambe, dated 26th May, 1989). The modern Indian women, as portrayed
by Deshpande, are working towards freedom. According to her, the statement of emancipation is the statement of freedom and responsibility of choice. She is a feminist writer but hers is not the strident and militant feminism which sees the male as the cause of all troubles. Deshpande believes that the fault lies even with the woman who submits to male's sense of superiority.

All her novels work through a feminine consciousness, Sarita in Terrors, Indu in Shadows, Jaya in Silence, Urmi in Vine, Sumi in Time and Madhu in Remedies and Jiji in Moving On. The two detective novels also have women narrators, Manju in Today and Devi is the dominant voice in Be Dead. There is no attempt at selecting a male protagonist but equally there is no attempt at focusing only on the feminine perspective. Women narrators transcend their gender in order to explore the male psyche and avoid stereotypical projections of patriarchal structures. Their inbuilt compulsions are presented with compassion and understanding. Sarita has the guilt for not being the male child her mother so much loved, and also the guilt that she failed to respond immediately to Dhruva's call for help like little Chicken's in Sula. Things are never the same after that. Sarita's marriage is under stress at this particular time because of a successful career which evokes her husband's jealousy. She has come back partly also in order to work her way toward recovery and rehabilitation. Her mother had died of cancer and had been ill for more than a couple of years. During this period, she had time enough to summon her daughter, forgive her and claim her as her own. But she did none of these things. She even forbade her husband from informing Sarita. Thus, Sarita's return home is also a test of her father's loyalty to her mother's memory. The silences between the two are rendered bearable by several things. Her father recedes quietly into the background, accepts her as she is.
Santa’s father is also a foil to the character of Manohar. He is gentle and soothing. And Santa finds that he has adopted the role of the housekeeper with remarkable ease in order to meet the exigencies of his life. The ‘dark’ of the title is her own past, her memories of childhood, the fifteen-year estrangement, the sense of having been abandoned and the fears of her subconscious mind. As she relives these years in the fragmented family on her return, she is exorcising the ghosts of the past.

Deshpande worked through historical and traditional contexts, explored psychological conflicts and inner spaces. Her art of writing has been submerged into the fact of being a woman. In an article “The Dilemma of the Women Writer” published in The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande, she expresses her views on what it means to be a woman and writer. She raises: “How valuable is a woman’s experience? What characterizes it and defines it?” (229-231). According to her, the woman writer has to decide for herself how far she wants to deromanticise the image created by men and also how to use her anger and resentment towards positive ends. In “The Dilemma of the Woman Writer” she not only concentrates on the conventional constrictive attitudes to women’s writing but also on the need to move out side that image. In it, she talked about her influence. She had no direct influence of any other women novelists. She writes “There was nothing, no body I could model myself on. What all the English writing by Indian writers meant to me was this – I could only tell myself. I don’t want to write like this, not like this, not like this” (Pathak, 229). She also points out the reason why woman self is missing in the writings of men in ‘On Women’s Writing’. In it, she admits “that a self is most often missing in the writings of men. And this is why so many women have sense of exclusion, of
being unable to discover themselves in the literature of men" (Ashoka Rani, 3-4). However, she acknowledges the influence of Jane Austen on her.

Deshpande in all her novels tries to distance herself from women’s lives. It is to say, as N.B. Masai in “Shashi Deshpande’s A Matter of Time As an Exploration of Women’s Inner Life” admits: “As a woman writer, her dilemma was either to give voice to women’s concern and be branded as a woman writer, [...] or to deny her femininity and write like a man either with the male name or male narrative voice” (14). However, Deshpande admits in an article in The Times of India that she is a feminist (May 10, 1992). In all her novels, as a feminist / womanist, she presents the social reality as it is experienced by women. Jaya, Sarita and Sumi who perceive their gendered roles and restrict their human potentiality and fullness rebel against the traditional way of life and patriarchal values. They struggle to transcend the restrictive roles. They rebel, reject and seek freedom from the traditional norms and ways of life.

Deshpande’s novels deal with the women belonging to Indian middle class. Her women are brought up in a traditional environment. They struggle to liberate themselves by seeking their self – identity and independence. Most of her women characters are able to transcend their identity crisis by analyzing their childhood and the process of their upbringing. The crux of all the prevailing problems of women is their subjugation, which is always present in the form of silent servitude. Their social conditioning generates slavish attitudes which results in compunctions in their psyche.

In all her novels, Deshpande deals with the inner world of the Indian women. Basically, she writes about the situation of women and their failures in
the fast changing socio-economic milieu of India. She writes about the conflict between tradition and modernity in relation to women. A woman is the centre of her fictional world. A woman's desires, efforts and failures are the main concerns of Deshpande. Her depiction of woman's world is authentic, realistic and credible. Her novels have the joint families, the working out of relationships within families and marriages, the fine insight into human character, her boldness in the treatment of sex and sexuality and crossing of caste, creed and class barriers. Her work is restricted to the urban middle class. She explores the lives of people who barely manage to survive within the norms of respectability and households which lack modern facilities and sophistication. The urban lower classes are projected as human beings and not merely as servants to be accommodated in their roles and images.

Deshpande's novels present a social world of many complex relationships. Doubt, anxiety and feeling of void of values make characters subjected to intense self-examination. Her women are caught particularly in the web of redefining and rediscovering their own roles within the given social world. In fact, Deshpande's own struggle, as a writer to focus on women's issues, problems, and experience, is equally symptomatic of the resistance to feminist expression.

Deshpande, in her novels, unveils the subtle process of oppression and gender differentiation in the family and in the male oriented society. Deshpande shows great sensitivity and awareness of the ways and means through which a young girl is prepared for her future status in society. The factors that influence her include cultural aspects, social and psychological factors such as the family structure, woman's position in it, female sexuality and the trauma of monthly
cycle. Her major novels Terrors, Shadows, and Silence trace the quest for self-definition of women, who are educated and modern but who cannot quite shake off their background and the manner in which they have been brought up.

In Deshpande's novels, sexuality, romance, and social environment are questioned through marriage. Usually, marriage is viewed as an initial attraction, which results in long-term breaches or rebellion. Indu in Shadows, Sarita in Terrors, Sumi in Happy, Madhu, Leela, and Kaveri in Remedies go in marriage of their own choice. On the other hand, Mini in Shadows, Premi in Time accept arranged marriages. Jaya in Silence also accepts arranged marriage. In all these cases, marriage is viewed not as self-fulfilment but as fulfilment of a social and familial duty where the body becomes a commodity against the concrete social reality where caste, status, puberty, wealth, and security are held in importance. Both in arranged and in love marriages, sexuality has its own role to play. Love, acceptance, response, yielding or withdrawal, rigidity, aversion and self-hatred come to rest on the point of sexual relationships. Even the struggle between the claims of freedom and the claims of body comes to rest on this man-woman relationships. Marriages and estrangements are a central concern with Deshpande as she moves from the marriage of acceptance to other relationships that fall outside. Her women characters question the idea of romance. They test its strengths and limits against their social reality and explore its memory through a sexual relationship.

Marriage subjugates and enslaves modern woman and it leads her to "aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently toward death without questioning its purpose" (The Second Sex 500). The role of a wife
restricts rather circumscribes woman's self-development. Rosemarie Tong in Feminist Thought observes that "sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to, as because they have to in order to survive economically and / or psychologically. Virtually all women engage in the feminine role playing" (208). Although the institution of marriage has long been enduring, it has undergone changes. With the process of industrialization, urbanization, westernization, politico-economic, cultural and socio-psychological changes, with growing emphasis on education, the Indian women experience freedom and struggle to get over it. The inevitability of the men to understand such needs and accept the individuality of women threatens and corrodes their marriage. As observed by Anuradha Roy in her book Patterns of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers, "Marital relationships have almost inevitably been the focal point of novels written by women. But there is a quantitative difference in tone and perception in novels, which adopt an explicit or implicit feminist stance. The emphasis is not on the development or mechanics of the relationship but on the forces which work together to make the relationship a farcical exhibition of togetherness. Functioning along fixed parameters, marriages become an arid formality, devoid of contact" (87-88).

In Deshpande's novels, mother-daughter relationships are perpetually under question. In Time, Vine and Remedies, the conventional idea of motherhood is subjected to scrutiny. Part of the problem arises with a mother's love for a male child as in Terrors, and part in the conflict between the need to be independent and free vis-à-vis the totalizing claims of motherhood. Also in some measure, it comes to rest on the mother-daughter relationship where domineering mothers destroy their daughters.
Through this mother-daughter relationship the woman to woman relationship is problematised across generations. It is a complex, protective, empathizing relationship. All women are not at loggerheads. All of them are not obsessed by the need for a male child nor is the relationship with a girl child constrained by gender relationships. Families are built on marriages which are heterosexual. And the equation between the husband-wife becomes crucial in determining the mother-child relationship. Indu in Shadows is the only one of her heroines who is motherless and has no memories of her mother. All other women have a love-hate relationship with their mothers whether it be Saita in Terrors or Sumi’s relationship with her mother on one hand and her daughters on the other in Time or Urmil’s with her mother in Vine or Savitri bai’s with her daughter in Remedies.

Terrors opens with Sarita coming home after nearly fifteen years. The news of her mother’s death has brought her home. She is a doctor, married and with two children. She has not been able to shake off the fears of the past. She has the guilt which has been thrust upon her ever since the death of her brother Dhrupa.

Sarita feels neglected and estranged, and also rebellious. Her marriage to Manohar is one such act of rebellion. Her mother’s attitude has been unyielding and unforgiving. This homecoming is significant from many aspects. There is a need to belong, to pay homage to her dead mother, to reach out to her living father. There is a desire to build relationships in order to forget the fears of the past. She has come back not merely to bridge the differences. She also has to claim her rightful place within her parental home. The novel works around three
mam strands of thought the first of which is problematising of the institution of family, the second of the syndrome of the male child and the third of Sarita’s coming to terms with her own self.

Shadows is a different kind of novel. Indu, the rebel who has married of her own choice, has a job and lives in the city. She is suddenly summoned to her great-aunt’s deathbed. Indu suddenly finds herself the heiress of her great-aunt and the centre of the various family claimants. The joint household has an assortment of relatives and dependents. Several of its members have moved out for personal reasons. Indu’s own father makes only an occasional appearance and one of her uncles stays in the city. But those who stay at home have to bear all the burden. Indu’s great aunt Akka is a childless widow. She has earned her wealth through fidelity to her old husband in an unequal marriage. She has survived through the relationship as if through a punishment. In the end, she has gained her strength from it.

Indu has inherited both Akka’s indomitable courage and shrewd judgment. The only one of her heroines to be an heiress, Indu reinforces the feminine inheritance in more ways than one. She handles the family’s affairs firmly. She decides to ignore the many pressures being exerted upon her. She decides to sell the house. This dislocation rather than be an uprooting experience becomes a liberating one as the sprawling family is forced to come to terms with its feuds, jealousies and exploitations of each other.

It is also a liberating experience for Indu as she decides to get out of the romantic submission to Jayant. She has to make space for herself. Actually Indu is on a visit to her ancestral home after a long period as she has got completely fed
up and disillusioned with her married life. This is where the story begins, backward and forward and the novelist unfolds the thoughts and emotions of this singular Indian girl. Indu marries Jayant against the family’s wishes and stays in the city. Her city house remains fastidiously clean. Indu, who is an unusual child, has developed into an unusual girl. Analysing her present life, she realizes that her overwhelming love for Jayant is disturbing. Her capacity for total self-surrender frightens her. She feels hurt by Jayant’s response, which does not reflect his total and absolute commitment which is expected. Her town-life and its hypocrisy are sickening to her. As a writer, she has also become dependent on the likes and dislikes of Jayant.

In Terrors Sarita is a doctor. She, too, is on a visit to her parental home in the small town. This house has not changed since her childhood. Away from the professional milieu, she becomes an ordinary housewife temporarily. Though the routine is dull, but it is far soothing. In the absence of her hectic city life and in the equanimity of village life, she reviews her life and her relations with her brother and her husband. In fact, Sarita has deeper and more intricate problems. Though she is a successful doctor, her husband is a medico lecturer. As she grows in stature, he begins to reduce in size. This has a terrible result. He becomes a sadist. It is his panic reaction to the neurotic anxiety of failure, particularly failing in comparison with his successful wife. Such a person subsequently cannot understand or even remember the strange action. The novelist is trying to indicate that financial independence does not emancipate a woman in true senses.

Deshpande’s two detective novels also project a similar world view except for the fact that the events move at a faster pace and people die not through
accidents or illness but they are killed, got rid of because of fear or aggression, in short, murdered. The first of these, Today, is a short novella with Guru, a philosophical person placed amidst a group of doctors. He is terminally ill and is staying with one of the doctors for his treatment. But he is also the observer eye with death staring him in the face, and disinterested in his own existence. He is keen to confront truth and compel others to do the same. This habit of him leads to an uneasy situation when ghosts from the past are brought out into the open. A series of murders is triggered of and Guru is the first victim. As other murders follow, everybody begins to suspect everyone else. Children are sent away. There are silent accusations, hidden fears and a state of general panic. The next to die is Tony, a death by drowning. There are other deaths which are narrated—Prabhakar Tambe, the union leader and others. Finally, it is discovered that it is the intense, and probably the incestuous love of Vidya, the Dean’s sister, which has led to Guru’s and Tony’s deaths. The destructiveness of possessive love is the evil which has disrupted the life of the closely-knit hospital community. The novel does not merely read as a suspense mystery. It raises several other questions and makes a very good use of the setting—the hospital, its staff, the terminally ill patient and the professional secrets which prick the conscience of the doctors as they move between the personal and the professional.

Indu’s ambition for developing a career in writing is shared by Jaya, the narrator of Silence. The four part novel is about Jaya’s questioning of herself and her relationship with her husband Mohan, who in order to escape from the restrictive life of poverty moves from modest aspirations to still higher ones and in this process of social climbing gets involved in some shady deals. In order to become unavailable for sometime, Mohan and Jaya move into an old flat which
Jaya had inherited. This forced retreat into the past, into the chawl-like flat lets loose all past ghosts, memories, and claims of relationships. It places them simultaneously amidst helping hands as well as inquisitive eyes, forcing them to take measure of themselves.

In Silence, the past as it unfolds itself carries images of large families, endless pregnancies and endless deprivation, the constant and brutal use of a woman's body and death in waiting as both the fertile and the barren women die. Male insensitivity and brutality and with men showering all their frustration on the women, also become evident. Within this chaotic existence, the one stable factor is a woman's wifehood which is considered a necessary sanctuary and a blessing camouflaging within it all its hidden miseries, conflicts and the uncomplaining burden which women carry.

Deshpande's Silence begins at a point of crisis, mid-way between the nominal attainment of middle class successes and a return to the earlier life style and travels through the past. As Jaya goes over the past, she realises in how many different ways Mohan has pushed her and appropriated her space and her relationships, and also in how many different ways he has limited her, inhibiting even the free expression of her natural generosity and fellow-feeling. It is a detailed analysis of a married relationship where the male bulldozes over all personal claims and sensitivities of the female. This is a shared history of most women. They begin to relate to the outside world through the minds of their men, but all the while also build up a hidden, and often silent, communication with other women, with aunts and mothers, sisters and mothers-in-law and neighbours. Thus, while there is a vertical relationship through the male, there is the horizontal
one through other women, the undercurrent of the conspiracy of silence. In Silence, as the narrative develops, Jaya begins to look at her own role in the making of her marriage a little more closely. She has been too unquestioning, too docile, concerned with the ends rather than the means. A woman's whole life—her childhood and adulthood both—is totally geared towards a male centre in which the central male, above father and above son, is the husband. Unending fasts are observed by the Hindu woman, a continuous self-mortification disguised as piety motivated by the sole desire of avoiding widowhood. It is not human goodness which is privileged, nor is it the functional aspect of a relationship, but the physical presence of the man and his right of ownership.

Amidst this surrounding awareness, suddenly her earlier insulation is punctured and the fortnightly ‘Seeta’ story, she is committed to write, never gets written. The strangeness of her diary pages stares her in the face. She falls back as her own resources unsullied by status and uncontrolled by sanity and finds that the world she had so carefully built had collapsed. She felt totally dislocated. Bit by bit, through fragmentary revelations of the past, the success story is unraveled to reveal the conscious efforts both—Jaya and Mohan—have made at forgetting the past. Memory is selective and one learns to falsify emotions and hide one's true feelings not only from others but also from oneself. Mohan has worked hard at acquiring an education and a middle class status, forgetting that his mother was a cook and that an old man paid for his education as an act of charity. Jaya has suppressed her anger and modeled both her prosaic recordings in the diary and the ‘Seeta’ stories on the culturally governed images of womanhood.
Be Dead is set in a girls' school and it will be taken as an adolescent mystery, where young girls are being lured into a call girl racket and the racketeers systematically begin to get rid of those they feel are likely to expose them. Kshama Rao who is the new Headmistress of the school is an ambitious woman. Her cousin Devi is invited to come and keep house for her and help in looking after her dependent brother who is not 'all' there. The rest of the story is actually a contrast between these two character types—Kshama and Devi—and the different ways in which they organize life, relate to people, cope with emergencies and the like—one independent, hard and ambitious, the other homely, gentle and caring. It is Devi who plays the amateur detective and is thus instrumental in Kshama's final rehabilitation.

Vine carries forward three narrative strands introduced in her earlier novel Terrors. Mira was given no freedom to opt out of the relationship. Love and passion are viewed as a male right. Women are supposed to fall in love and oblige. Mira's relationship with her husband is one long nightmare. It is rape within marriage. And Mira who writes poetry and keeps a diary, dies while delivering her child. Mira's life illustrates the traumatic aspects of a loveless marriage, and of one-sided love. The male impulse to possess the woman and override female resistance marks an aggression which is backed by social approval through marriage.

Urmi's questioning of the mother-daughter relationship is a continued exploration of Sarita's relationship with her mother in Terrors. Urmi resents her mother, resents having been sent to her grandparents during her childhood, but she learns that she had been sent away at her father's behest, because he had wanted to
protect her from any possible assault. Urmi is grieving over her dead daughter and not a male child. As Urmi learns to cope with it she gets involved in other people’s lives. She finds the young doctor attracted towards her and begins to think about the nature of sexuality.

Vine takes up for its theme a real life case of sexual assault resulting in the victim’s going to coma. In the novel, this brutal rape is conducted upon a young girl, Kalpana, and by her own uncle—her mother’s sister’s husband. This uncle of hers is a lecherous man and keen to take her for a second wife. But Kalpana is in love with a young man closer to her own age and unwilling to be sacrificed for the security of her childless aunt. But male desire claims her as its own and Kalpana is raped, clawed into, brutally bitten. The woman-to-woman friendship is also highlighted as it even cuts across class and role boundaries. Urmi has a very good relationship with her husband’s half-sister and she develops an empathy with Shakutai, Kalpana’s mother. But somehow it is her own mother she resents. In developing relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and other women within the kinship network, Deshpande is simultaneously reflecting a deep reality of Indian family patterns by reversing the popular image of animosity between relationships established through marriage. Further, she traces the matrilineal aspects of tradition as property which is handed over by Akka to her grandniece in Shadows. Urmi reconstructs her mother-in-law’s female experience from her diary and poems. It is significant that the limited space the woman gets is only the pages of diary and the little tin box in which her belongings are stored.
Urmi's grieving over her daughter is also indicative of her sense of loss, at the double disruption in this feminine tradition. She has failed to relate to her mother. And, now this failure is duplicated in the next generation by the death of her daughter. The novel ends with Kalpana's aunt committing suicide. The shock of her husband's destructive desire, the sense of betrayal she experiences and the guilt she lives with, make it impossible for her to continue with the act of living. Love can be very demanding, very cruel, destructive and ugly. Yet, it is needed for surviving, for the act of living. The various relationships do not only reveal the complexity of human needs, but also the irrelevance of social models if they have become meaningless. Shakutai and her sister are victims of the normative structures which surround them else. Kalpana need not have been sacrificed. Vanaa and Urmi have a slight advantage because of their education and class background and are in a better position to negotiate their social reality.

Deshpande's Time deals with the theme of the quest for a female identity on the basis of the complexities of man-woman relationships specially in the context of marriage. It also has the theme of the trauma of a disturbed adolescence, her attempt to break traditional moulds in which she is trapped, subjected to sexual discrimination, due to the rejection of the dependency syndrome and introspection. Time revolves around four generations of women-Manorama, who is dead but her presence is felt through her portrait, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru. Bereavement is the subject of Time. It is the loss of a male child during a journey which brings about a rift between Kalyani and her husband leading to a total division of the house. The house, 'Vishwas', is a symbol of stability, but for this family it has become one of instability. This house has always been in search of an heir. Kalyani is the only daughter of her parents, and
in order to keep the property in the family, Manorama, her mother, got her brother to marry her daughter. The only male child of this union, a mentally retarded boy, strayed away from his mother causing a permanent division of the house with the husband and wife living on different floors.

Sumi is the other child of this couple and the novel opens with her husband Gopal walking out of their marriage. It is simply a question of withdrawal. Gopal wants to recede into himself and seeks his freedom from the marriage bond. While others try to bring him back, Sumi does not even attempt to do so. The first one to go to Gopal is Sumi’s mother, Kalyani, who sees in this a replay of her own life. The next is his daughter who does not plead but threatens a legal action. Gopal finds himself helpless because his withdrawal is beyond his control. Others step in to act as substitute supporters, his father-in-law who takes his daughter and grandchildren to ‘Vishwas’, and his nephew, Romesh, who places some money in Sumi’s bank. And as the house is once again peopled, and relatives find their way there with offers of advice and expressions of concern, each one of the family members tries in her own way to rehabilitate herself. Aru forms a friendship with a woman lawyer whose help she has sought to take action against her father. Sumi who is house-hunting finds a strange understanding emanating from a prosaic house-agent. Charu acquires a boy friend. Family connections come alive. Doda and Premi descend upon them. And this house full of women has several moments of laughter when through narration, recollection, queries and responses the past comes alive. But that is only on the surface. Their lives are still rudderless. Gopal continues living over his pupil’s printing press in his ascetic, self-contained manner and Sumi refrains from making any claims on him. There is a strange passive acceptance on her part of the separation thrust upon her.
and she progresses in another direction. First a job, then involvement in the job and then the writing of a play.

The novel makes several comments on relationships of all kinds—within marriage, with siblings, family relationships, generational slipovers, and relationships with one's self. Sumi's father and her husband, both have withdrawn suddenly from their families. There is a retreat from involvement. In both cases, there is the absence of a male child.

Kalyani's life has been spent in sexual deprivation, but there is also the suspicion that the loss of the mentally retarded child may have been a subconscious need to be free of him. The loss of a male child also comments upon the ability of the women to sustain themselves on the strength of their children irrespective of their sex. The male child symbolizes a continuity primarily for the father. The incident has a long-term effect on the husband-wife relationship and calls into question all family relationships. Its social and familial ramifications are innumerable.

Time has several subnarratives woven into it, many of them which move into the past—Kalyani's life, Gopal's childhood; Romesh, Gopal's nephew's, relationship with Gopal whom he calls Guru; Romesh's parents, and their relationship with Gopal; Manorama, Kalyani's mother's marriage to Vithal—and the whole range of conspiratorial management behind the scenes. These subnarratives act as decentralizing factors with no individual protagonist being the sole concern of the story. Lives are interlinked and interdependent. The narrative may be projected through a dominant consciousness, but it is not a centralized one.
Deshpande works out the tangle of relationships through a double narrative in *Remedies* which also takes up for its theme the subject of bereavement. Madhu is a journalist, a part-time writer like Jaya and Indu in her previous novels, and has recently lost her son Adit in a bomb blast. This has affected her relationship with her husband. In an attempt to help her cope with her depression, her friends ask her to do a biography of Savitribai Indorekar, a famous singer who was at one time a next door neighbour, and with whose daughter Munni, Madhu had struck up a friendship.

There are two main narratives running parallel to each other—one of Savitribai’s life and the other of Madhu’s—but in fact there are several more. Munni has always denied her parentage and has consistently attempted to run away from the shadow of her famous mother. Munni’s life is spent in pursuit of normalcy which her mother has destroyed by taking to music as a profession, by acquiring a Muslim lover and giving birth to Munni out of that union. The mother and daughter work in opposite directions and while the mother is almost ruthless in the pursuit of her talent, the daughter is equally determined to seek anonymity in the folds of a family. Both of them deny each other. Savitribai never mentions her. And in her, the conventional image of a sacrificing and a caring mother is dismantled. She is also not obsessed by the need for love and discards her love just as she had walked out of her family. In large measure, it is the either/or choice which again is the accepted code reflecting the belief that women cannot have a full life if they pursue a career.

There is also another subnarrative of Madhu’s marriage and her husband’s jealousy. The guilt she feels is not actually at the death of her son but at the
breakdown of communication between her and her husband. Their estranged relationship affected also their relationship with their son Adit, who had begun to avoid them. Her husband Som, almost a carry over from Nayantara Sahgal's The Day in Shadow, looks upon her with suspicion regarding her pre-marital friendship with a man. The disturb arising out of this suspicion destroys their relationship.

There are yet several other narratives, those of Madhu's childhood, of her father's mistress, her aunt Leela's unusual marriage and her stepchildren and Madhu's mother's family and finally the connection with her hosts at Bhavanipur. It is during this time spent at Bhavanipur that Madhu begins to resume life and starts a renegotiation with herself with the help of her hosts, the mirror reflection of Savitribai's life, the memories of the past, Joe's brotherly protection, and the crisis caused by Savitribai's illness. Music and religion, both are placed in a situation of conflict with religion claiming purity and music offering devotion. Religion, like family and marriage, is seen to be a patriarchal structure and music as one which encourages deviation, spontaneity, transgression. With Savitribai's Muslim protégé taking her place in the religious performance, a reconciliation takes place, one which is a harbinger of Madhu's return to Som for the first death anniversary of their son. The past has to be allowed to go.

Deshpande has also written several short stories. Several of her short stories are included in Stone Women. Her stories, like her novels, deal with relationships, with one difference. They are, at times, more radical, even sexy in their themes and statements. The stories capture little moments of nostalgia, of perversion and terror, of the disruptive events of life. They weave an atmosphere.
Myth is interwoven into almost all her narratives, into her language, images and references. In contrast to her novels, several of her short stories have a male protagonist and work through a male consciousness and perspective. She herself questions this choice in one of her essays.

The present study is the result of survey of literature made on the works of Deshpande. The survey unearths the fact that though the image of woman in Deshpande’s work has been traced, it is not a full-length critical study as Sarabjit Sandhu’s bibliography is not an exhaustive one as it happens to be a forerunner in the scholastic study of Deshpande. Hence, it is decided to conduct a critical inquiry on Deshpande’s literary discourse to unravel the hidden images of Indian women to construct a woman identity keeping its culture, philosophy and values in perspective. Sarabjit Sandhu’s The Image of Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande (1991) traces the image of woman in Terrors, Shadows, and Silence but Sandhu miserably fails to trace the various images imbedded in her novels. R.K.Dhawan’s book Indian Womeu Novelists (1991) has essays on Deshpande’s works, particularly in its fifth volume. Viney Kirpal has edited a book under the title The Girl Child in 20th Century Indian Literature (1992) and this book contains articles on Deshpande based on theories formulated by Nancy Chodorow, a child psychologist. Mukta M. Atrey has done a doctoral thesis on Deshpande under the title “The Portrayal of Womanhood in the Fiction of Shashi Deshpande” (1993). Later, Mukta with Viney Kirpal has brought out her thesis in the book form under the caption Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of Her Fiction (1998). Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal examine Deshpande’s works from the feminist perspective treating women as wives, mothers, grandmothers and aunts. It also examines the short stories of Deshpande and also the art of
Deshpande. The chapter on husbands, lovers, fathers, and so on is interesting as for the first time men are also included under feminist perspective. R.S. Pathak has edited a book on Deshpande under the title *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande* (1998). It contains critical essays on issues like gender identity, evil, feminism, women, search for self, myth and folklore, metaphor and also some interviews with Deshpande. Anuradha Roy has written a book on the feminist consciousness found in Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Attia Hossain, Rama Mehta and Deshpande under the title *Patterns of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers: A Study of Anita Desai's "Cry, the Peacock", Nayantara Sahgal's "Storm in Chandigarh", Attie Hossain's "Sunlight on a Broken Column", Rama Mehta's "Inside the Haveli" and Shashi Deshpande's "That Long Silence"* (1999). It focuses its critical attention on the repressive forces within family, sexual stereotyping, and also considers tradition and culture and purdah as means of female repression. It also highlights the issue related to woman's surrender and accommodation in *Silence* in comparison to Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli*. Mrinalini Sebastian's book *The Enterprise of Reading Differently: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande* (2000) analyses the works of Deshpande under the level called Postcolonial arguments with issues like novel as a colonial genre, loneliness, gendered subject, subaltern, recognition, woman as individual, ambivalence and interstitial perspective taking four major works like *Vine, Silence, Terrors and Shadows*. The book is a counter-statement to the works of Deshpande as the author finds that the novelist has not taken postcolonial issues and further states that the "novels of Shashi Deshpande do not deal with issues of cultural difference and cultural conflicts, even when the narrative mode is realistic" (Sebastian 11-12). M. Rajeshwar has brought out his
articles on psychological aspects in Indian Fiction in English under the title
Indian Women Novelists and Psychoanalysis (2001). It includes an article on
housewife’s trauma related to her fiction Silence. Prasanna Sree has authored a
book on Deshpande under the title Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande
(2003). It also includes an interview with Deshpande, T.M.J. Indra Mohan has
edited a book on Deshpande under the title Shashi Deshpande: A Critical
Spectrum (2004). It contains critical essays on themes like girlhood, women’s
inner life, mother-daughter relationship, gender issues, feminist voice and
marriage and sexuality. Amar Nath Prasad has edited a book on Deshpande under
essays on gender issues, female space and voice, psycho-familial issues,
feminism, marriage and sexuality and human relationship.

There are several other essays. Of these one is by Adele King under the
title “Shashi Deshpande: Portraits of an Indian Woman” in Kirpal’s The New
Indian Novel in English. King shifts from a predominantly Indian context to a
larger world. Deshpande’s themes, King feels, are universally applicable (King
166). Other essays are Sarala Palkar’s focus on the mother-daughter hostilities in
Kirpal’s The Postmodern Indian Novel and Santosh Gupta’s critiquing in her
two essays, one in Critical Practice (Vol. No.2 1998) where she comments on
Vine and the other in Memories of the Second Sex under the title “Feminine
Identity, Myth and Society in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande” (Qtd in
R.S.Pathak 30). There is another essay on the anger in Deshpande’s Silence by
Adesh Pal in The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande, which moves out of a feminist
framework into a psychological one but the multiplicity of her work still remains
unexplored primarily because the major thrust has been on surface themes like
'quest for identity' or the Indianness of her milieu. Deshpande herself has in several interviews stated that she hasn’t yet got the recognition that she deserves. Such remarks have also been thrown out of context and interpreted in terms of the limits of her work.

The relationship of a woman to her body of works within a complex networking cannot be seen in terms of 'liking' or 'aversion'. The realism that pervades her novels has also not received full attention. Neither its implications nor its variety have surfaced in the critical material available on her. Her numerous references to her literary influences have not been taken up in their full implication. Neither has there been any attempt to look at her narrative modes and strategies. One needs to look closely at several of these aspects and then go back to the texts in order to work out the full implications of her rejection of the tradition and her claim or affiliation to writers of Indian languages, her assertion that her background is firmly here and that her work is about Indian people and the complexities of their lives. With a sizeable quantum of work behind her, it is legitimate for her to demand that her work should be assessed in its fullness. The feminist perspective is a positioning within a large discourse or else needs to have its counterpart in defining a masculinist-perspective. It is not logical to categorise male writing as universal and to confine woman's writing to a cubbyhole label feminism. Environments, space, temporality, relationships are shared by both men and women.

Deshpande recognises the childhood experiences, influences and tendencies which make her protagonists revolt against the established tendencies within the family. Deshpande urges that it would be psychologically unrealistic to
Imagine that awareness within the woman emerges suddenly, that she becomes a person with the oneself of adolescence. The role of early life experiences, the role of education, closeness to parents, sibling relationship, marriage, sexuality, women’s career, desertion by men, and her going-back or home-coming are very crucial elements that go a long way in creating a woman’s personality.
REFERENCES


___________. "No Woman is an Island". *The Sunday Times of India* (10 May, 1992) : 12.


