Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION
The present project is a comparative study of the treatment of man-woman relationship in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee. The modern Indian women writers in English have discovered new ways to counter the various forms of oppression meted out to women in a male-dominated society. They seem to have been guided by the age-old experience of repression of Indian women. Kamala Markandāya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Attia Hossain, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Nargis Dalal, Rama Mehta, Shanta Rama Rau, Venu Chittle, Veena Paintal, Mrilani Sarabhai, Jai Nimbkar and Shouri Daniel are emotionally and intellectually equipped to offer an authentic fictional treatment of the problems of man-woman relationship in terms of marital dissonance, socio-cultural issues, socio-political and socio-economical problems. These prominent and eminent women writers seem to have been inspired by the feminist movement in the West. Though they refused to be labeled as feminists, they accept the statement of Virginia Woolf:

there is the obvious and enormous difference of experience in the first place; but the essential difference lies in the fact not that men describe battles and women the birth of the children, but that each sex describes itself (1965:26).

Women novelists discuss their own problems more insightfully. Vimla Rao explains this in a very outright manner:
Women, by nature, see, hear and talk more exuberantly than the men. Being at the centre of the vaities of life nothing escapes them. Keen observation, a quick perception, a fine sensibility and an intuitive insight into life are the strong points of any novelist. Women novelists have made use of some of these natural gifts in the writing of their novels (LHY. Vol. VII. No.1:1966:47).

The personal background and intellectual training of these women novelists seem to have endowed the speciality which their fictional product bears. Their wide acquaintance with the vagaries and nuances of life, both in the East and the West, and their achievement of often high educational and intellectual standards have given a sharp edge to their observations. Their natural feminine sensibility and introspection have imparted to their observations a humane touch and a psychological depth to their art. These women novelists have witnessed the emergence of the new woman in the fast changing social milieu waiting for liberation from the tyranny of the ages. Consequently, man-woman relationship has assumed tremendous importance in their fiction. Their novels emphasize the need for economic independence, reject virginity as sign of purity and accept pre-marital sex. These novelists have taken up a radical posture and propagated a new set of values pleading revolutionary changes in social norms and attitudes by showing the plight of woman, her quest for her own identity, her pursuit of freedom, her struggle for self-realization
and self-definition, her rebellion and protest against oppression. Thus, the women novelists, by probing into the women’s psyche, have opened up avenues for the study into the various social, cultural, political, economic, feminist and sexual issues.

It may not be out of place at this point to look very briefly at the concept of feminism as it originated and developed in the West. The term ‘feminism’ was first used by the French dramatist Alexander Dumas, in 1872 in a pamphlet ‘L’ Homme- femme to designate the then emerging movement for women’s rights. It gradually emerged to be world-wide cultural movement to secure complete equality of women with men in the enjoyment of all human rights- moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal, economic and so on. The set pattern which evolved through centuries i.e. man to rule and woman, to obey/serve; man, the god, and woman, the devout; man for the field and woman for the hearth and so on is now challenged.

Feminist criticism is political in character and has no particular theoretical affinity and in fact, it uses many available models to put forth its case. In fact, it questions phallocentricism and phallogocentricism i.e. the male-centred view of life and male dominated discourse. It is as much an avant-garde movement as deconstruction, and has many facets,
sociological, anthropological, psychoanalytical, textual, ideological etc. Its prime task is to deconstruct what is derogatorily called ‘patriarchal metaphysics’. The foundation for feminist studies was laid by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) when she observed the asymmetry between man and woman in as much as man inclusively refers to the human, while woman is the other. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1969) made a scathing attack on patriarchy or the rule of the father which has for centuries distorted the position and role of women in society. She distinguishes sex from gender, sex is biological whereas gender is a cultural construct. The undermining of woman’s position aligns feminist poetics with that of Marxism which champions the underprivileged. Feminist politics even recalls to mind the ideology of the Blacks who have been oppressed class. Virginia Woolf’s writing constitutes pioneering work in the feminist criticism. They reveal resentment of the denial of opportunities of education and of improvement for women. Virginia Woolf thus located part of the issue of feminism in the material conditions inherent in her times. She even attempted an analysis of discourse, exploring the possibility of a female language.

The earliest feminist critical writings have been political in character while recent feminist criticism has been called ‘gynocritics’ (‘la
gynocritique’ in French). Its ambition has been to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature. As Elaine Showalter has observed, ‘gynocritics’ aims to develop new models based on new insights into female experiences made available by research in many disciplines. The aim was not simply to fit women into the history of a tradition among women themselves. The extracts from Ellen Moers and Elaine Showalter, building on the earlier work of Virginia Woolf, reveal the affinity which women writers felt for each other, the interest sometimes encouraging, sometimes anxiously competitive that they have taken in each other’s work, the way the writing of one might prepare the ground for another, the problems all faced, and shall face, in handling the institutions of literary production (Eagleton Mary [ed.] 1956:1). Showalter agrees with Germaine Greer that women writers tend to disappear more easily from literary history, leaving their sisters bereft and struggling to reconstruct the lost tradition. Secondly, Showalter considers that the notion of a ‘female imagination’ can confirm the belief in a deep, basic and inevitable difference between male and female ways of perceiving the world. Such ‘essentialist’ or ‘biologist’ beliefs imply that there is something intrinsic in the experience of being female and thus render gender biological rather than cultural. They tend to privilege gender at the
expense of class or race; and they can too easily become a-historical and apolitical, presuming our unproblematic unity among women across culture, class and history.

Special mention must be made here of French feminist criticism which has drawn heavily from Jacques Lacan's work in the field of psychoanalysis. The early feminist critics resented Freud's attributing 'penis-envy' to woman. They resented his dictum that anatomy is destiny. To the feminists it was yet another instance of male aggression and appropriation of privilege and 'presence'. Lacan does not reject phallocentrism, for he sees the phallus as power. But he steers clear of the biological determinism. He points out how there is no natural correspondence between woman as signifier and on things designated by the term 'ladies' e.g., the label on the bathroom door. This he calls 'symbolic' as different from an original sign, like 'free' which is 'ironic' and 'natural'. Post structuralist feminist critics like Julia Kristeva accepts this distinction as usual in constructing their ideology. Kristeva regards the female as open and flowing and therefore resisting crystallization. The female stands for creativity which is itself fluid. Helene Cixous who is regarded as 'the prophet of the female world' discards Virginia Woolf's advocacy of androgyny in preference to a celebration of the feminine and
female per se. She skillfully uses Derrida's concept of difference and advice to allow free play of the signifier, in her attempts to go beyond the death-dealing polarities of father/mother, sun/moon, culture/nature, head/emotion. The feminist critics take daring liberties with the texts they examine, in elucidating their favourite ideologies (Seturaman, V.S. [ed.] 1989:44-45).

The names of the critical works in the realm of feminist literary criticism in America are Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about Woman* (1968), Patricia Meyers Spack's *The Female Imagination* (1975), Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontes to Lessing* (1977). Lesbians, both black and white, and heterosexual women of colour criticize which is almost as selective and ideologically bound as the male tradition. Sexism is challenged in the white heterosexual work but heterosexism or homophobia or racism or ethnocentricity may not be. All the faults of male critics with respect to women's writing generally are reproduced by some feminist critics with respect to lesbian or black writing. There is the factor to recognize difference, the presumption that what is said about white, heterosexual women's writing will count for all women. Thus critical texts often establish an unconscious and
unarticulated complicity between author and reader that the world is white and heterosexual (Eagleton 1986: 2-3). In England, the Marxist Feminist Literature have attempted to marry class and gender, it is an understanding of women’s writing an approach which several members of the group have developed further in their subsequent work collectively.

The equal challenge has been taken up by the Indian writers in English especially the women novelists. They have opposed the orthodox Hindu social code and the decree that a woman must never be independent. In childhood a woman must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband and after that to her sons. The subservience to male domination faced a challenge from Indian women when they actively participated in the national struggle for independence against British rule. Subsequently political freedom and universal suffrage “gave women experience in participating in all aspects of politics” and with “relative ease” they “entered the profession and captured political power” (Srinivas 1981:18). Nevertheless the condition of Indian Women in spite of legal reforms- The Hindu Succession Act (1955) and the Hindu Marriage Act (1950) giving rights and succession and divorce to women – remained unchanged on the psychological level and to a very large extent in practice. Therefore in the years which followed, many novels were
published on the predicament of women not only in English which is the medium of creative writing for only a microscopic minority but also in Indian languages. Female Indo-Anglian novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee and Jai Nimbkar belong to the privileged urban minority but they voice the general concern of the Indian women towards their plight. The women characters created by these writers reflect the consciousness of individuality which for long has been suppressed.

The favourite theme of these Indian women novelists seems to be the human relationship. They focus on the primary groups in which the most intimate interaction is possible. The most important primary groups are the family, friendship and work groups. They are primary in the sense of their enduring influence upon the individual. Family is man's immediate fragment of society. "For Man does not live in cosmos, he lives in microcosm" (Krech David 1962:480). As a psychological group, the family is significant as in its structure are involved three fundamental bonds: the marital, parental and sibling. Even this small group, simple as it may seem, offers challenging possibilities of complex ties. Notwithstanding our weaknesses and strengths, predilections and aversions, we all are influenced and constrained by family relationships.
The important institution besides family is marriage. It plays a vital role in shaping the life of a human being. Human beings go through a procedure of marriage to establish a family. Marriage, as depicted by sociologists, is “A cultural phenomenon which sanctions a more or less permanent union between partners conferring legitimacy on their offspring” (Abercrombiee Nicholas.1984.127). In a patriarchal society, “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society”(Beauvoir Simone, de: 1987:445). The Hindu view of marriage is that it is a bondage that extends beyond the husband’s death.

While Hindus feel that the goal of life of a woman is to worship her husband, in Christianity the first parents were made bone of one’s bone and flesh of one’s flesh. In marriage, oneness, companionship and mutuality are stressed. It is assumed that the interests of the husband and wife are one and that whatever is the benefit of the one is for the benefit of the other also.

Woman in reality is essentially a subservient partner in marriage. In a way marriage for her is a trap which negates her rights to individuality, independence and self-realization. Usually in the institution of marriage a woman is reduced as an object of decoration, possession and man’s sexual gratification. It turns out to be an institution of oppression for her in
various forms rather than of her protection for which it was primarily instituted. J.S. Mill observes: “No slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full in a sense of words, as a wife is” (quoted in Alice S Ross [ed.] 1974:156).

Engles is of the opinion that marriage is not a reconciliation of man and woman but the subjugation of female at the hands of the male. As a man is a taker of woman and the woman is giver in marriage she becomes man’s half and takes his name, his religion, family and class. She is truly reduced to the status of a nurse maid of the children. Before marriage, woman is forced to live under the care of her parents. After her marriage, she is transferred to the jurisdiction of her husband. Like a citizen in the communist government with utmost sincerity, she too is destined to follow her husband’s norms with devotion. Germaine Greer remarks that “She eventually finds that after her marriage her life has changed radically but not her husband’s”(1971:321). Karl Marx says that, “marriage is incontestably a form of exclusive private property” (quoted in Mitchell, Juliet.1973:110). A.K.Sur observes that “Marriage in the biological sense is a sexual relationship entered into with the intention of making it permanent, even apart from whether or not it has sanction of law of the
church” (1973:2). Therefore, in most societies throughout the world, marriage is considered as a permanent life-long and sacred union:

In spite of all these dicta and slogans supporting the indissolubility of marriage, these are factors, internal as well as external, working to undermine the stability of marital ties. Such a situation is termed 'marital dissonance' which may be manifested in various forms, divorce being the final (Pothen. S. 1987:2).

The primary ties within the family fold are universally esteemed and cherished. Nevertheless, in the modern age these fundamental bonds have become fragile under the pressure of in-built personality traits, quest for identity, external stresses, economic and political upheavals. Despite several common qualities, each human being is a living affirmation of the ubiquity of individual differences. Consequently, temperamental properties influence even basic human relationships.

In the rich stratum of Indian society, the institutions of marriage and family have come under tremendous strain in modern times. One of the major causes of the disintegration of a family is the rampant promiscuity. Another factor is the lack of a set of routine work and excessive leisure among women of the richer classes which becomes the chief cause of the restlessness, discontent, indiscretion and divorce. Subhash Chandra defines marriage in a manner which “postulates
complete sexual freedom, with no notion of marital fidelity” (quoted in Dhawan R.K. [ed.] 1991:244).

Though there are radical changes in Indian society, still most people favour a happy, life-long marriage characterized by love and understanding. Some see it as ‘a marriage of two minds’. However, this seems to be really unattainable. In fact, people fall out of love, remain locked in unhappy marriages or seek divorce. It requires effort and commitment on the part of the spouses to maintain their marital relationships.

Besides the psychological attributes, external circumstances also affect mental ties. These concern the mundane realities of human existence: the economic stresses, political tension and the changes in the value-system of the society. Continuous adjustments and consistent adaptation are required and must be accomplished to accommodate the diversity of external influences. The solidarity and strength of a relationship is seen in terms of its ability to absorb such stresses through internal, interactional and sequential modifications.

In the context of Indian culture, marital, filial and sibling bonds assume great significance. Familial ties are considered sacred in India. All successful and satisfying bonds are based on a spirit of sacrifice and self-
denial. However, the changed temperament of the age, when a distinctly individual identity is the cherished dream of every individual, had dealt a severe blow to the traditional concept of primary relationships. These ties are being seen from a different perspective altogether. Subtle cultural and intellectual changes, responsible for a shift in emphasis, from a collective destiny to an individual identity, are causing great upheaval. Modern man is, therefore, living in a psychologically tense, socially dynamic and economically uncertain milieu which is obviously not conducive to the establishment and development of gratifying interpersonal relationships. The Indian women novelists, by focusing on man-woman relationship in their novels, seem to have favourably responded to the changed situations, psychological realities, the phenomenal attainment of freedom in a spirit of analytical reconstruction of Indian life.

The portrayal of man-woman relationship is not new. It is as old as the novel itself. Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding on the one hand and D.H.Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner on the other, have been primarily concerned with this fundamental relationship. As D.H.Lawrence points out: "The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman..." (1972:130). This theme is popular with Indian English
novelists as well. There exists a deep involvement with the female question in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Manohar Malgaonkar, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Arun Joshi and others who like their female protagonists also plead for equal opportunities to women and have interpreted sex as a corollary and a casual byproduct of a higher type of relationship between man and woman. Hence in the post-independence Indo-Anglian novel there is no rigid binary opposition between the female and male approach to the women question. There exists a unified sensibility which is evinced by novelists of both the sexes who are involved in the creation of a harmonious society.

The male Indo-Anglian novelists have an objective understanding of the problem of women in Indian society. Manohar Malgaonkar upholds woman’s right to choose her own husband. In his *Distant Drum*, Bina decides to marry Jacko rejecting her parent’s choice Arvind. Her confidence and individuality rejects Kamala Kant’s traditional views: “our women should not have the same kind of freedom as the western women seem to have” (1960:69). Malgaonkar is critical of dowry and of the tendency of the Delhi elite “showing off their hospitality, showing off their wealth and showing off their women”. The pity is that “the women consider of being on display themselves, were showing off their clothes
and jewellery” (Ibid.248). These upper class women enjoy their position as sex commodities but Saroja in Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* resents her position. She tells her brother Ram that the European women know how to love and complains that Indian women know only how to bear children. They are treated “just like a motor car or a bank account” or “a comfortable salary paid by a benign and eternal British Government”. “Our joy”, she says, “is a treasury receipt”. She vehemently opposes her marriage criticizing her future in-laws, “I am a cloth in their waste-basket: they’ll know what to beat me against the stone, to make me white as milk. We girls are thrown to other families as the most intimate, the most private of our clothes are thrown to the dhobi on Saturday morning...Like cotton, we women must have grown on trees...” Saroja’s bitter attack on the Indian orthodoxy in general and the Brahmins in particular is legitimate. Ironically her brother, the philosophical narrator deeply rooted in Hinduism, has “no answer to give” and tells her to have patience as “Time and experience soften all things” (259).

The progressive outlook in India rejects the traditional concept of marriage and morality, pleads for freedom and sexual equality and supports the women’s desire not to be treated as passive commodities. In this context, Mulk Raj Anand believes that only a socialist society can
grant true individual status to women. The profit oriented society would always treat women as sex commodity. He does not extol the idealized suffering of Sita and negates the myths in his *The Old Woman and the Cow*. For the new age not Sita but Gauri is the myth who from the gentle cow’s acquiescent visage changes to “a woman with a will of her own” (1960:248). When her husband Panchi doubts her, she tells him, “if you strike again, I will hit you back” (Ibid.283). It is not Ram, the male who rejects Sita, the female but Sita who leaves Ram and threatens him with retaliation if force is used. The mythical parallel is developed to climatic intensity and Sita is metamorphosed into Gauri- the new woman who is confident of finding a job and looking after her child. The negation of the Sita myth is the outcome of Anand’s rejection of the idealized Hindu wife who perpetually suffers. Gauri boldly walks away with the hope that her “child would not be the coward that Panchi was or as weak as he had been” (Ibid.284). The novel ends with Gauri developed into an individual with a free will, no more dependent on males for survival but able to realize her potentialities with a sense of the future symbolized by her faith in her unborn child. Dr. Shankar in Anand’s *Private Life of an Indian Prince* sums up the post-independence attitude of both the female and male prospectives to the women problem in India:
Woman stands on the same footing as men and love becomes a reciprocal business, embracing the whole of the man-woman relationship, and not being merely mistaken for sex, which is only one part of that relationship (1970:319).

On the basis of this in the ideal marriage “the ordinary life is transformed from trivial detail to some exalted purpose which is secret wish of both the partners” (Ibid.141) leading to true happiness.

A purposeful and enriching conjugal life is the nucleus of an integrated society but frequently an Indian marriage proves to be a scourge and has a negating impact on the female personality. As a result, Kamala Markandaya finds no bliss in a traditional marriage. She rejects the notion of male superiority in sex matters and resists established social norms. In A Silence of Desire she depicts Dandekar as the active sex partner and by implication points out that he “has turned his wife into a household article” (1972.89). There is no fulfillment for a woman in this kind of existence. As a contrast, Markandaya sees the possibility of a deep rapport and friendship, outside sex between man and woman. In Possession Anusuya, the first person narrator describes her natural and warm relationship with her friend Jumbo:

We were old friends, had known each other so long. There was not even sex left, just this easy relaxing warmth that is sometimes formed between well-disposed brother and sister (1967:93).
Markandaya attacks the concept of virginity as the touchstone of a woman’s purity. In her A Handful of Rice, Ravi marries Nalini and his male ego is satisfied when he finds that his wife is a virgin and he owns a first-hand commodity. The novelist’s disapproval of this male chauvinism is sharp and full of irony:

In the morning- Ravi- looked for it – there was blood on the bed. The spots hardly showed on the bridal red- flower draw sheet...It induced in him a deep protective flood of tenderness for Nalini (1966:4)

The psychological agonies generated by Hindu marriage is a recurring theme in the novels of the post-independence era. Maya, the heroine in Anita Desai’s Cry: The Peacock is a victim of “temperamental incompatibility”, with her husband which is “basic to the theme of psychic degeneration”, (M. Belliappa:1971:1) due to which Maya pushes her husband to death. Nayantara Sahgal, too rejects the principles of Hindu marriage as laid down by Manu. In This Time of Morning, she portrays Rashmi, Arjun and Uma as bad victims of arranged marriages and goes on to comment “How like prolonged starvation wrong marriage could be robbing lustre, defeating courage and will”. (1965:147) The traditional approach towards marriage is accepted by Mira, who belongs
to ‘a fast – disappearing race of women for whom endurance was a test of character’, therefore she wonders:

What reason under heaven could severe to be the result of wrong marriage. Jeevan makes a valid comment on the outlook of the Indian women and their misery because they are still living in the era of Ramayana, ‘Virtuous wife must do this. A good husband must behave thus. The hero is a saint, the villain is a devil. Nice people don’t have sex organs’ (Ibid.120).

The sexual inhibitions of the Indians are scathingly attacked by Sahgal. In her Storm in Chandigarh, Saroj has experienced premarital sex and is, as a result, constantly tortured by husband, Inder. She does not even remember the past but when humiliated by her husband she wants to say, “I don’t want forgiveness. I have committed no crime” (1969:95). On the other hand, her husband feels that he has been cheated as he knows of people “who would have flung her out with rubbish, considered her used, soiled and unfit for marriage” and had read of primitive societies that demanded “the blood of virginity as evidence of female purity” (Ibid.96). Vishal voices Sahgal’s view that Indian women “belonged to their men by contract or blood. Their sphere was sexual and their job procreation. They were dependents, not individuals” (Ibid.189). This realistic analysis enables him to see in Saroj “a struggling human being to be valued for her own sake”, and Saroj tells him, “I’ve always loved myself….One should
be able to. I’ve been able to say I mattered, that I was whole and clear” (Ibid.292). The mutual confidence and understanding show that not Inder but Vishal is the real man for Saroj.

Sahgal treats the same theme of strained marriage in her autobiographical *A Day in Shadow*. Simrit, a sensitive writer searches for a higher type of relationship with her husband Som, an ambitious businessman; and wonders:

Can’t we just hold hands? Can’t we live side by side like brother and sister, like friends, and talk? Can’t a husband and wife be friends? Is that forbidden? (1971:96)

Som, unable to understand her desire for companionship outside sex, believes, “when a woman freezes up every time her husband touches her, it’s time to call it a day”(Ibid.98). Simrit separates from Som taking the help of the divorce laws but finds it a hard life as a divorcee, finally finding solace in Ray’s company and realizing her potentiality through writing. Sahgal’s quest for individuality of the women does not overlook the sexual side, for Nita’s resentment in *This Time of Morning* derives from such things as the right to be sexually gratified and live life to the full. The question of sexual gratification is taken up by other novelists as well. In Nargis Dalal’s *The Sisters*, Mina complains against her husband:

He was absolutely impotent. Did you know that? Impotent. He couldn’t do a thing. All that beautiful face and a beautiful
body-all sham. He did not want a wife he wanted a mother (1973:130).

In Jai Nimkar’s Temporary Answer, the first person narrator Vineeta goes in for a love marriage but unfortunately soon becomes a widow. She is a doctor and starts her practice which she did not do as a wife. She becomes intimate with the writer-professor Abhijit and has sex relations with him, which would be forbidden and a sin for a Hindu widow. In him, she finds her real man and finally decides to accept him as her husband. Vineeta gives strength to Abhijit and believes anything less than an equal relationship is not enough. She is an enlightened woman and does not want to remain half a person, expecting Abhijit’s support in her movement towards wholeness.

Attia Hossain comments on the social facts and orthodox conventions that confine women, her focus is on Muslim women. Sunlight On A Broken Column (1961) is a portrayal of Laila’s revolt against joint Muslim family. She is the woman with western outlook and craves to get freedom like western women in the family reigned by the domineering patriarch, Baba Jan, a dying grandfather. She gets married to Amir quite against the wish of her family, and unfortunately gets widowed. Laila learns to struggle and come to terms with life. This
autobiographical novel proves Attia Hossain as a feminist novelist in Indian English literature.

Vimla Raina acquired her place as a woman writer through her only novel *Ambapali* (1962). The novel presents the historical period of Lord Buddha in Indian history. The legendary Ambapali was a celebrated dancer, beautiful and honoured and *Nagarvadhuc* of Vaishali in 600 B.C. She was greatly inspired by the Buddhist philosophy. The novel portrays her world and her aspirations as a woman and culture, religion, customs and philosophy of that time. The relationship between Ambapali and Ajatshatru is well focused.

Veena Paintal has a strong awareness of woman’s position in Indian society and she expresses her views to change it and challenges the male-chauvinist domain through her bold themes.

*An Autumn Leaf* (1976) is a story of Charishma who is educated and looks at traditional norms with contempt. She mocks the social system of marriage which is established to prove male-dominance and naturally rejects the proposal by her parents and elopes with Amit, a man of her choice, a man of 35 and brother of her friend. But for that she has to leave her parental home. She lives with Amit without marriage. She is the woman who craves for freedom. While living with Amit she realizes
that her freedom is in danger. So she soon abandons him. Then she lives with Rohit, rebels for women emancipation in male-dominated society and criticizes marriage system. Thus the heroine shows female sensibility to be free as an autonomous being.

**Spring Returns** presents Tara, a helpless young girl who is a victim of injustice done by her stepmother. She gets the training of nursing and adopts this career for her liberty. Her stepmother wants her to marry her nephew, Dalip who is insane and mentally disordered due to a heart-break. Tara runs away from home and works as a governess in Srinagar to assert her ‘self’ where she gets married with Mr. Kenny. Her heroines are bold and educated and aware of their traditional niche in the male-dominated society. They try to fight with system and show their rebellious nature to assert their womanhood.

Raji Narsimhan, born in (1937), is basically a critic but when she tries her hand in writing novel, she tries to search the liberated woman and her plight in contemporary society.

**The Heart of Standing Is You Cannot Fly** (1973) is a love triangle of Asha, Narayan and Mona. The novel depicts Asha’s desires and her emotional world.
The protagonist of *Forever Free* (1979) is Shree who is in futile search for meaning of life, her mother thinks that education is a gate-way to freedom. So when her husband as well as her in-laws suspects her, she accepts the solitary life by leaving her husband and drifts from man to man in search of love and stability. Her education does not save her from disillusionment. Finally she returns to her widow mother; now both of them are forever free, bound by neither marriage nor convention. The bondage from which they seek freedom is not physical but an external manifestation of their own trapped selves.

In the novel *The Sky Changes* (1992) a fan of poet Shelley and sensitive Krishna has a mismatch Jagat who is an insensitive husband. She tries to get away from him and her mother pressurizes her to return to him though she has affairs with many lovers. Krishna finally considers herself doomed to suffering.

Though Raji Narsimhan shows her heroines somewhat rebellious, they finally adjust with the situation. The themes she prefers are – the discrimination against the daughter, the silence of women and lack of communication between the sexes.

*Venu Chitle’s novel In Transit* (1950) presents the picture of three generations of Hindu-Brahmin family at Pune and its struggle during the
crisis of First and Second World War. It depicts the changing social, political conditions and economic pressure and Janki’s efforts to keep her family away from these. While depicting this, Chitle shows her women characters in different relationships in the joint family.

Kamala Das, a well-known poetess, attempts to explore self against a background of personal relationship through her writings. Her novels also attempt to depict the struggle of a woman to prove herself in the male-dominated society. The reflection of her ‘self’ can easily be found in her novels. A close study of her autobiography My Story reveals that she was rebellious by nature and craves for freedom throughout her life.

The Alphabet of Lust (1980) is a story of Mansi who faces marital-disharmony having an aged husband. Being a government official, she is always busy with his work and has no time for her wife. All her desires of love, companionship and warmth are unsatisfied. Being cheated by marriage she seeks her freedom and identity. Later, with the help of her political contacts, she becomes a renowned poetess and wins several prizes and also becomes successful to become Home Minister. Thus by asserting her ‘self’, she tastes power, glory and success.

A Doll for the Child Prostitute (1977) depicts two child prostitutes Mira and Rukmini. Mira secretly marries her client and is
frustrated within a week and forced back to her profession. Rukmini strongly desires to be a cultural and cultivated woman but her dreams are brutally crushed by her parents when they sell her to a brothel keeper. Middle aged Inspector wants her as his keep, but as she sees her father figure in him ironically begins to call him ‘Papa’. Soon he changes his attitude and his carnal desire is transformed into the father’s affection and promises her to bring a foreign doll and makes good his promise. Finally, she is proposed by the son of the brothel keeper and gets an opportunity to be a decent and self-respecting woman. Thus the quest for identity is the main themes of Das’ novels. She seems to be strongly aware of woman’s position in the society, her secondary place in man-woman relationship and her need to be emancipated.

Namita Gokhale’s only autobiographical novel **Paro: Dreams of Passion** offers her a prominent place among women writers. The heroine, Paro rejects sexual repression and rebels against cultural imposition. By thwarting the moral barriers she vents her uncontrollable sexual desire and seeks sexual variety. Thus, for her, sex becomes the symbol of quest for identity to be a free woman. Namita Gokhale’s woman character is representative of woman’s changing mentality and she displays her
radical views through her bold heroine who battles with male-domination to assert her self.

Rama Mehta is one of the important Indian woman novelists and winner of Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979 for her novel Inside the Haveli (1977). Inside the Haveli concerns Geeta’s alienation from the life of haveli and her gradual acceptance of its modes and rules. She is forced to live by its rigidly enforced course of behaviour which center on the ritual evidence of both men and older women through veiling, in order to retain her respectability. She must keep her head covered even when no men are in sight. Mehta describe that, “in the haveli men were regarded with awe as if they were gods. They were masters and their slightest wish was a command.” At time of extreme crisis, Geeta burns with rage, anger or frustration. Yet she remains silent. The veiling of the face is the overt symbolism of masking of inner emotions.

The author herself is both novelist and a leading sociologist, whose insight into the lives of women is based upon her own experiences of life in Udaipur (Rajasthan). Her novel is built upon information contained in one of her non-fiction text, ‘From Purdah to Modernity: two geographical space-time dimensions’.
Uma Vasudevan deals with the practical problem of Indian women. Her *Song of Anasuya* (1978) depicts the theme of sex and a man’s shameful emotional relationships with two women. Both have an entirely different nature. Priti is a woman of delicate and erotic passion. The representative of male section is Jagat who performs as an anti-hero, always in search of sex, joy and fulfillment, a middle aged man who longs for Anasuya with her song. He is unwilling to marry Priti who wants him and desires to marry Anasuya who doesn’t like him. Thus the novel depicts the failure of harmonious love-relationship.

*Shreya of Sonagarh* (1993) portrays the sexuality of a middle class woman, Shreya who is unquenched by the sexual attitude of her cool and neglectful husband, Brijesh. She is obsessed with Anand, her lover and attains her ecstasy of orgasm with ardent love-making. When Anand realizes the futility of their relationship he advises her to remain faithful to her husband and this brings the harmony between the couple. The novel depicts Shreya’s sexual odysseys, her journey from self-alienation to self-identification, from rejection to acceptance. The portrayal of women characters presents Vasudevan’s biased opinion of woman based on Western style of luxurious life. That’s why critics often charge of her being Western based and not firmly rooted in Indian soil.
It must be noted that these novelists have depicted the attitudes and desires of the middle class and the upper class women. They belong to "a tiny urban minority hailing from the upper classes which has been the principal beneficiary of the new gains", (Srinivas 1981:27) of Independence. Moreover, it is their class which is more inhibited sexually and given to the traditional idealization of "mythological character such as Sita and Savitri" who "were held up as ideals of devotions-for the women of the sanskritized high caste"(Ibid.18)and unconsciously accepts asymmetrical relationship, the observance of virginity before marriage and chastity subsequently and the rejection of divorce and remarriage.

The modern Indian writers writing in English have also voiced their protest against the prevailing male domination and attempt to achieve the 'self-actualizing' awareness of the emerging women. The reason is quite obvious that whenever the balance gets collapsed, there is tension in the society and double-dealing and hypocrisy predominate. The Indian feminist writers echo these changes which are taking place in contemporary society. However, it is observed that they had mild voices protesting against male-dominance in the beginning which have gradually assumed a strident, violent and rebellious posture in the latter writers.
The younger generation of women writers attempt to redefine and redress their own beleaguered selves discarding the male perception, with which they have been viewed and examined since ages, and entering into zones hitherto considered forbidden for women. Today the women writers depict a large number of women characters including hawkers, gypsies, prostitutes, painters, nuns, women employed in various professions. These women characters show courage enough to fight the social evils and male authority.

The second generation raised its powerful voice against the discrimination practiced against woman within family and outside in educational, political and economic spheres. The novelists in the post-independence period have realistically portrayed the changing phases and diverse aspects of the Indian society. Their novels reflect the varied features of contemporary society, the great change in the condition of the poor women and weaker section of the society. Women novelists of this period are aware of their individuality, their aspirations, their strengths as well as their weaknesses. They focus upon the main reason of woman’s wretched condition, because as a wife she suffered more due to the incompatibility between her individuality and awareness of herself and traditional views of her husband and the in-laws. The pattern of these
writers' quest is also as diversified as it is in the novelists of the other gender. But one motif with a strong hold on their imagination is the discontent and frustration of middle-class women. Novelists are aware of their trapped situation and they attempt to come out of this mire. Kamala Markandaya's heroines struggle against poverty and starvation but finally establish themselves in tune with Indian woman's identity. Nevertheless, her Western heroine shows contrast to her earlier image of woman by possessing males at her hand.

In the last two and a half decade, women became aware of the increased abuses which they are subjected to. In this connection, Mukesh Verma opines:

Perhaps the most striking feature of the contemporary Indian English Fiction has been the emergence of feminist literature feminist in the sense of giving voice to the sufferings, aspirations and assertions of women in a traditionally male-dominated world. Beginning with Anita Desai the list would go on to include novelists like Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee and Manju Kapur

(Verma/Agrawal 2002:5).

These women writers attempt to portray the tortured consciousness of the urban middle class woman, who in the quest of her identity undergoes a sudden change from a silent sufferer to a hard-core rebel, breaking away from the age old and rigid ethics of the male-centric world. At times, the rebellion of the woman takes extreme forms such as sexual
freedom or extra-marital relations which serve as a device for her to assert her ‘self’.

Uma Vasudevan depicts modern Indian woman’s liberation in Western ways. Attia Hossain takes us to her own caste and depicts a struggle of Laila against Muslim patriarchal system. Venu Chitle depicts middle class women’s struggle to save their family against socio-political situation of the contemporary times. Rama Mehta deals with a regional woman confined to the Purdah system and struggling for emancipation. The new generation of women writers has emerged from both subjugation and aggressiveness to a state of equanimity and equality in clear perception of their goals in the future. The blending of ‘feminism’ and ‘Indianness’ is clearly seen in Indian English women’s literature.

Thus the women writers before Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee and also their contemporaries discussed above have focused upon the changing position of women in the Indian society. They have added new dimensions to the themes like love and sex, man-woman relationship and woman’s plight in society. The gradual change in the status of woman in society is attempted by the women writers from time to time. In line with these women novelists, Deshpande and Mukherjee shoulder the afore-mentioned task to delineate the man-woman
relationship from their female protagonist’s point of view. They also handed it over to their further generations, notable among them are Shobha De, Githa Hariharan, Arundhati Roy and others.

Deshpande began her career as a writer in 1970 with the publication of collection of short stories. She is one of the dynamic women writers in Indian English Literature. She is honoured by Sahitya Akadami Award and other literary organizations. She is regarded as a forceful writer, with an excellent command over English Language. As a living writer in India, Deshpande reflects a realistic picture of contemporary middle class family life. Her writings transcend gender boundaries. Human issues and humanity is her concern.

There are three categories of women projected in Indian fiction 1) Rural 2) Educated, middle-class 3) Upper strata, urban women. Deshpande’s heroines Saru, Jaya and Indu belong to educated middle class category. While Kamala Markandaya’s Rukmani belongs to rural category and Namita Gokhale’s Paro and protagonist of Sahgal and Shobha De represent upper strata, urban women.

Deshpande’s novels provide a glimpse into the female psyche and feminine experience of middle-class heroine who is aware of her rights and urges. Deshpande represents those female writers who are
now presenting a picture of women which is totally different from the image of the past. The changing economic status enables the woman to change her attitude towards gender. Consequently, woman has strengthened her position which has forced her to shed off her Sita-Savitri image to her husband. The widely affected area of this change has been the vital relationship between man and woman. The change in woman’s position and relationship attracts many creative Indian women writers. They try to redefine the husband-wife equation through their writings. Shashi Deshpande is one of them to deal with the dominant theme of man-woman relationship.

A deep study of Deshpande’s novels shows her protagonist’s confinement in marriage and search for identity within wed-lock. Her protagonist seems to swing like a pendulum between tradition and modernity.

Mukherjee, an Indian born American novelist, is one of the major novelists of Indian diaspora who has received considerable critical attention from almost all the quarters of the globe in a relatively short period of just twenty five years. She has been acknowledged as a voice of expatriate-immigrant sensibility. She has acquired the esteemed place in
the galaxy of Indian authors writing abroad with Indian ideas, beliefs and values and provides them a living atmosphere.

Her consciousness about her female characters enables her to carve her place among the women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, R.P. Jhabwala and Githa Hariharan. All her novels revolve around the lives of the protagonists and their immigrant psyche. Her protagonists strive to find a niche and give themselves a second chance to build their lives. As a writer, Mukherjee does not impose ready-made solutions to the problem facing immigrant Asian women. She has paid indeed a special attention to the condition of the Indian women immigrants in North America. Her women characters lead lives of quite desperation but few of her heroines triumph over the obstacles they confront. Her heroines face multicultural society and are aware of their social reality. Her depiction of her women characters unavoidably presents the relationship of these protagonists with their husbands which is a world phenomenon now. The man-woman relationship in her novels is an outcome of cultural alienation.

Since Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee are women and have woman protagonist occupying centre-stage in their novels, their feminist outlook is bound to surface. As their roles are traditionally
associated with women, the thoughts of these women characters are sure to appear unexpectedly in their struggle for their identity in male-dominated world and their relationship with them.

The study, thus, attempts an analysis of Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee’s selected novels. An analysis of the novels would reveal that both of the novelists try to redefine the man-woman relationship with changing family values nowadays. Man-woman relationship being the central subject of literature appears to be inexhaustible and the changing times and changing social situations have served to bring out its amazing diversity and infinite variety. Both the writers try their best to find out this relationship in terms of mutually fulfilling relationship and have its foundation understanding and mutual respect.

Any relationship requires a lot of hard work to be able to take care of one’s own needs and the partner’s needs as well. Any betrayal on either side however minuscule in nature could be a deterrent for conjugal happiness.

The hidden and suppressed world of Indian woman comes to full light in their novels. The focus is on the relation of man and woman as
portrayed through their novels tracing their sense and sensibility, responses and reactions in the Indian social milieu.

The study has four more chapters.

Chapter II is an analysis of Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors and Mukherjee’s The Tiger’s Daughter. Each novel has a couple at its center, Sarita and Manohar in The Dark Holds No Terrors and Tara and David in The Tiger’s Daughter. In both of the novels, the two writers portray the problems of the educated women. But the difference between the two is that Sarita is a victim of Manohar’s sadism and as an escape from him she enters into extra-marital relationship with Boozie. Whereas Mukherjee’s protagonist Tara is a victim of cultural clash and is unable to adjust with him and so she leaves David. The similarity between the two protagonists is that they ultimately return to their husbands namely Manohar and David.

Chapter III examines Deshpande’s couple Indu-Jayant from Roots and Shadows and Mukherjee’s couple Jasmine-Prakash and the men Bud and Taylor in Jasmine. Both the protagonists are opposed to each other in the sense that one is educated while the other is uneducated. Indu is timid and conceals her love making with Naren. Whereas Jasmine is bold
enough and emerges as a Kali when she avenges her rape by killing the rapist Half-Face.

Chapter IV offers a discussion of the couple Jaya-Mohan in Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* and Dimple-Amit in Mukherjee’s *Wife*. Jaya and Mohan both look at their marital relationship where there is nothing but suppressed silence. Dimple and Amit who migrate to America also faces the same problem of disappointment in marriage. Dimple considers it to be fully his fault. She enters into an extra-marital relation with Mitt Glasser, an American which is the result of the influence of bad American culture. Consequently, she stabs Amit in the kitchen and ends up in madness and suicide. The difference in the behaviour of the two protagonists is that Dimple murders her husband for her love for Milt Glasser, while Jaya goes back to her husband Mohan.

Chapter V is conclusion.