Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION
Indian English Novel has a rich heritage of different genres of literature - Drama, Poetry and Fiction. Like the other literatures of the world Indian literature is also getting changed with time and space. R. Parthasarathy does not seem to be correct when he says “Indian verse in English did not seriously begin to exist until after the withdrawal of the British from India” (Introduction: Ten Twentieth Century poets, p.2) A remarkable change has occurred in the contemporary Indian English Literature. It has steadily been enriched by new traditions, process of negation and assimilation and by shifting traditions and so on. The issues of relatively peripheral nature were given priority in early English Literature.

Indian English novel attained maturity by a large number of good novels and master pieces like Untouchable, Kanthapura, The Guide, Midnight’s Children etc. During the last decade of 19th century Indian English Literature had its origin. Later it has developed over the years with lots of ups and downs. Indian English novelists strove through experiments and searches to bring out an Indian form to the Indian novel.

The first major thrust in Indian English Writing came in the mid-1930s when the big trio-R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao-appeared on the scene. Their work created awareness about the emerging Indian English literature. In the initial stages Indian English Novel was influenced by the West. Later on Indian writers used Indian words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian. Mulkraj Anand’s Untouchable, Raj Rao’s kanthapura, Bankim Chandra Chaterjee’s Rajmohan’s Wife speak of social reforms of the then India. The writers of thirties and forties like Mulkraj Anand, R.K.Narayan, K. Nagarajan and the writers of fifties K.A.Abbas, Ahmad Ali, K.S.Venkataramani, Humayun Kabir, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Kushwanth Singh more or less spoke about the realities of colonial age and the dilemmas of post-independent India.

Nirad C.Choudari a writer of non-fiction is best known for his The Autobiography of An Unknown Indian. The triumvirate of Indian Fiction in English Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao depicted a realistic picture of then India.
They began writing around 1930’s. Bhabhani Battacharya was also their contemporary but started writing after independence. Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* is Indian in terms of its story telling qualities. Dhan Gopal Mukerjee was the first Indian author to win literary award in United States. P. Lal, a poet, essayist translator and publisher founded a press for Indian English Writings in the 1950’s. Mulk Raj Anand gained acknowledgment for his stories set in rural India. Caste, religion and class differences of those days were depicted through his fiction. His novels are strongly ingrained in the soil of the land and he never went into the world of fantasy. The protagonists of his novels are the downtrodden, untouchables, deprived people, and the low-castes. Like Anand, R.K.Narayan also writes about a small section of the society. There was nothing like harshness and cruelty in his novels but his characters etches in the minds of reader. The other Indian novelist Raja Rao differs from his contemporaries in terms of writing style and projecting female characters. He portrays traditional Indian culture and there is a blend of psychological and material action.

Since 1950’s there emerged a wide variety of novelists in the history of Indian English Fiction, focusing attention on a multitude of social, economical, political, religious and spiritual issues faced by three coinciding periods of human experience. India as a subject matter of literary writing is uniquely placed because within a period of half a century it witnessed diversified upheavals and tremors caused by the coexistence of post-colonial nostalgia, the new colonial awareness as well as the post-modernist revivalism.

The writers of 1960’s in Indian English Fiction are focusing on the fundamental issues meticulously to creative and critical activity in the Indian circumstances. Issues like post colonialism, multiculturalism, indignation, nativism and the socio-political agenda of criticism are given prominence. The writers of Indian English Literature went through the relative approach with great courage and responsibility.

Salman Rushdie is the notable writer among the later writers. The novelists of Rushdie’s generation Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, and Upamanyu Chatterjee are said to be the migrant writers. They undertake the exploration of relationship between east and west and the contemporary socio-cultural milieu. The
hollowness of national identity and national boundaries, Indian mythology and Western nationality are the chosen materials of most of the writers of this generation.

These novelists presented the postcolonial world plagued by the neo-colonial disaster like economic disorder, social malaise, governmental corruption and state repression. They struggle hard to give a pattern to their new destiny. They are the makers of new tradition and they have fashioned astonishing artistic patterns. Some of the writers of this period responded to their thoughts and migrated to less exploitive and more comfortable lands. The major preoccupations of the majority of the writers of this period are postcolonial corruption, cultural degeneration, identity crisis, Fictional reworking of mythology and history, colonial and neo-colonial power structures, dispossession and cultural fragmentation.

These novelists invented innovative techniques and devices, Salman Rushdie a great Indian writer used fantasy as an expressive device in his *Midnight’s Children* (1981). His novel *Shame* (1983) talks about a country that denies freedom and justice to women and also ruined by corruption and dictatorship. The novel is a fantasized interpretation of degenerate postcolonial society.

Amitav Ghosh in his *Circle of Reason* (1986) offers the reader a blend of devices, ironic mode of narration and recreation of magical world. In *An Antique Land* (1992) a non-fictional novel he mingles history, geography, magic, voyages, trade, memory, adventure and several viewpoints. The novelists of Rushdie’s generation mark a break from the traditional themes of Indian English novel. The early novelists were really surprised by the new techniques, patterns and devices of their successors. The significance and possibilities of Indian English Novel writings take a new dimension in this period. The Fiction of post-independent novelists depicts how the creative life is knotted with emotional intelligence.

In the postmodern scenario the novel has large readership comparing to other genres of literature. The modern novel found its roots in the socio-political condition of the period, Liberty, foreign domination, independence and self rule are the constant themes in the early novel. The first English Novel *Rajmohan’s Wife* is appeared in the second half of the 19th century. However the novel as a literary genre is a new entrant to India. There are critics in England and America who appreciated Indian English
Novels, Prof M.K. Naik remarks: “One of the notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction for though India was probably a fountain head of story-telling, the novel as we know today was an importation from the West”. (*Dimensions of Indian English Literature*, p.99)

Fiction being the most important form of literary expression today has acquired prestigious position in Indian English literature. It is quite acceptable that the novel is the most suitable literary form for the exploration of ideas in the modern context and Indian English Fiction occupies its place in the field of literature. Indian novel owes much to the efforts of the novelists for gaining solid ground and achieving an identity of its own.

It was in the decade of eighties followed by nineties witnessed a long list of writers emerged in the Indian literary scene and many of them attained celebrity status by winning Booker Prize (Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy). Writers like Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee and Amitav Ghosh captured inviting attention through a more number of literary periodicals. Sahithya akademi award winner (Shashi Deshpande) and the significant contribution of women writers have moved Indian writings in English ‘from margin to the centre’. The awards and achievements of Indian writers elevated them to the peaks of by and large, the euro-centric common wealth literature. It is now recognized that Indian English literature is not only a part of common wealth literature but also occupies a great significance in world literature.

The term feminism had its origin from the Latin word ‘Femina’ meaning woman, and thereby refers to the advocacy of woman’s right, status and power on par with men, in other words, it relates to the belief that woman should have the same social economic and political rights as men. Feminism defies the age-long tradition of gender differentiation. It attempts to explore and found a new social order to find pertinent resolves to the real life problems in the light of traditionally-gendered role playing. Woman has always been projected as a secondary and inferior human being. The bias against women can be seen right away, from the day one of creation. It is said that, ‘God is male and it is said that, God after creating man made woman from the rib of man. As Adam, the first Man on the earth remarks about Eve… “This is now, bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of Man”. The suggestion is that-woman is secondary to man.
The male writers have mostly reduced women as inferior and weak. Aristotle, for example, remarks that ‘the female is female by virtue’, of certain lack of qualities and that we should look upon the female state as, it were a deformity, on which occurs in the ordinary course of nature on account of its weakness, it quickly approaches its maturity and old age, since inferior things all reach their end quickly. The German philosopher Nietzsche declares that woman is the source of all folly and unreason and that she is god’s second mistake.

The story of women’s oppression clearly does not proceed from the colonial context; its genesis can be marked during the last decade of the 18th century, when the struggle for women’s rights began. The struggle was started on the suffragette movement at the outset of the 20th century. In 1929, Virginia Woolf’s book *A Room of one’s own* came to light and was recognized as the most important feminist’s document. The late 1960’s witnessed intensification of the feminist struggle in Europe and America. The movement acquired political dimensions and turned aggressive and polemical nature. Western theories are a part of our intellectual capital for Raja Rammohan Roy, Phule, Ambedkar or Ramabai. During the colonial period the negotiation led to a trend of essentializing ‘Indian culture’ and a construction of an image of re-casted Indian woman hood as an epitome of that culture.

Feminism in India can be traced down to the days of Rammohan Roy and the Almiya Sabha started in 1914. The emancipation of Indian woman was a by-product of Gandhiji’s non co-operation movement. The independence struggle paved the way for women out of the hearth and chimney hooks into the life of the nation. It gave them an opportunity to realize the potentiality they possessed. Transition began with the renaissance, reformist and independence movements. Women had high status and freedom of thought and expression in the pre-Vedic and the Vedic ages.

The Vedas prescribed certain ideals and roles to be taken up by women, slowly, the matriarchal system of the pre-Vedic times started collapsing and the matrilineal structure was replaced by the patrilineal organization. The change is reflected in the Aryans depiction of the Goddess of the Shakti-cult as married, thus implied male control over female. Goddess Lakshmi is shown as devoted wife sitting at the feet of her husband, Vishnu. Though, Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and prosperity, her role as a wife is under the control of her husband is of importance.
Woman did not occupy an important place in most of the Anglo-Indian novels. In Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, there is hardly any women character. In E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* Indian women are sketched, not drawn. The Indo-Anglican novels of this period presented women as romantic, charming, cultured, graceful, wise, and courageous. The novelists of this period treated women’s lives, experiences and values as marginal. They assumed that literature was serious about public events than about the private life. They thought literature by and about women were inferior to literature by and about men.

The post-colonial India has shown much emphasis on education, which proved fruitful for women at least in finding good employment and good marriages but it was confined only too well to do families and who are highly educated. The condition of average women, has not, improved much.

There is a plethora of problems such as female infanticide, foeticide, dowry, gender discrimination, wife beating and several kinds of violence/crime against women. Women are even today humiliated and harassed in houses as well as work places. She remains victim-of patriarchal oppression. A woman in modern India entrapped into the inescapable cage of being a woman, wife and mother. A woman cannot exist outside the boundaries of married life and motherhood. Indian woman do not appear to have their independent role in society. Moreover, they must become a male appendix in order to have role. Indian women are thus linked by male definition sex-segregation.

Even in the modern days, strict emphasis is given on arranged marriages. In case a woman flaunts the rules and regulations of her family, she is blamed to ruin the honor of the family. Female sexuality is seen not as personal private matter but a family concern and sexual constraints on unmarried girls control on their sexuality and the obsession with virginity is still very common in Indian. Even today, when it comes to woman, the law of control is applied. The woman in India is confined to ‘the triple role’ of daughter-in-law, wife and mother, yet another form of gender discrimination in the eating customs of Indian families.
India has been a Man oriented country for centuries. Women counterparts treated by men as their property that can be owned, controlled, disposed the way they liked. M.K.Gandhi changed this scenario totally by giving a new direction and dimension to the Feminist Movement in India. He tried hard to free women from passivity, servility, and domesticity. He was in the opinion that men and women were partners, having equal rights and duties in social and political filed. The right of Municipal vote for Indian women in 1855 could not be properly utilized by them for lack of education, lack of opportunity for self-development, lack of interest in social problems. Keeping in view equal rights and the opportunity of receiving the highest education women had enjoyed with men in the Vedic days, Gandhiji acclaimed the concept of Ardhangini, enshrined in Indian culture, and accepted the fact that men and women are complementary to each other, and one is never a whole without the other.

Traditionally, Indian women were captivated by many hegemonic layers of prejudice, convention, ignorance and silence in literature as well as in life too. She was a lifeless object and had to be gentle, patient and gracious for generations together. In 1851 Jotiba Phule came forward to educate the scheduled caste girls in Poona. Since then there has been no looking back, as women also started clamoring for education for which they had been indifferent for ages.

With the introduction of English education and culture, the Indian woman has also re-emerged with newfangled ideas. A new feminine literary tradition has generated out of the curiosities and anxieties of a woman’s life. The Indian woman in the modern day is no longer a Damayanti; she is a Draupadi or a Damius or a Nora or a Candida or Joan of Arc. Social reformers like – Raja Rammohan Roy, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and political revolutionaries like Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru lent her a new dimension, gave her a new direction.

The new revolutionary theory called Feminism came into existence in India with the feminine psyche trying to redefine woman’s role in the society. As Rousseau said “Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains.” In fact it is not he but she is in chains not always and everywhere. All women do not conform, they rebel, they reconcile, and they are both Kali and Durga, symbols of destruction as well as creation. During the Vedic period, Indian woman enjoyed the pride place with the wonderful scholars like Gargi, Matreyi, Lopamudra, who walked equally with men.
Even Sita, Savitri, Shakuntala and Draupadi, who make their appearance at a later period in history, were not said to passive, submissive, docile and servile.

During India’s independent moment women freed themselves from their repressive life and threw them into the freedom movement; Women broke their chains, walked hand in hand with men, raising their little fingers against the total tyrannical rule at home and abroad. Annie Besant was also aware of an educated women’s capacity to enlighten her home and the family. This transition for the achievement started in the post-independence India.

Sarojini Naidu led the way to salt Satyagraha, and describes it in one of her poems “Village Song” and prefers the free life in the forest and calls the world as a prison house;

“The bridal songs and cradle songs have cadences of sorrow
The laughter of the sun today, the wind of death tomorrow
Far sweeter sound the forest notes where forest streams are
Falling O, mother mine, I cannot stay, the fairy are calling”.

(The Golden Threshold)

This protest was voiced in many forms in Indian English fiction not only women writers like – Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Jai Nimbkar, Shobha De, Kamala Markandaya, but male writers like Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar etc., dwell on the tortured womanhood. The woman who was not allowed to move in and around the house was brought out of the kitchen into the drawing room by Tagore in his novels. His heroine Damini is a symbol of strength; she challenges the orthodox bound Bengali society through her remarriage.

The women are placed in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, in a socio – cultural milieu of an oppressively conventional Hindu society, where she is destined to a life of degradation and dehumanization, and life of mental subjugation and conditioned responses. Anand while portraying the character Lajwanthi, brings forth the pathetic image of Indian womanhood, she is shrunk half-size, while his other character, Gauri explodes the Sita myth into a thousand fragments and retrieves the female species
through her symbolic liberation on the road to Hoshiarpur, and the spurious virtue of masculine supremacy disintegrate in the face of Gauri’s new found freedom.

R.K. Narayan projects the irregular family of Ramani, in his novel *The Dark Room* (1972) there is very little understanding between husband and wife. The other character Savitri makes an unsuccessful attempt to run away and to lead a life of her own. Narayan marks the man – woman relationship on the marital plane in his the *Dark Room* and *The English Teacher* and the extra-marital plane is seen in his *The Guide, The Vendor of sweets* and *The painter of signs*, Manohar Malgonkar’s *The Princes* and *A Bend in the Ganges* picture Maharani and Sundari, struggling against the tyranny of tradition. Hiroji her husband consigns the maharani to the dark lonely room in the palace. Her son calls her ‘Bitch’. She marries a Muslim and leaves the country.

After 1980’s Indian women novelists have turned towards the woman’s World with great meditative power and legitimacy. They have launched a voyage within to explore the private consciousness of their women characters and to measure them. Elaine Showalter talks of three phases in the growth of feminist tradition i.e., Limitation, Protest and Self Discovery. Shashi Deshpande delineates the middle class educated women to show that what man has made of woman. Her women are anti-patriarchal protagonists. Shobha De projects woman as a creative force that controls the dynamics of the society. Her women oppose the three Ms; Marriage, motherhood and monotony, Kamala Markandaya’s women lords over the male. Markandaya makes, her women a domineering professor, an active victimizer of an adolescent male.

Freedom for the Indian women meant freedom from centuries of male domination and male ordained social and cultural norms. Though the Indian woman did not have to struggle like her American Counterpart for universal suffrage, she had to strive to attain acknowledgment for her individuality and acceptance by society, of an existence even beyond her gender-based roles. Patriarchy had compelled the Indian women to be totally submissive to the male in both the social and economic spheres. She never sought to change all this. The Indian women did not enter a phase of bra-burning-libber movement nor did she take the extreme stance of a misogynist. Instead she attempted to effect a slow but sure change within her own house.
The Modern feminist thoughts came into Indian English poetry with Kamala Das, who emerged as a staunch rebel against the customary patriarchal arrangement in the Indian society. Sunita Jain is another significant signature among Indian women poets who writes extensively on the various vicissitudes of love and man-woman relationship. Her poems are characterized by intense feminine feelings and female urges. But, she very rarely prefers to revolt against the domination of patriarchy in such a bold and overt manner as Kamala Das and Gouri Deshpande do the same in their writings. The frequent use of irony and contrast makes her articulation forceful and compelling.

According to Indian women poets writing in English, feminism is by and large an outcome of the various genders based on social cultural taboos, which suppress the freedom of women and compel them to adapt to the given situations. Much reaction is evoked by such stereotyping as idealization of domesticity and passive roles for women along sexualization and objectification of women as mere objects of males sexual and sadistic pleasure; humiliation and harassment of women both at house and work place, sexual violence, crime and ill treatment done to women.

Feminism initially studied, gender, as a system of cultural signs or meaning assigned to sexually dimorphic bodies, but over the years it turned to see genders as a basic binary opposition –Man/Woman, male/female, Masculine/Feminine, and in the past few decades it acquired. The political dimension about who oppresses whom. Thus, feminism as a Movement against sexism turned out to be reverse sexism, thereby, developing an attitude of revenge towards the male domination.

The last phase of the twentieth century’s have witnessed signs of depravity and decline of the feminist philosophy as is evident in the Indian women’s verse at the drawn of the new century and the new millennium. The most striking sign is the new women poets detour from or drastic change in outlook towards man, woman, love, marriage, sexuality, gender roles and identity. They show a newer consciousness of womanhood and mother hood, show their interest, care and concern for family, children and household and show somewhat romantic tender feelings of love. They seldom speak of their failure frustrations and acrimony in man-woman relation, as the most feminists did. Moreover, some of the poets can be seen turning back to traditional values as well. All these changes can be viewed as signs of what can
provisionally be termed as ‘Post Feminism’. Post Feminist era, which is to a certain extent show of gender conflict and idealist politics and uninfected by the reactive, explosive and disruptive political stuff of feminism particularly speaking in the context of Indian women poets writing in English.

Among the other novelists experimenting with the Indian writing in English Shashi Deshpande has unique place in the literary world. She is uniquely Indian and her use of words presents the customs, culture and traditions of India. She doesn’t write for the foreign reader. She is basically Indian and writes for Indian society.

Shashi Deshpande (born in 1938 in Dharward Karnataka, India) is an award winning Indian novelist she is the second daughter of famous kannanda writer and Sanskrit scholar Sriranga who is described as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada literature talking about him in an interview with Vanamala Vishwanatha Shashi Deshpande says that “he was dominant never domineering”. She got writing as a legacy from her father. She was educated in Bombay and Bangalore. She has degrees in economics and law. She did a course in journalism at Bharathiya Vidhya Bhavan and worked as a journalist for the magazine. “On Looker”. She grew up surrounded by books and literary personalities.

“The number and variety of books at home…and their accessibility. To read soon became as necessary as to breathe or eat …and there was the atmosphere in our house, the company my father kept, the kind of friends he had, the conversation and discussion that went on over endless cups of tea, the play-reading and rehearsals that took place at home – all this created a world of words and ideas I was happily submerged in”. (Deshpande p.174)

Shashi Deshpande started her career as a writer of short fiction in 1978. She has been contributing her literary jewels for more than thirty years. She won Sahithya Akademi award for the novel That Long Silence in 1990. Her first novel, The Dark Holds No Terrors was published in 1980. Acknowledging her talent as a writer, she was awarded the Sahithya Akademi Award for her novel, That Long Silence in the
year 1991. She has received various accolades and laurels in the form of various national and international awards.

Shashi Deshpande was a novelist with most sustained achievement having published ten novels, four books for children and a number of short stories and essays. Her several perspective essays available in the volume entitled ‘Writing from the Margin and other Essays.’ Trained as a journalist her work focuses on the reality and the truth of the lives of the Indian women. She seems to grapple with the identity crisis of the contemporary women in her works. She describes her literary style as ‘really a very simple and stark style’, which really draws attention to itself. As a school girl, she read the great British classical novels in English, and particularly liked the works of Jane Austen. She was very much influenced by the ideas and beliefs of her father from childhood. She received an English education at a protestant missionary school in Karnataka. She received her graduation in Economics from Elphinstone College, Bombay and in Law from Government law college, Bangalore. Much later, she took a post graduate degree in English from Mysore University in 1962. She was married to Dr. Deshpande, a Nuero Pathologist, (Prof. of Pathology). The initial years after marriage was given to the brought up of her two sons. She refuses to exoticize India in her fiction. She does not belong to the set of Indian writers who produce fiction meant only for export.

Shashi Deshpande is a creative genius and singular among Indian English women writers in the sense that she purposefully refrains from the temptation of succumbing to literary fiction of the west. She writes of the day to day Indian middle-class life and explored fresh possibilities in human relationships, marriage, motherhood and new sexual mores. She has her own style of writing and never wrote for popularity or to attract the west or to target relationship. Her fiction provides a glimpse into female psyche and deals with the full range of female experience. Her women characters try to achieve a harmony of relationships besides being caught in the psychic and moral dilemmas and repercussions with themselves and their surroundings. Till date she has published ten novels The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), If I Die Today (1982), Roots and Shadows (1983), Come up and be dead (1985), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1993), A Matter of Time (1996),
Small Remedies (2000), Moving on (2004), In the Country of Deceit (2009), four books for children, a play and several perspective essays.

The fiction of Shashi Deshpande deals with the life of educated Indian middle-class women. She is meticulous about the socio-cultural milieu of the society for which she writes. The changed post modern society with traditional cultural outlook, her work is distinctive from the other women writers. She deals with the subject with so much of depth and profound understanding of a woman’s life makes her a great writer. She writes on the themes like inner conflicts and identity crisis, parent-child relationship especially mother-daughter relationship in the context of marriage and sex. Above all the theme of silence rooted in the complex relationship between man and woman holds a great fascination for Shashi Deshpande.

The individuality of a writer developed in her when she wrote a short story called ‘Intrusion’. Her passion for words during childhood laid foundation for her writings. Some other writers like Somerset Maugham, and even more Jane Austen had lasting influence. But it was so when she was untrained as a writer, after she started writing she got stimulation by the writers like Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Erica Jong, Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, Simone de Beviour and Germaine Greer. In an interview she told Vanamala Vishwanatha; “I still read her (Jane Austen) regularly. But I don’t think there have been any conscious influences on my writings as such”. (Interview to Vishwanatha in R.S.Pathak, p.233).

A brief introduction to her fiction will be helpful to understand the nature of the discussion about her novels. Since the last quarter of the twentieth century she has become an undeniable figure in the Indian English literature. The recurring themes of her writing are human desire, longing body, conflicts and compromise, man-woman relationship, gender discrimination, marginalization and protest. She writes about person to person and person to society relationships. She wants to be recognized as an author beyond male, female dichotomy. In her essay ‘why I am a feminist’ 2003 she says.

“It took me years to say even to myself ‘I am a feminist’ it was the culmination of a voyage that began with in myself and went on to be the ocean of woman’s place in the world. Today when I
call myself a feminist...I believe that women are neither inferior nor subordinate human being ... I believe that nature, when conferring its gifts on humans, did not differentiate between males and females except for the single purpose of procreation. I believe that mother who does not everything else, but it is a bonus, as extra that women are privileged to have ... would the anti feminists deny all this”.

All the protagonists of her novels are middle class educated women. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* a doctor, Indu in *Roots and Shadows* a journalist, Jaya in *That Long Silence* a creative writer, Urmi in *The Binding Vine* a college lecturer, Sumi in *A matter of Time* a teacher, Manjari in *Moving On* a script writer, Devayani in *In the Country of Deceit* an English teacher. Thus Shashi Deshpande believes that her idea of women’s liberation is possible through career women. Mother-daughter relationship has a significant place in her fiction. It’s like a hard hearted relationship in her novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence, The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time, Moving On, In The Country of Deceit*.

Having a close touch with Indian culture and the place of women in that culture, she consciously writes from the point of view of woman about women’s problems and predicaments, their hopes and aspirations, their feelings and sentiments. She is concerned with their silence, subdued anger and suppression under patriarchy. Her realistic presentation of women’s lives and their problems and objective treatment of her characters – both male and female – earn her a niche among the contemporary Indian women writing in English. Her sensitive understanding of the suffering of women and its root cause, combined with her skill to present them authentically makes her a novelist with rare skill. She writes about women’s lives, their sexuality in an overt manner which echoes what Helene Cixous has once said regarding women writers.

“Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as
into the world and into the world and into history-by her own movement”. (*Feminist Literary Theory*, p.320)

Here, one of the most significant aspects is underlying potential of women’s body as a source of all generative power, the power to produce a female-oriented life and consciousness that would be able to recreate a female world with a female history in such a language that will subvert and upset the masochistic communicative language of man. As a distinctive woman writer, she is bent on a realistic presentation of her characters in that she seldom manipulates them, a quality that other distinguished writers do lend to stick to. She rarely portrays women as they should be; she rather seems to have a keen interest in portraying women as they are; as she tells Vanamala Vishwanatha in an interview. “My characters take their own ways. I’ve heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are”. (R.S.Pathak, ed. *The Fiction of Shshi Deshpande*, p.335)

As she is a committed woman novelist she gives ample freedom to her characters who would lead their own lives with as little interference with their decisions and actions as possible. For instance, the sudden and untimely death of the protagonist, Sumi in *A Matter of Time* may not serve any purpose from the angle of women’s cause and liberation or feminism which provoked such a comment from as eminent a critic as R.S.Pathak: “By removing Sumi prematurely from the fictional scene the novelist has denied herself the opportunity of bringing in the important issue of women’s economic empowerment”. (*Modern Indian Novels in English*, p. 204)

It seems Shashi Deshpande’s treatment of birth and mortality is never in conflict with the course of nature which means that she is quite content with presenting life as it is and reflecting. “A slice of human life” in which, as she says “birth is here, death is there. Premature deaths we see all the time. Why people die we cannot say”. (Prasanna Sree, p.96)

Shashi Deshpande creates characters that live without their creator sometimes and following her likes and dislikes. They live in full freedom as individuals with minds and hearts as to determine what they are going to do with their self-justification. In the same fashion, now and then they work as the mouth piece of the novelist. To cite one example, Sulu in *The Binding Vine* commits suicide because she
cannot take the fact that it is her husband who has raped Kalpana, her sister’s daughter. The novelist justifies Sulu’s suicide in an Interview to Prasanna Sree: “Being the kind of person she is, for her, suicide seems to be the solution… Human beings are made differently, we can’t impose one solution”. (New Lights on Indian Women Novelists in English, p.93)

Most of her characters live outside of her. They are living human beings on the pages of the book, not the patch board characters who would dance to the tune of the author. In most of her novels, Shashi Deshpande tries to give a clear picture of genuine mother-daughter relationship too without any exaggeration and false representation whatsoever, at times, however, much against the popular notion built upon unreal dream and myth. More often than not, one finds the mother-daughter relationship depicted very lovingly and warmly in most of the fictions and popular media like films and T.V. Such representation, however, may not be constructed as real because in the first place, they are different individuals having their own preferences and tastes; hence the possibility of the clash of interest often catapulted into a generation gap between them, a fact that cannot be overlooked.

All these intricate issues are kept engrossing in most of her novels. Her novels abound in good as well as not-so-good mother-daughter relationships. Vanna and her mother in The Binding Vine, Sumi and her mother Kalyani in A Matter of Time, Devi and her mother in In the Country of Deceit share a good understanding between them; however the same is not the case with Vanaa and her daughter, Shakutai and her daughter Kalpana in The Binding Vine, Savitribai Indorekar and her daughter Munni in Small Remedies. Jaya and her mother in That Long Silence and Saru and her mother (who have major conflict between them) in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Jiji and her mother in Moving On, Devi’s mother and her grandmother, Rani and her daughter in the novel in the Country of Deceit. The later are an example where there is no smooth sailing between mother and daughter. What we find in such a treatment is that Shashi Deshpande as a novelist has an eye for different facets of such over-rated institutions and relationships of our society, and they cannot remain unconcerned. In this regard what she says in an interview is quite appropriate:
“I have a feeling that the people expect the love between mother and daughter to be very lovy and dovy … It is a kind of image that we build up in Hindi movies… Please look at the reality, I don’t write from myths. I write from real life”. (Prasanna Sree, p.94)

In what Shashi Deshpande writes or says there is permanent certitude that cultural myths, whether they are associated with man and woman, motherhood etc., are by no means similar to reality for they contrast and are opposed to each other. Myths are generally treated as cultural dreams, the idealized as against the real.

Shashi Deshpande’s commitment as a writer seems to be away from that of a conformist, her politics is not hell bent like that of a hardcore feminist writer. She appears to be a bit shy of calling herself or being called feminist or a postcolonial writer. Perhaps she feels threatened of being marginalized by such categorization from the mainstream literature. No doubt, from the various interviews she had given and the numerous essays she had written so far, it is quite clear that she is a feminist and proud to be one as a person. However, she strongly reacts against being labeled a feminist writer as Shashi Deshpande said:

If I want to write about feminism and convey a message about it, I will not write a novel or a short story; I will write an article or an essay – as I have often done. But certainly, for women’s writing to be judged purely as feminist writing is a problem’.  

(Writing from the Margin, p.16)

Undoubtedly, she writes as a woman about various problems being faced by women in Indian society, as gendered class because of their sex, but that does not mean that she is radical feminist accusing man of women’s suffering and suppression, for man alone is not responsible for women’s lot. The problems are of a multiple nature, and no single cause can be fixed as the root cause. The problems are dynamic and their treatment is also dynamic.

In such a context, it is not Shashi Deshpande alone who has taken this position. Eminent Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Kabita Sinha, Mahasweta
Devi, Arundhati Roy, Nabaneetha Dev Sen express the same view, “there are good writers and bad writers, and gender is irrelevant in art”. They are of the view that such categorization separates them from the mainstream literature where a male writer as hailed authoritatively and reverently, almost gloriously—as a writer. No hyphen, no prefix. He is just a writer, prim and proper. Even the Nigerian woman novelist, Buchi Emecheta writes, in spite of her very deep commitment to women’s issues and problems that she would better be called a feminist. Thus feminism is not aimed at separating women from men; it is a way of projecting women, women’s image from a woman-centered perspective, and not a tug of war between the sexes.

The very significant aspect of the novels of Shashi Deshpande is the realization of acute sense of victimization of women at the hands of patriarchy. The conditions of women and their position both in and outside the domestic walls are still deplorable, though there are some outward changes recently. Social, cultural, religious and traditional norms still manage to relegate women to a secondary position even in this modern age. Even intelligent and well-qualified women are treated as puppets in the name of guarding family’s honour and tradition.

In most cases, women’s acquisitions are taken for granted. Their most important decisions of life are generally taken by their parents before marriage, by their husbands after marriage and by their sons when they are old, still religiously following what Manu had dictated many centuries before: “Day and night, women must be kept in subordination to the males of the family, in childhood to her father, in youth to her husband, in old age to her sons.” (qtd. Meitei Feminism and Indian Fiction, p.45)

Such attitude and notion clearly indicate that women are incapable of taking decisions of their own life and hence, should remain under the supervision of males throughout their life. In this way, women have been denied many opportunities that men have been enjoying since time immemorial and therefore, chances to prove their worth are ruled out in most cases.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels emphasize that a woman, besides being a daughter, a wife and a mother, is also a human being, an individual that has the need for self-fulfillment and self-actualization. They become aware of their self and also
the society’s biased treatment of women. This is a passing but a necessary phase of their struggle to prove themselves. The protagonists strive to overcome their identity crisis by searching for their own identities and the meaning of their life. They become rebels against those dominating forces, and finally they are able to overcome everything by liberating themselves.

As a novelist, Shashi Deshpande is one of those few women writers who do not succumb to the extreme attitude that women are-always-victims, as she is able to see men are also, sometimes, very much victims of their own system as women are. For instance, Manohar in The Dark Holds No Terrors becomes a sadist from being a loving and caring husband to Saru because of the system of the society where men are expected and supposed to be always superior to women. In Roots and Shadows, too, through the character of Jayant, the novelist seems to opine that it is not only women but also men who feel tied down and trapped by marriage as he confides to Indu, “The way these women pestered me to get married to them! It’s a trap…that’s what marriage is” (Roots and Shadows, p.60). In the same novel, Indu’s Kaka, “even after becoming a grandfather could be reduced to a red-faced shuttering school boy by Akka’s venomous tongue!” (p.22) In That Long Silence, too, it was Jaya’s “other ajji” who dominated and ruled over her family.

By projecting some of her male characters as victims and some women characters as dominating, Shashi Deshpande not only reflects a part of reality in the society but also points out the blind spot in the writings of most women writers that have a tendency to turn blind to anything that is good in men and bad in women. They seem to look in every woman, a victim, and in every man, a predator. The novelist seems to be aware of the possible danger of such an extreme view and she is able to avoid it by treating both her men and women characters objectively. Ever since the arrival of feminist criticism on the literary scene, men’s writings have been criticized and scrutinized for their in authenticity and incompleteness in portraying women characters. Twentieth century has witnessed a growing awareness among women regarding their desires, sexuality, self-definition, existence and destiny. Bell Hooks writes:
Suddenly more and more women began to either call themselves “feminists” or use the rhetoric of gender discrimination to change their economic status. The institutionalization of feminist studies created a body of jobs both in the world of the academy and in the world of publishing. (*Feminism is for everybody*, p.10)

As Virginia Woolf has rightly pointed out, the unrealistic presentation of women by men writers, “until very lately women in literature were the creation of men,” (*Women and Fiction*, p.82) if women writers too use the same defective weapons against men by creating men characters with only their ugliness, by exaggerating their faults and overlooking their goodness, there is danger of repeating the same mistake committed by men writers regarding women characters. To avoid such in authenticity in the writings of women, there is need to treat both men and women characters objectively though the focus may be on the latter. This is exactly what is found in Shashi Deshpande’s oeuvre.

As a novelist, she rejects the masculine concept and tradition of writing. In her writings, we find an authentic female voice, that has no fear in speaking out her body and mind in the language of her own. In this context, what Rashmi Gaur has observed deserves some attention:

> Her narratives bear the authenticity of a woman’s signature. She has rejected the masculine dialect and the masculine perception of virtue, relationship and content, and laid bare before us the subversive role of tradition in perpetuating the secondary role of women, emphasizing the need of discrediting its legacies if women have to emerge as liberated and emancipated beings. (*Women’s Writing: Some Facets*, p.67)

Shashi Deshpande is never against motherhood, the institution of marriage, family, society, men, religion but against the system, idealization and monopolization that work together against man-woman relationship by creating wide gap between them. Her feminism is meant to improve man-woman relationship in the family and
society that should be based on mutual co-operation and understanding. Women’s victimization will come to an end only when men and women join hands to discard all those inequalities and injustices prevailing in the society. Women are not only daughters, mothers and wives but also human beings who need to prove themselves, like men. Once more Shashi Deshpande’s ideas of feminism may be seen in their own dynamic nature, not one-sided anti-man like the Western feminist position:

Is to be a feminist to want to be like a man? I don't think so. On the contrary, to me it has meant an acceptance of my womanhood as a positive thing, not as a lack. An understanding that I am different, not inferior. And how can feminism be anti-men when it is really working for a better, a more meaningful and companionable relationship between man and woman, instead of the uneasy relationship between tyrant and oppressed? . . . I believe that the family is not a divine, sacred institution, but one created by humans for the benefit of all society; and therefore, it should be built, not on the sacrifice of some, but on the co-operation and compromises of all its members. The loud cry of the new-born is a triumphant assertion of being—I AM. Does a baby girl cry less loudly? (Writing from the Margin and other Essays, p.83-84)

Shashi Deshpande skillfully reflects some of her attitudes and viewpoints on various issues and subjects through her protagonists. As M.Mani Meitei rightly states: “An artist is expected to design his work such as to represent life as he sees and understand it, partly or wholly true to his experience. No wonder that certain characters speak like the author himself.” (The stream of Consciousness Techniques, p.100)

Often, the researcher hears the voice of the author mingling with that of the protagonist. There are moments when the author is easily identifiable with the created characters. It happens so because the writer is the creator of the character, hence there are always channels of thought commonly shared by the characters and the author. In speaking of her character’s relationship with herself, Dorothy Richardson once made a statement that she was Miriam Henderson, in each of her words the author is there,
Shashi Deshpande’s demytholization of motherhood, as she speaks in an interview with Vanamala Vishwanatha (236) has been linked to what Urmila in *The Binding Vine* observes.

> Sometimes, I think…they brainwash us into this motherhood they make it seem so mystical and emotional when the truth is that it’s all just a myth. They’ve told us to often and far so long that once you’re a mother you have these feelings that we think we do. (p.76)

Shashi Deshpande in an interview with Geetha Gangadharam talking about her novels saying that intelligence is always a handicap for a woman. The same opinion can be heard from Indu’s old uncle in *Roots and Shadows* that intelligence is always a burden. In her essay, “*The Dilemma of the Woman Writer*”, Shashi Deshpande recalls how pleased she had been when one of her friends said that she had imagined the writer to be a man while reading her story. Indu, the protagonist feels the same way when a friend tells her about her writing.

> “If I hadn’t known it were you who had written that story. I’d have thought it was a man” (79). Such assumptions of gender positions occur many times in the male and female writings. As for instance, Joyce’s protean language, a characteristic of female language, masquerades his male identity. French feminist critics see this female potential in Joyce’s use of instable and symbolic language.

A work of art may not be strictly autobiographical but a work of art, as it were, is also partly an unconscious mind’s creation of the creator himself or herself. Shashi Deshpande may not be autobiographical novelist in many of her novels but at times we see her quite inseparable from the emotional and psychological attitude and statements made by her characters. A writer’s mind finds expression in the characters whether male or female. She or he may speak in the role of a woman or a man as the situation demands. One need not be strictly confined to one sex only. A woman writer may demand man’s attention and vice-versa.

Shashi Deshpande got so surprised when one of her stories was sent back by a publisher with a comment that it should be sent to a woman’s magazine as if sex is
attached so unalterably to a text. Sex has a free play in a given text, it is the mind of
the artist that is there for the reader to see in the way he or she tries to. One can cite
her statement from one of her interviews, “some of my thoughts are always there.
They are there for the reader to pick and choose.” (Gangadharam, R.S Pathak ed.
p.253)

In *Moving On* too, the novelists seems to express her own views regarding the
casual attitude towards women’s writing through the character of the protagonist’s
father when he expresses his regret for not taking his wife’s writing as seriously as he
had regarded his professional writing. He thought writing for her was only pastime, a
kind of hobby. Now, after her death, he comes to know that she wrote not only fiction
but also stories of women, about love, marriage and the home. His realization of the
seriousness of her profession as a writer, though late, subtly conveys some message as
he says, “And if that wasn’t trivial, what was it? So I thought. Now I think I should
have respected what Vasu was doing. She belonged to a profession which deserved
much more than the condescension I granted it’ (201).

Shashi Deshpande is a very conscious and serious writer. She takes great care
in choosing words to avoid any melodramatic statement and to have a kind of
“subtlety of approach” (Holmstorm, p.242). She started her writing career late but she
has learnt about language very seriously. She opines that craftsmanship is so
important in writing and one can learn it only by doing. R.S.Pathak rightly states.
“Deshpande’s writings once again prove that art lies in concealing art. The highly
functional language with telling economy that she uses is an important asset of hers as
a fiction writer”. (*The Making of the Novelist*, p.26)

Shashi Deshpande as a novelist lays emphasis more on characterization than
on plots, as she says:“All my novels are like this: there is no plot; I only have the
characters, characters with which I live for years, about which I know almost
everything before I begin to tell their story”. (*Writing from the Margin*, p.19). For her,
every novel starts with people and the novelist seems to agree with what Ivy
Compton-Burnett states. “ As regards plots I find real life no help at all. Real life
seems to have no plots.”(Allott, p.249) As far as technique is concerned, Shashi
Deshpande takes a lot of concentration. What she tells Lakshmi Holmstrom is worth-
citing. “Technique is something which I have to worry a lot about. I have to work at it
and think about it and it takes me a long time to hit upon it exactly. It’s like setting a tanpura, you know, before a concert begins”. (Holmstorm p.248)

Shashi Deshpande proves her excellence as a novelist by successfully employing recurrent metaphors and motifs. They include ‘the dark’ and the ‘sunlight’, ‘sleep’ and ‘dream’, ‘house’ and ‘homecoming’, ‘roots’ and ‘shadows’, ‘death’ and ‘life’, ‘silences’ and ‘The Binding Vine’. Of all the motifs employed by her, silence dominates and becomes all pervading in all her novels. It plays a pivotal role in the lives of many of her characters, especially while dealing with the theme of alienation reflecting the realities of modern life. Most of the problems in human relationships arise owing to lack of communication. Silence becomes an essential part of life as stated by Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (p.35).

It is perhaps silence or lack of communication between the husband and the wife that causes failure of their relationship once fulfilled and satisfied. The husband, Manohar, feels bad and humiliated when other directly or indirectly point out that his wife earns more and is more successful than he is. Then, he becomes a sadist in his attempt to assert his manhood. Saru, recalling this said incident with regrets and she feels: “I should have spoken about it the very first day. But I didn’t and each time it happens and I don’t speak, I put another brick on the wall of silence between us.” (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, p.96)

Again lack of communication between Saru and her mother makes their relationship very bitter. In *That Long Silence*, as the title suggests, Jaya, the protagonist, undergoes a long silence throughout the novel, though it ends with a hope of erasing that silence. The treatment of silence by Shashi Deshpande is not merely a form of lack of communication, but it is mode of reaction, protest. Women and only women are subjected to this kind of suffering when they are segregated from the male-made culture as evidence when Jaya finds her name not included in the long list of names in the family tree, not even her aunties, mother and even her grandmother. To this she said nothing she “had learnt it at last-no questions, no retorts only silence”. (*That Long Silence*, p.143)

Another extreme case is Kalyani and Shripati, in *A Matter of Time* who lived in total silence for thirty-five years after they lost their only invalid son in a railway
station for which the former was accused of having been responsible. Women take silence as a means of internalizing their suffering. One can just see Sumi’s suffering in silence when her husband walked out of the family. Her enduring silence was so deep that even her daughters failed to understand it and hence, mistook it for indifference until the end of the novel. Gopal, the male protagonist felt the emptiness of life as he says:

\[
\text{Emptiness, I realized then, is always waiting for us. It’s just deceiving ourselves when we say we are not alone. It is the desperation of a drowning person that makes us cling to other humans. All human ties are only a masquerade. Someday, some time, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth. (A Matter of Time, p.52)}
\]

In *The Binding Vine*, Urmila witnessed the long silence of Akka, of Mira, of Shakutai’s sister, of Kalpana who was in coma and many others like them. Thus many characters in feminist fiction assume ‘silence’ as an indispensable part of it. Because of the long suppression, women tend to be mute and silent. They remained voiceless unheard of, turned out at the margin. It becomes a mask of suffering, pain, and also a feminist strategy to withdraw to female self with a measure of silent communication without speech and language. It is the language of protest and suffering. In the novel Mohan’s mother’s struggle was “so bitter silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender” (p.36). The theme of alienation and loneliness is also there in *Roots and Shadows*. Indu, the protagonist, says:

\[
\text{I had pulled in my boundaries and found myself the poorer for it. Alienation, I know now, is not the answer. On the contrary too much of it and we can die of a terrible loneliness of the spirit. ‘I am alone’. They seem to me to be the most poignant words in any language (p.10)}
\]

In one of her novels called, *In the Country of Deceit*, silence is used in two ways, serving both negative and positive purposes. Devayani found Ashok’s silence ‘impenetrable’ on certain subjects, blocking their communication. On the other hand, when they’re together, sometimes, they lay in silence just to enjoy each other’s
company. Sometimes silence is used as a means of communication as she says. “No
more conversations and not even monosyllabic answers. Even a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ can
give you away. Why even a silence can give you away.” (p.78)

A different theme that pervades most of her novels is the theme of death
followed by emptiness. It is Aditya’s untimely death in Small Remedies that has left
Madhu completely grief-stricken and devastated. Similarly, it is the death of her only
son, Dhruva, in The Dark Holds No Terrors that unfolds Saru’s mother’s distress.
Urmila suffers the death of her baby daughter in The Binding Vine. In her novel,
Moving On one finds death staring characters in the face. There are so many deaths in
the novel and the novelist is at her best in expressing the emptiness and the loneliness
that generally accompany the death of near and dear ones as felt by Jiji’s when his
wife died.

I woke up in the morning after Vasu’s death to a sense of
emptiness, as if I was in an empty house. I woke up to a sense of
void which was within me. The house was neither empty nor
silent…But the sounds seemed distant; it was as if I was
enclosed in a vaccum and nothing could reach me. (Moving On,
p.111)

After the death of his brother Rama Krishna, his younger brother Bala Krishna
becomes a sad and lonely man. Jiji who was intimately attached to her younger sister
Malu and her husband was struck with shock when the two died. Their death was a
personal loss to her as if she had lost her partner and part of herself and soul.

And there’s Malu, whose death left an aching emptiness inside
me. Shyam’s death devastated me, for shyam was my lover, he
was my companion. In losing him, I became a woman without a
partner. But Malu was a part of me, she was connected to my
being, my soul. When she died, it was like losing something of
my own self. I felt the way Mai must have done after they
amputated her leg incomplete (p.327)
The theme of ‘life and death’ is very much a part of Deshpande’s fiction. For instance, Sumi, the protagonist in *A Matter of Time*, died in an accident when she was ready to face life and the world with a new hope after having struggled for long. In the same way, Rani (Devayani’s friend), the former actress, met with a car accident and had serious injuries, destroying her hope of making a comeback in a dream project. When Shashi Deshpande was asked the reason of such untimely death and unexpected accident, she stated that ‘death’ and ‘accident’ happen in real life and she is reflecting that aspect of reality. Most of the philosophy of ‘death’ and ‘accident’ comes from Sindhu being a cancer patient.

I’ve accepted my illness, my possible death, as a matter of fact. It didn’t come easy, let me tell you that. To overcome your fear of death you have to move from the world ends with me’ to the world goes on without me’. It is a great leap, the biggest step a human can take. (*In The Country of Deceit*, p.20)

Devayani’s father committed suicide unable to bear heavy burden of life imposed upon him from an early age. Loneliness and alienation are also very much part of modern life. Both Devayani’s father and Jiji’s husband Shyam in *Moving On* suffered from alienation of self and society before meeting their tragic end.

Recurring dreams is another motif frequently used by the novelist. Devayani in the novel, *In the Country of Deceit*, like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, was haunted by some kind of dreams in which a powerful man came to her, ‘the man standing at the edge of the grove of trees, his face in the shadows. (p.94) She knew what he wanted, she wanted to run but she couldn’t, reflecting one of her childhood incidents when she along with her girl friends was threatened by the watchman in the mango orchard. Since then she had been having the same nightmare. As the novel progresses, she was no longer afraid of the man when she met Ashok and finally she could overcome her fear of men.

The novelist’s use of symbols and metaphors is worth mentioning. In *Roots and Shadows*, the old house stands for tradition and old values, a symbol of authority as Indu says, ‘Yes the house had been a trap too, binding me to a past I had to move away from (p.204). Everyone is bound by the strict authority and discipline of Akka,
Indu’s aunt, a rich widow. After her death, Indu has decided to sell the house and this is symbolic of her freedom and self-assertion, defying the old authority. By doing so she feels as if she had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges of me (p.204).

At the very outset of the novel, *In the Country of Deceit*, the picture of the demolition of the old house is presented which is soon replaced by a new house, ‘a complete reversal of the old house’ (p.4). The drastic change is used as a metaphor in Devayani’s life which would take a sudden turn in her boring life. When she moves into the new house, Devayani feels both physically and mentally free for the first time with no one to look after and take care of she has changed drastically after she met Ashok as observed by others, ‘from a dull uninteresting old-fashioned Devi’ to a beautiful woman with her own unique style…As if someone has brought out the shine and polish in her (p.148).

The changes and development in a small town, Rajnur also serves as a metaphor to the protagonist’s life. From a not-so-happening small town, Rajnur became a fast developing town with new educational institutions, professional colleges, shopping complexes, restaurants, dhabas, banks, cyber cafés, a post-office—all the requirements of a modern town. This parallel development in the personality of the protagonist and physical changes in Rajnur is beautifully intertwined.

Literary works present avant-garde constructs which often become the basis of revolutionary social transformations. They not only embrace in themselves the social, cultural or mythical backgrounds of their native land, but also expose the fragments of alienation present in different segments of human life and its predicament. Literature therefore has always been an effective vehicle of fundamental changes. To a large extent, the popularity of feminist ethics in India has also been generated by the ‘new’ image of women presented by literary writers in their works. Many critics have tried to trace the decline in the status of Indian women by rummaging its history.

Some reformers simply commented on wars and invasions, claiming that political disorder inevitably led to restrictions on women’s education and mobility. A number of reformers located the decline during the time of Smritis, that is, to a period when the vast body of law codes such as the Manusmriti, commentaries, and epics most prominently the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and *Puranas* or stories of the
Gods were written. These theorists argued that the decline in women’s status could be traced to these writings.

After the achievement of independence, various reforms were made by the government to ensure development in the country. Soon, a new sphere of literature appeared where the writers wrote on themes projecting the miseries and complexities of human lives and concentrating on individual predicament. The mid-1950s and 1960s mark the second important stage of Indian English writing, when writers like Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Shobha De and Nayantara Sahgal came out with their works that changed the face of Indian English novel. They have opened up a new vista of human nature and man-woman relationship.

The problems discussed in their novels are individual, rather than universal. These writers have projected the inner psychological turmoil of human beings surviving in different sections of the society. Anita Desai has portrayed the tyrannies; torture and violence faced by women in Indian society. She has stressed the disturbed psyche of women which makes them appear neurotic. Shattered by their stifling atmosphere, her women characters become depressed and helplessly suffer.

Most of her women characters lack the spirit of viewing life with optimism and fail to overcome their existing traumas and apprehensions. Maya in Cry, The Peacock is unable to understand her husband who has a practical approach towards life. Raka in Fire on the Mountain is a product of a broken marriage who has witnessed the violent attitude of her father towards her mother. The brutality of her father destroys the humanity in Raka. She sets the mountain on fire and rejoices in her act. Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer lives a life of comfort and ease with her husband, who is flexible and understanding. At the time of her fifth pregnancy she develops a psychological imbalance during the gestation period.

To escape the reality of her life, Sita takes refuge at the island of Manori with the thought of getting blessings of his dead father who was known for performing miracles among the local people. It not only disturbs the smooth course of her marital life, but also pushes her children to the darkness of the island. Monisha in Voices in the City commits suicide as she finds no way out of the monotony of her life.
Anita Desai has also projected the pathetic condition of Indian widows through her characters Mira and Mashi in the novel *Clear Light of the Day*. She is one of those contemporary writes whose themes revolve around the female world. Her women characters though lack strength, vitality, valor and hope, and are normally unable to develop a positive approach towards life. Her women characters are feeble and engrossed in their pain, which inculcates in them a devious state of mind restricting them from initiating relevant and authentic changes in their lives.

Most of them lack the power to analysis their pathetic condition and cannot overcome their neurotic state. Her novels mostly exhibit the disturbed psychology of bereaved women and their lassitude due to the stifling atmosphere in which they have to survive. Her fiction does not talk about the emancipation of women either intellectually or morally. Her themes are not universal; rather they talk about individual women and their emotional and psychological turmoil.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala is another contemporary Indian English novelist who has portrayed strong women characters in her novels. Her novels project the post-independence Indian society which consisted of Indians as well as Britishers. They portray beautiful and vivid pictures of the British culture and its style of living. However, her novels lack the warmth and touch of Indianess. Though she has touched upon the theme of human relationships, it is presented within a latticed framework consisting of sophisticated Britishers and learned Indians. She has also delineated women’s alienation resulting from the adaptation of British culture by Indians and Indian culture by Britishers.

Jhabvala has penned the growing influence of Britishers on Indians which was making them materialistic. While writing about Indians and their families, she has displayed the typical Indian housewives as well as modern, educated women. she talks about the attitude and temperament of Indian women in *Esmond in India* when she writes.

‘So like animals like cows,’ he said with sudden revulsion ‘Beat them, starve them, maltreat them how you like, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a hand to defend
themselves. Saying do with me what you will, you are my husband, my God, it is my duty to submit to my God. (p.78)

Jhabvala provides a glimpse of Indian society in which men hold the place of master and women of slave. The feminine traits inculcated in women force them to unquestioningly submit to their male counterparts. Cultural difference also baffles them. Judy in *A Backward Place*, who has a British upbringing, is unable to cope with an Indian husband; similarly Gulab in *Esmond in India* reticently endures her British husband’s callousness. Jhabvala has written about a particular section of Indian society, which thrived soon after India received her independence and has limited herself to a particular time-frame. Her themes do not possess a universal appeal. Her writings too do not become a part of feminist literature as they relate about women and their plight with no aim of ameliorating their pathetic state.

Kamala Markandaya is one of those contemporary writers who have tried to define the pathetic condition of Indian women by raising some feminist issues. She talks about women trapped in their poverty like Rukmini in *Nector in a Sieve* and Nalini in *A Handfull of Rice*, where as in *The Golden Honeycomb* she has written about women belonging to rich families.

Unlike Anita Desai and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, she points out that the crux of all prevailing problems of women is their financial dependence. Her women characters like Premala, Sarojini, Vasantha and Meera project the idea that the economic independence of women shall solve most of their problems. These characteristics of Kamala Markandaya’s female protagonists distinguish them from women characters of other contemporary Indian-English writers. Her women characters refuse to treat men as oracles. Her novels take up some feminist issues and provide a new, strengthened and independent image of women. Unlike other writers, she not only criticizes the deplorable status of women, but also wants to guide and encourage them to transcend it. Though she has suggested financial independence as a remedy to the doomed feminine world, yet many other problems concerned with women, such as social conditioning, sexual discrimination, and forced sex remain unanswered. Still, Kamala Markandaya has successfully propounded some feminist ideas in her novels.
Shobha De’s fiction deals with the lives of urban aristocratic women. Marriage to them is a convenience for money, social status and physical gratification, rather than having and psychological attachment. Shobha De portrays women who, while in quest of self-identity, lose their morality. Her female characters are modern, educated, glamorous, ambitious, money-minded and have thirst for physical gratification.

They are relentlessly in search of a new life-partner instead of analyzing their marital problems, and are doomed by their spirit of romanticism. Her characters do not possess any moral or ethical values the Indian psyche normally associates with marriage. Infidelity is not a sin but routine activity for them for which they have no remorse. Her novels portray the metropolitan elites, who have bartered values and ideals for superficial lusts—lust for money, physical gratification, success and ambitions. Shobha De’s feminist ideas lack Indianness. Her themes propagate the dilution of family ties by women in order to accommodate themselves in better social positions. Though she takes up some problems related with the lives of women, she fails to suggest any substantial or relevant solutions to them. Her novels present a very small section of contemporary society. It can also be mentioned that feminism which was propagated as a revolution to grant equal rights to women in India, is now being influenced by the feminist concepts of western culture.

The enthusiasm to ameliorate the condition of women in an under privileged society often overlooks the difference in the plight of Indian and western women. According to the western feminists, women should attain their individuality within or without the family, whereas Indian women want to seek their individuality while remaining within the institution of marriage. They value their family, as well as their individuality. They normally do not favor fragmentation and dilution of familial and marital bonds. This difference in the temperament of Indian and western women nullifies the adaptation of western feministic ideology in India. Writers like Shobha De represent a small section of Indian women who get misguided and carried away by their emotional undulations and end their marital knots with no regrets.

In this whole scenario the fiction of Shashi Deshpande comes like fresh air, which not only propagates feminist ideas but also advises women to understand their naked selves. Her novels suggest that women should take cognizance to their weaknesses, overcome them and implement their potential in order to assert their
individuality. As a novelist she mirrors the new socio-cultural context of the process of change. Her novels reflect the social realities of Indian life—they also revaluate and reinterpret women’s status, helping them to reinvent their identity and community positions, norms and values.

The themes dealt by Shashi Deshpande in her novels possess universality. They do not refer to a particular woman or a particular section of women in the society but are representative of Indian woman in general. As compared to the novels of Anita Desai, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya and other early writers, we find her fiction giving a more transparent picture of the status of Indian women. She is neither prejudiced against men nor has any partiality towards her female protagonists. She presents the true facet of the modern Indian society in her novels. Supporting the autonomous self-hood for women she suggests that substantial and reasonable methods should be employed to improve their condition.

Like Virginia Woolf, she feels that women should be allowed to utilize their talents, and simultaneously they should fulfill their duties towards their families. Like Betty Friedan, she too advocates that women should be equivalent to men and their existence should be noticed as human beings. Like Simone de Beauvoir she traces and exposes the limitations associated with a woman’s life from her childhood to womanhood. Shashi Deshpande’s feminist concerns are different from those of the other contemporary writers. She presents the new image of the Indian woman—who wants to be a wife, mother and daughter, and simultaneously desires to achieve her individuality. Her novels define the concept of feminism within the context of Indian social milieu.

The very possible solutions that Shashi Deshpande shows, in spite of her literary talent, do not get wide recognition and acclamation especially abroad, as compared with some of her contemporaries such as Anita Desai because she writes independently without being conscious of what her readers, specially, the Western readers expect from Indian literature. She neither uses Indianism nor does she try to ‘simplify certain concepts, ideas, culture and myths purely Indian’. What she tells M.D. Riti in an interview. “There is No Looking Back” is quite ambivalent. She is neither there nor here as it were.
I do not use Indianism to make my writing look Indian. I never try to make India look exotic. I do not think of a Western audience at all. I belong to Indian literature. I would not like ever to be called an Indo Anglican writer. I feel strongly about that (The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande, p.240)

It seems she is rather backward in her conviction and commitment that to be an Indo-Anglican writer is so by virtue of one’s adherence to the social, cultural ethos and reality. May be because of this reason why some German students said that they found the character of Sumi in A Matter of Time puzzling as she did not confirm to their idea of an Indian woman. Meenakshi Mukherjee says:

“Her special valued lies in an uncompromising toughness, in her attempts to do what has never attempted in English, her insistence on being read on her own terms and a refusal to be packaged according to the demands of the market.”(India club.com)

Throughout the discussion, Shashi Deshpande does not like to conform to any kind of categorization or labeling. She has declared herself a feminist but she has been defending herself from being called a feminist writer. Whether or not she is a feminist writer, her fiction certainly contains some basic feminist elements, though there are also many other elements, which are not feminist in orientation. Her method and vision as a woman writer is different from that of the Western feminist writers or even her contemporary Indian feminist writers. Her fiction shows a clear departure from the male writing tradition, which itself is a qualification for feminist writing. Each of her novels is a journey of self-discovery, self-realization and self-actualization. She is one of those writers writing about women’s problems and predicaments but that does not necessarily mean that she is always woman- centered with a predetermined bias that all women are wronged and men an instrument of female oppression and suffering.

For all that women suffer; men need not be always blamed because women’s sins are mostly created by themselves. All the more women need to be conscious of their own role and responsibility in the society. Women are to reform themselves as
much as men are to be reformed. Looked at from this angle what Shashi Deshpande argues is in favor of a balanced society where man and woman share equally, understand each other on an equal footing. That perhaps will be able to remove sexual and gender disparity. Shashi Deshpande, the novelist will have to be seen in this light for proper investigation and interrogation. Her feminism bears a totally different stamp. Feminist, yes, she is one but with a difference that is to be established when Shashi Deshpande’s work needs to properly construe.

Shashi Deshpande is a modern woman writer who writes with commitment and consciousness of women’s life and their problems. Her treatment of and dealings with her women characters clearly show that she writes drawing upon her experience as a woman. Women’s authentic and sincere voice is what the novelist attempts to bring forth. Most of her protagonists suffer from identity crisis at some point of their lives and hence, their struggle to search for identities becomes the main concern of her novels. Ultimately they are able to discover their true self.

Shashi Deshpande as a novelist may be placed in the third phase in the history of women writers as divided by Elaine Showalter. Women writers are grouped into three phases-the “Feminine phase” (1840-1880), the “Feminist phase” (1880-1920), the “Female phase” (1920-present). According to Showalter, “The Feminine phase” is the phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of dominant tradition, and internalization of its standard of art and its views on social roles”. (Showalter pp. 15 -16).

In this period, both the production and consumption of literature were considered exclusively as males’ domain. No wonder some women writers like Mary Ann Evans who wrote under male pseudonyms George Eliot. The second phase, the “Feminist phase” is marked by “protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy”. (Showalter p.16) Finally, there is “Female phase” of “self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity”. (Showalter p.16).

Shashi Deshpande would be properly and adequately fitted into the “Female phase” not only because she chronologically falls within this period but also because
of her very commitment and preoccupation. She is not one who tries “to fit women between the lines of male tradition”; but rather she “focuses on the newly visible world of female culture”. (Showalter p.28) Right from her very first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, to the latest one *In The Country of Deceit*, the novelist’s depiction of her women characters and their problems reveals her consciousness of the multi-layered sexual politics prevailing in the society through the ages. She neither imitates the masculine mode of writing nor does she blindly follow the style of militant feminist writers. As a responsive feminist writer, she writes for a better world of man and woman. This means that she writes not what she must but what she chooses, and as a very sensitive feminist writer, she knows the huge gap between men’s world and women’s world and wishes to bridge the two worlds so as to create a harmonious society of both man and woman.

Surprisingly Shashi Deshpande’s novels have typical endings. They end with an optimistic note and hope not for just survival but for living a meaningful life. Unlike Anita Desai’s neurotic, psychic and suicidal heroines like Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*, her protagonists strive to find a balance, a way of finding some solution to their problems and sufferings. In this sense, it would not be wrong to say that her novels are positive in attitude towards women’s life and their problems. Here, the novelist seems to agree with what Elaine Showalter says.“Women’s literature must go beyond these scenarios of compromise, madness and death. Although the reclamation of suffering is the beginning, its purpose is to discover the new world”. (Showalter p.39)

They are ready to rectify their fault for a better life and even go on accepting things beyond expectation. They had turned their back to their problems and silently endured with constant fear, but they at the very end of the novels are sure of themselves and ready to face anything in life.

Another important aspect of Shashi Deshpande as novelist is her sympathetic treatment of her male characters, though she does not focus on them as she does on her women characters. She can reach out to the suffering and pain that is there in the mind of her male characters too. In *A Matter of Time*, the treatment of the male character, Gopal is noteworthy. Here, the novelist successfully presents the inner working of his psyche as sympathetic as she deals with her female characters. Though
Gopal’s desertion of his family abruptly for the reasons not known to him even seems to be cruel, her insightful observation and objective treatment of the character makes it possible to win our sympathy towards him. The novelist, who has so far used female protagonists, for the first time, uses a male protagonist through the character of Gopal. In her novel, *Moving On*, Shashi Deshpande marvelously relives another male protagonist as the diary entries are unraveled. Here the novelist, quite successfully, expresses the very intimate feelings and sentiments of a dying, old man, looking at his life from the very beginning.

In a different outlook Shashi Deshpande projected her male characters as in her earlier novels do not share the same space like their female counterparts but the novelist’s kind and concerned dealing of male characters in the later novels is worth mentioning. Devayani’s father was shown as a failure, burdened with financial problems. Being the oldest son of an irresponsible father, he had to look after his younger sibling’s education, to take care of her sister’s marriage. When he married Pushpa, a rich man’s daughter everyone thought he married for money but it wasn’t true. At the age of forty, he gave up a good job in his father-in-law’s bank. ‘Maybe he wanted to get away from being Krishna Bhat’s son-in-law, or perhaps’ he was tired of family responsibilities’ (p.60). He had his own dreams of plantation that couldn’t be fulfilled. He suffered from depression and midlife crisis. At last, he committed suicide. Towards the end of the novel, when Devayani was bedridden after an accident, she was able to understand her father, the darkness he was in and ‘the despair that had driven him to his death’. (p.249)

Shashi Deshpande also projects him as the victim of male’s ego reflecting our society’s pressure on individual male. The patriarchal society demands some expected role not only from women but also from men to act in a certain way. Men are always expected to be superior, stronger and bread-earner. Devayani’s father did not touch a single penny from his wife’s money to pay the heavy family debt and even for their daughter’s marriage, all because it would hurt his male ego.

Other male characters like Shree, Devayani’s brother-in-law (they grew up together in the same colony), Iqbal, her lawyer (for a dispute over land) and Keshav Rao, her uncle, were depicted as understanding and sympathetic persons. They too, in
their own way reached out to Devayani to lend a helping hand. It was Shree and Keshav who wrote to her, trying to reason the consequences of her relationship with a married man. Finally it was Iqbal who offered her much needed work as his assistant, helping her to cope with her life after Ashok. Through these characters, Shashi Deshpande seems to suggest the possibility of male-female bonding and its positive result in the individual’s life.

For instance, DSP Ashok Chinnappa was a man living for the moment, doing well in his career as policeman but seemed to have not-so good married life because of which he had many women in his life. However he had perhaps found something special in Devayani, a feeling he never had before, when he first saw her. He was depicted as one who asserted himself and knew the world around him but because of his loving daughter, he was ready to face unhappy married life, sacrificing his undying love for Devayani. This shows that men too, like women in Indian society, had to give up their individual likes for the sake of the family. In their last meeting, he said, I’m sorry, Divya, I am sorry. I can’t lose my daughter, I can’t let her lose me. (p.299)

It does not seem that the novelist uses the male protagonists just to show her competence to explore the other gender’s consciousness but to reveal the dreams, the uncertainties and the inner psyche of the male characters more convincingly. In doing so, Shashi Deshpande is at her best. Men in the Minds of Women, ed. Meenakshi Bharat rightly observes: “When a woman writer works her narrative through a male consciousness, questions of sexuality and psychology are raised” but “No eye –brows were raise when Samuel Richardson wrote first Pamela.” (Jain p.4) In the same essay, the observation she made deserves some mention.

Women writers when they turn to male narrators are not necessarily guided by the desire to escape a female consciousness or to demonstrate that they have a grasp over the male psyche. Most of the time, it is not the average swashbuckling hero who interests them. What fascinate them are the dreams men have and the layers of sensitivity which lies undiscovered in them. (Jain p.57)
Thus, one can come to the concluding point that Shashi Deshpande’s fiction is different from other writers in the sense that she not only points out and exposes the wounds of the ‘second sex’, but also purposes and suggests their remedies. Her themes present an adequate analysis of the contemporary Indian society. The evaluation of her literature concludes that women should actively participate in life and also relish the family ties, because family; as an institution, is essential for their sustenance. She points out that “for most Indian women to live alone is a very hard life” (2001).

Her message is that women should flourish, not only as daughters, wives and mothers but also as individuals. As a novelist she excels in possessing deep knowledge of women’s psychology and their predicament associated with their suppression. She objectively diagnoses the norms responsible for establishing the balance and harmony of marital life and simultaneously does not allow any easy escape to her protagonists for their weaknesses.

Her concept of feminism is closer to the realities of the Indian social milieu where women have a desire for socio-economic independence, retaining their preference for permanent relationship and harmonious family life. She points out in an interview given to Lakshmi Holmstrom.

Feminism isn’t matter of theory: it is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, children or about not being married not having children etc., I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our lives, our experiences. (pp. 248-49)

Her novels can be summed up as revealing the true facet of the contemporary middle-class Indian society which is dominated by men. They expound that the society requires a fundamental change, only then women will be able to enjoy their existence as human beings. The significance, relevance and practicability of her feminist concern, reflected in her novels and the humanistic and universal approaches
to which she is committed invariably underscore the success of Shashi Deshpande as a novelist.

Shashi Deshpande finds it difficult to apply the theories of feminist writers or critics especially those who propagate violent feminism, in the lives of women. She states in her article. “No Man is an Island” that feminism does not mean “a western concept, rejecting the family and home, hating men and waging a war against them.” She further expounds her idea about feminism:

“Today, when I call myself a feminist, I believe that the female of the species has the same rights to be born and survive and to fulfill herself and shape her life according to her needs and the potential that lies within her, as the male has. I believe that women are neither inferior nor subordinate human beings, but one half of the human race, I believe that women (and men as well) should not be straitjacketed into roles that wrap their personalities, but should have options available to them. I believe that nature, when conferring its gifts on humans, did not differentiate between males and females, except for the single purpose of procreation. I believe that motherhood does not bar everything, but is a bonus, an extra that women are privileged to have.” *(The Times of India, 23rd April, 1998)*

Shashi Deshpande is basically a woman knows the very nature of women. Shashi Deshpande opened a new door (eye) to look at and estimate women. Women from the beginning are- a care taker (mother), soul mate (wife) playmate (Sister), friend, companion etc., and bread winner too sometimes. She may be physically weak but mentally strong to even understand anything that seems to be difficult to comprehend. Especially the modern woman is ready to come forward to take up any kind of risk and responsibility on par with men. The modern women in the corporate world prove themselves with men. Shashi Deshpande’s understanding of women is so different from others. From rock age to rocket age infinite number of changes take place in the history of mankind as the same with women. As science, technology, ecology sees transition women also transcend from one stage to another.
Thus Shashi Deshpande’s feministic concerns are constructive rather than destructive. Her works clearly indicate that the concern with feministic issues does not hinder the women’s capability to nurture various relationships—of mother, wife, friend, companion and daughter. Rather an awareness of the self as an individual enables them to establish and enjoy these relationships in a more cogent, rational and open manner. She unequivocally asserts that a woman can be a person herself and still enjoy her social roles and relationships fully. Besides this, Shashi Deshpande is a feminist with a difference—she has no revulsion towards men. Rather she points out that men can contribute a lot for the emancipation of women, which is the unique contribution of the novelist in the horizon of contemporary Indian English fiction.

The next chapter ‘Bleak Identity of Woman’ deals with the common and specific problems faced by Indian woman and the different moral codes that have been established for men and women. It also projects the problem of working women who are overburdened by the responsibilities of job and family. It projects the women who tolerate the humiliations inflicted upon them by their male associates because any kind of retaliation will become a permanent stigma on them. It also reveals the true picture of the chauvinistic societies which chastises even those women who are the victims of sexual harassment and exploitation.