CHAPTER 1
1. INTRODUCTION

It is a truth universally acknowledged that, women, who are physically and mentally equipped to perform on par with men, are not only denied existence as complete human beings, but also deprived of the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, their thoughts and their anguish.

The feminist movement, which started in the West in the 1960s, went a long way in arresting the injustice meted out to women.

The nineteenth century French dramatist, Alexander Dumas, was the first to use the term ‘feminism’. To refer to the then-emerging movement for women’s right, which was mostly limited to politics, it gradually spread across the world securing complete political, social, economic and educational rights for women. That movement influences many Indian and other writers but in the later part of the twentieth century, it swept across the world, shaking it out of its centuries old complacency, making people think anew about old-age beliefs. In India, a population steeped in religious beliefs, superstition and tradition did not readily influenced by this movement. The *Manu Smriti*, which has been widely accepted in India as a text laying down the rules of social behaviour, declares:

“Day and night, women must be kept in subordination to the male of the family: in childhood to the father, in youth to her husband, in old age to her sons…. Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be worshipped as God.”¹

Feminism, thus, plays little or no part in the lives of most Indians. A few Indian writers in English have attempted to challenge the age-old myth surrounding the man-woman relationship. It has succeeded in their attempt, if
not in finding an ideal solution, but, at least in creating an awareness of the existing equalities in society.

According to the historian Linda Gordon, feminism is “An analysis of women’s subordination for purpose of figuring out how to change it”\(^2\). Women constitute roughly half the world’s population, but their contribution in various fields of activity has been totally disproportionate to their numerical strength. Branded as the weaker sex they have been denied full justice—social, economic and political. An awareness of the inequalities present in society resulted in the women’s Liberation Movement as late as the mid-nineteenth century. The credit for providing an impetus to such a movement must certainly go to pioneers like Simone de Beauvoir, who sought to shatter the myth of femininity in her book, *The Second Sex*. First published in French in the year 1949, it was later translated into English making it accessible to the rest of the world. With frankness hitherto unheard of, she writes:

“All agree in recognizing the fact that females exist in the human species; today as always they make up about one half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, and become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity. Is this attribute something secreted by the ovaries? Or is it a platonic essence, a product of the philosophic imagination”\(^3\).

Simone de Beauvoir draws heavily on various disciplines like biology, psychology and history to express her ideas clearly. She studies in detail issues
like a girl’s education, marriage, prostitute, and domestic chores, which she
describes as unpaid drudgery. She discusses frankly topics, which were
hitherto considered to be taboo-sexual initiation and sexual pleasure for
women. She also seeks to debunk the sentimental propaganda about maternity.

Though Beauvoir’s book sowed the seeds for a revolution, it did not
exactly initiate the women’s movement. The book, which sparked off the
movement, was Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine mystique*, published in 1963.
Fifteen years after graduating from college, Friedan conducted interviews with
many of her erstwhile classmates and the result of this survey proved that the
general assumption of a woman achieving happiness and contentment in
marriage and motherhood was false. Most of the women interviewed by
Friedan were wives and mothers, ostensibly blessed with all the comforts of
life. Yet the survey proved that they were merely playing the role of a devoted
wife and loving mother and were supposed to seek fulfillment in it. Friedan
holds the view:

“For a woman, as for a man, the need for self-fulfillment-autonomy,
self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization-is as important
as the sexual need, with as serious consequences when it is thwarted.
Women’s sexual problems are, in this sense, by-product of the suppression of
her basic need to grow and fulfill her potentialities as a human being,
potentialities which the mystique of feminine fulfillment ignores”.

Friedan’s book was followed by Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* in
1969. Millet is considered to be another important feminist of the twentieth
century. She vociferously argues that in the patriarchal society, woman has
been accorded a demeaning position. She gives a graphic explanation of the
insecurities faced by women and she anticipates the problem which society would face one day in the form of female feticide with the result of rapid scientific development which would enable pre-natal sex determination tests. She says:

"The gnawing suspicion that plague any minority member, that myths propagated about his inferiority might after all be true often reaches remarkable proportions in the personal insecurities of women. Some find their subordinate position so hard to bear that they repress and deny its existence. But a large number will recognize and admit their circumstances when they are properly phrased. Of two studies which asked women if they would have preferred to be born male, one found that one fourth of one sample admitted as much, and another sample, one half, when inquired of children, who have not yet developed as serviceable techniques of evasion, what this choice might be, if they had one, the answers of female children in a large majority of cases clearly favour birth into the elite group, whereas boys overwhelmingly reject the option of being girls. The phenomenon of parents' prenatal preferences for male issue is too common to require much elaboration. In the light of the imminent possibility of parents actually choosing the sex of their child, such a tendency is becoming the cause of some concern in scientific circles"\(^5\).

Propagating the same brand of militant feminism, Germaine Greer feels that marriage as an institution must be abolished because, "if women are to affect a significant amelioration in their condition it seems obvious that they must refuse to marry"\(^6\).
The women’s movement also produced a number of feminist novelists. Sylvia Plath’s *Bell Jar* took American women by storm. The novel depicts the transformation of the young, innocent and oppressed heroine, Esther, into a vengeful Diana. The novelist uses the exquisitely handcrafted mat made by Mrs. Willard, one of the characters in the book, to symbolize the oppression of women. This mat is not used for interior decoration as some object of art but rather as a kitchen mat to be soiled under the feet of Mrs. Willard. It makes Esther think:

“...And I knew that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners a man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out under his feet like Mrs. Willards’s kitchen mat”

Other feminist novelists in the West like Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, Marilyn French and Margaret Atwood have created a niche for themselves in the literature produced in this century. They have come a long way from the handicaps and constraints faced by their counterparts two hundred years ago. Women in those days did not dare defy the rigid norms laid down by society. While it was permissible for men to ignore social decorum and prudish notions of morality, a woman writer was expected to restrict herself only to certain areas of life. Even such writing was possible only after much sacrifice. Writing about women writers, Anne Stevenson comments:

“It is surprising how many spinster writers there have been: Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Stevie Smith, Charlotte Mew, Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop. These women may have suffered, but they suffered
as women who attempted neither to fight male domination nor compromise themselves to suit it. Theirs was a narrow independence, even a selfish one, but it was real. It was bought at the price of what used to be called ‘womanliness’- sex, marriage, children and the socially acceptable position of a wife”

Society has undergone a great change since then. No longer do women writers have to assume pseudonyms, as in the case of George Eliot, to shield their identity. Women writers today enjoy a relatively greater measure of freedom and do not hesitate to explore regions of experience that were earlier considered taboo. Even in a conservative nation like India, we now have Shobha De who has dared to enter the exclusively male domain of pornography and become a commercial success.

In general, however, Western feminists far outnumber their Indian counterparts and are a lot more stridently feminist in their approach. In India, the first generation of Indian writers in English- Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao missed out a great opportunity. A wealth of material in the form of the freedom struggle and the women involved in it seemed to have escaped their notice. Anand had been too deeply involved in championing the cause of the underdog in society to pay attention to the travails of women. His protagonist Gauri in The Old Woman And The Cow, however, is a fine example of his idea of women’s emancipation at least some of Narayan’s women characters of everyday life try to assert themselves in their desire for a career or their need for physical gratification. If he has portrayed the meek and submissive woman in Margayya’s wife in his novel The Financial Expert and Savitri in The Dark Room, he has also created vibrant and sometimes radical
women characters like Daisy and Rosie in his novel, The Painter Of Signs and The Guide respectively. These heroines, however, are not role models whose experiences are meant to be emulated. Talking of Daisy, Shanta Krishnaswamy says:

“She is unique in that she is able to cast aside all culturally imposed feelings of guilt and shame on womanhood and sex. Narayan, however, in depriving her of personal fulfillment in marriage and domesticity, warns us about the excesses of rampant feminism which would lead to a destructive or deathlike androgynous blurring of the two sexes”

The women in Raja Rao’s fiction are reduced to mere automatons. Those of his women characters, who aspire for more, end up feeling bitter like Saroja or settle for passivity like Savitri, dutifully playing her role as the wife of a government officer in The Serpent and the Rope. The women in his novels are victims of domestic injustice and tyrannical tradition, but he proposes no solution to their dilemma. This may be because as Shanta Krishnaswamy says,

“The culture he springs from and which he has imbibed so thoroughly in his entire being, precludes Rao from resolving the woman’s issue in concrete terms.” In Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novels, woman is the epitome of all virtues and plays an important role in bringing about social reform. But in spite of being pure and noble, she is victimized. Kajoli in So Many Hungers! Reveals an unconquerable spirit in the face of endless suffering and misery. The city-bred Mohini in Music for Mohini transforms the village, Behula, symbolic of a country
steeped in superstition and obsolete customs, into a model village with
the help of her progressive-minded husband. However, it may be said,
“the picture he paints of the woman is idyllic, tender and charming,
sometimes even too optimistic to be realistic”. (353)

Thus, while writing about women, men tend to go to extremes—either
highlighting their weaknesses or deifying them and putting them on a pedestal,
making the characters seem unreal. Women writers, on the other hand, are
more honest in their portrayal of women in their novels. Kamala Markandaya
very successfully portrays the double pulls that the Indian woman is subjected
to—between her desire to assert her dignity as human being and her duty as a
daughter, wife and mother. She also points out how the distortions in the
economic and social order affect women more than men. Through her
protagonist Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*, she proves that within the
traditional role, she can accommodate her other roles as a human being, and
not through alienation and self-laceration, but through expansion and
communion a deeper self-knowledge can be attained. Another example is
Sarojini in *A Silence of Desire*, who is determined to overcome her problems
in her own way. It is perhaps only in *Possession* that Markandaya transforms
the traditionally suppressed woman into a domineering and tyrannical
possessor. In most of her other novels, however, the woman is a source of
dormant strength and shores up the male protagonist from collapse.

Anita Desai explores the disturbed psyche of modern Indian women.
Her protagonists are usually highly intelligent and sensitive women who end
up exhausted and on the verge of mental crises in their attempt to manage a
home and children and find emotional fulfillment. They usually resort to
drastic steps when their predicament reaches a climax. Maya in Cry, the peacock is highly sensitive, caring woman bound in marriage to the practical, down-to-earth lawyer Gautama, who remains totally oblivious to his wife’s emotional needs. Physically and emotionally, her body and mind crave for attention, the denial of which leads to dire consequences with Gautama being pushed to his death by her. Where Shall We Go This Summer? Describes the gnawing void in the life of Sita by reviewing her life as a woman, wife and mother. It is an intense story of a middle-aged woman torn between her desire to abandon her comfortable, albeit boring, existence and the realization that the bonds that bind her to it cannot easily be broken. Desai, in all her novels, presents the predicament of sensitive women characters, who find it very difficult to adjust them in the present mechanical and urbanized set up. She, however, makes no attempt to find solutions to their various problems.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala is mostly preoccupied with the travails of the white woman in India. She writes predominantly from her own viewpoint with her bitter experiences in an alien land. Her portrayal of women is very limited and narrow, and provokes Shanta Krishnaswamy to comment that “Her examples of women in her fiction seem to make people unacquainted with India believes that all Indian women are contemptible, flighty or neurotic and pathetic creatures” (356).

Nayantara Sahgal, another prominent Indian woman writer, started writing before the feminist movement was launched in the sixties. Yet she has dealt with problems concerning women who went on to become major issues in the feminist movement. She writes sensitively of the way women suffer owing to sexist bias in a patriarchal set-up. In The Day in Shadow, she gives a
sensitive account of the suffering of a woman in Indian society when she chooses to divorce her husband. The protagonist Smirit feels diminished and humiliated not only by the stigma attached to divorce but also by the cruel 'consent term' of the divorce which compel her to pay a staggering amount of tax on an income she cannot even use. The novel, however, cannot be labelled feminist because Smirit, in spite of her liberated way of thinking, does not have the courage to stand without male support. If it is not her husband Som, it is Raj, who she later depends on to solve her problems. In Rich Like Us, Ram inflicts great emotional violence on both his wives Mona and Rose. Though both the women are aware of the injustice done to them, habit makes them willing victims of exploitation and injustice, Sahgal, it must be observed, works out her feminist ideas in a limited world. She usually restricts herself to the study of women of one class-the elite. She makes a close and sensitive study of the sufferings of the women of this class and shows how they refuse to remain chained to their subordinate roles, and how they defy traditional norms in search of emancipation. Most of her works, however, also deal with the impersonal world of politics in a story running parallel to the main theme of the personal world of man-woman relationships.

1.1 CRITICAL OVERVIEW

LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

In the context of contemporary Indian writing in English, Deshpande is one of the most understated yet confident voices, which explores individual and universal predicaments through the female psyche. In one of her interviews she says, "I do not like to call myself a feminist writer. I say I am a feminist, but do not write to propagate an ism"
Shashi Deshpande occupies a significant place among contemporary women novelists who concern themselves with the problems of women and their quest for identity. She says, "Basically, mine is a quest for the human self within the woman." Her protagonists are modern, educated young women, crushed under the weight of a male-dominated and tradition bound society. Her attempt to give an honest portrayal of their sufferings, disappointments and frustrations makes her novels susceptible to treatment from the feminist angle. She, however, maintains that her novels are not intended to read as feminist texts. This is evident from what she says:

"A woman who writes of women's experiences often brings in some aspect of those experiences that have angered her, roused her strong feelings. I do not see why this has to be labelled feminist fiction." 

Ibsen, who heralded the idea of woman's emancipation with his character, Nora, in A Doll's House, also disclaims any connection with women's rights, he says: "Of course, it is incidentally desirable to solve the problem of women; but that has not been the portrayal of human beings." 

While it may not have been Deshpande's intentions to propound any particular theory, even a cursory reading of her novels displays a tremendous amount of sympathy for women. Most of her protagonists are educated and exposed to western ideas. As Ramamoorthy puts it, "Her heroines speak of Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own and Betty Friedan and it becomes obvious that the women she has created are feminists if she is not one." Moreover, the attitudes and reactions of her protagonist to various issues related to women who are caught between tradition and modernity do provide ample material for treatment from a feminist angle. She has written 'Roots

A reading of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals a deep understanding of the female psyche particularly that of the educated, urban, middle-class woman. Deshpande is undoubtedly an outstanding Indian English novelist with four volumes of short stories, four children's books and six novels to her credit. She was born and brought up in Dharwad, Karnataka, and is the daughter of renowned Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Sriranga, who is described as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada theatre. She graduated in economics from Elphinstone College, Bombay and in law from the Government Law College, Bangalore. Much later, she took a postgraduate degree from the Mysore University. She married Dr. Deshpande; a neuropathologist in 1962 and in the initial years of her marriage was largely given over to bringing up her two sons. Recounting the influences in her life, Shashi Deshpande says: "There are three things in my early life that have shaped me as a writer. These are: That my father was a writer, that I was educated exclusively in English and that I was born a female".

In an interview to Vanamala Vishwanath, Shashi Deshpande says that she began writing most casually and without any intention of setting down to a career in writing. She had accompanied her husband, a commonwealth scholar, to England and lived there for a year. In order not to forget her experiences in England, she began writing them down. The fact that they were
found worthy of being published encouraged her to try a career in journalism. A stint at Onlooker further encouraged her to try her hand at short stories and, in a sudden burst of creativity, she wrote several short stories, which were published in reputed magazines, and which were later compiled into four volumes. Her first collection of short stories *The Legacy*, published in 1972, was prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University, other collection of short stories are *It Was Dark, The Miracle* and *It Was Nightingale*. In between, Shashi Deshpande also tried her hand at detective writing and wrote three detective serials, two of which were subsequently expanded and published as regular novels- *Come up and Be Dead* and *If I Die Today*. The racy style of narration made these books quote popular but Deshpande herself considers them as failures.

A close study of Deshpande’s short stories and novels reveal an author who is intelligent, articulate and relatively free from prejudice regarding gender, but at the same time highly sensitive to the issues involving women. The relentless probing of men-women relationship by the author intrigues the reader enough to question her stand on feminism. Deshpande is perhaps the only Indian author who has made a bold attempt to give voice to the frustrations and disappointments of women despite her vehement denial of being feminist.

*Roots And Shadows* is the first full-length novel written by Deshpande though it was published after *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, her second novel. The novel highlights the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. She finds herself alienated when she refuses to conform to the rigid code laid down by society.
Marriage to the man of her choice brings only disillusionment when she finds her educated and ostensibly progressive minded husband no different from the average Indian male. She is even contemptuous of herself when she realizes that she has all along been unconsciously aping the model of the idea of an Indian wife. The novel gains its feminist stance from Indu’s persistent exploration of herself as an individual. Extra-marital affair helps her to break free from the emotional bondage of matrimony and makes her aware of herself and realize that it is possible to exercise autonomy within the parameters of marriage. *Roots And shadows* also offers us scope to observe meaningless ritual and custom all of which help to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. Seen through the novelist’s eyes, insignificant everyday details take on a new dimension and highlight the gross inequalities present in society.

Deshpande’s second novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, seeks to discuss the male ego, which refuses to accept a secondary refuses to accept a secondary position in marriage. The novel narrates the harrowing experience of the protagonist, Saru, who enjoys a greater economic and social status than her husband Manohar. The trauma of being the victim of her husband’s frustration that manifests itself in the form of sexual sadism is vividly portrayal. Deshpande also makes the readers aware of society’s reaction to the superior status of wife in a marriage, which leads the husband to develop an inferiority complex. The novel also seeks to discuss the blatant gender discrimination, which is shown even by parents towards their daughters. Deshpande effectively conveys the craving by parents for male child and the disastrous effect it can have on a sensitive young girl. Denied of parental love and victim of her husband’s frustration, Saru commences an arduous journey
into her and liberate herself from guilt, shame and humiliation to emerge in full control over her life.

Deshpande’s third novel, That Long Silence, brought her into limelight as it was published by British feminist publishing house, Virago. The novel, deals with the protagonist Jaya’s passage through a maze of self-doubts and fears towards the affirmation of herself. A crisis in the middle-class family of the protagonist triggers off a chain of events, which compel her to view her life in retrospection, what follows, is an honest and frank account of Jaya’s life. In her anxiety to play the role of wife and mother to perfection, Jaya realizes that she does not do justice to her talents as a writer. Her constant fear of displeasing her husband and inviting the censure of society, not only make her give up writing but also discourage her from acknowledging her friendship with a man who is not her husband, brother and father.

Jaya is representative of the modern young woman - educated and aware- nevertheless unable to break free from the stronghold of tradition. In the process of telling her story, she offers us a glimpse into the lives of ostensibly content housewives who are nevertheless suppressed under the weight of male dominance. Deshpande, however, avoids the facile solution of laying the blame on men alone and tries to view the men - women relationship objectively. She observes through her novel that both men and women, being products of their culture, find it difficult to outgrow the images and roles allotted to them by society.

In her fourth novel, The Binding Vine, Deshpande uses the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmí to focus attention on victims like Kalpana and Mira- victims of man’s lust and woman’s helplessness. The novelist makes a
bold attempt to portray the agony of a wife who is the victim of marital rape - a theme which perhaps has not been touched upon any other Indian writer in English. Urmi tries to reconstruct the pathetic story of a bright and attractive girl, Mira, who wrote poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage to alleviate her suffering. Urmi also crusades for the cause of another victim, Kalpana, who is brutally raped and is on her deathbed. The novelist deftly handles the juxtaposition of the two situations - rape committed within the precincts of marriage and outside it. The novelist gives a moving account of the plight of women raped outside marriage, who would rather suffer in silence than be exposed to the humiliation involved in publicizing the event and that of married women whose bodies are violated by their legally wedded husbands but who would never dare reveal this to anyone. They would rather stifle their voice of protest for the sake of social and moral security. Deshpande, through the voice of Urmi, also offers us a glimpse into the lives of myriad other women, who are ostensibly more liberated than their predecessors but, who nevertheless, are victims of some from violence or deprivation.

In her novel, A Matter Of Time, Deshpande liberates herself from the narrow confines of women and their problems and enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. The novel is essentially the story of three women from three generation from the same family and how they cope with the tragedy that overwhelms them. But in narrating their story a greater emphasis has been placed on Gopal, the perpetrator of this tragedy, and his view of life.
Shashi Deshpande’s novel, *Small Remedies* is the most confident assertion of her strength as a novelist with her deliberate denial of sentimentality and her total control over the unwieldy material. Structured as a biography within a biography, it is about Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing doyenne of Hindustani music, who denies a marriage and a home with a view to pursuing her genius. It also tells the story of Leela, who gives up her respectability in order to gain love and unhappiness in equal measure. At the center of this sprawling narrative is Madhu who, in telling the stories of Savitribai, Leela and Munni, hopes to find a way out of her own despair.

*Come Up and Be Dead* and *If I Die Today*, two of Deshpande’s detective serials which have been expanded and published as novels have not been included for study in this book because the very nature of their themes is totally at variance with the subject of this study. Shashi Deshpande’s interest in detective fiction is obvious from her review of *A Women’s Eye: New Stories by the Best Women Crime Writers*. Her remarkably sagacious assessment of the stories leaves one in no doubt about her love for genre. But a reading of both her detective novels drives home the point that to review a book and write one are two entirely different things. The books are at the best amateurish as Deshpande herself has acknowledged.

*Come Up and Be Dead* has been compared unfavourably with Agatha Christie’s *Cat among Pigeons*, because the setting for both novels is a girl’s school where a series of murders take place. The novel, which starts briskly enough, falters towards the middle and is unable to hold the reader’s interest in the true tradition of a whodunit. *If I Die Today* is set in the resident quarters of a large charity hospital where again there are series of killings beginning with
the murder of the terminally ill-patient Guru. The vast numbers of characters in the area, their frustrations and disappointments, their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities provide enough material for a gripping murder mystery. But what could have been a taut suspense story meanders aimlessly taking the readers along to an uninspiring end. If both the novels have fallen short of the reader’s expectations, it may be because the novelist has set a high standard for herself in her other published works. It is easy to see that what Deshpande is best at is portrayal of human relationships and the turmoil’s raging in the minds of her female protagonists who are unfairly treated by their parents, husbands, and society in general. Deshpande is so acutely aware of the inequalities present in society that even her detective stories are replete with examples to prove the same.

The chief female characters in *Come Up and Be Dead*, the school principal, Kshama, and her housekeeper/cousin, Devayani, are spinsters. They are typical examples of women caught between the modern idea of freedom and the traditional need for a husband and home of their own. Kshama is an efficient administrator and possesses an ostensibly unruffled manner but her thoughts reveal the agitation and complexes within her. Devayani seems quite content with her role as a housekeeper but we find her musing now and then about the uselessness of her life, “But I was neither daughter nor wife nor mother now. What was I then? Nothing? In a sense, it was restful to be nothing. And yet there was this feeling too. ...I might as well be dead.”16. This is may be Deshpande’s way of showing that even a person as well read as Devayani who quotes frequently from Shakespeare and Dickens, is still the product of a culture which declares a woman’s experience as incomplete
without marriage. Through the character of Jyoti Raman, a schoolteacher, Deshpande also hints at the sexual aggression of men tolerated silently by women. Mrs. Raman is somehow able to free herself from her husband by threatening to commit suicide but there are many others who are not so lucky.

The narrator Manju in If I die Today is quite different from the average Indian woman who views matrimony and motherhood as the ultimate happiness in life. She resents the fact that her children are a barrier to her independence. Motherhood, she thinks, “is a trap, keeping you in a cage until you lose the desire for freedom until you forget what the word ‘freedom’ means.”17. It is obvious also that she does not approve of her daughter displaying any typically female characteristics like fear or cowardice. “I didn’t want her to grow up a clinging vine. I wanted her to be fearless and independent.”45. Deshpande also tries to unmask the outwardly sophisticated and well-educated person’s yearning for a son and heir. Pitying Mariga for being unkindly treated by her ‘oh-so-foreign’ father, Dr. Kulkarni, Manju thinks: “Behind the pipe-smoking perfectly mannered phlegmatic style that he cultivated, was he after all, just a traditional Hindu man longing for son and heir? And taking it out on poor Mariga because she was only a girl?” (36). Despande also lays bare the feeble male ego, which cannot tolerate the idea of female superiority. Finding a sympathetic listener in Manju, Tony unburdens his marital problems to her: “Don’t let them tell you, it doesn’t matter who earns more money in a marriage. It does. There was Cyn before marriage crazy about me, looking up to me, ready to do anything for me. It didn’t matter at all that I was just a Games Master and she was a medico. We were just crazy about each other (84).
Tony very succinctly sums up the main ingredient for a happy marriage. He is happy so long as his wife looks up to him but when she starts earning more than he does, he begins to think that she is patronizing him. The same situation is dealt with in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* where it is the main theme of the novel. It is obvious that in both her detective novels too, Deshpande is unable to remain unconcerned about the inner turmoils and sense of unfairness experienced by her female protagonist.

Shashi Deshpande started her literary career writing short stories. Her earlier stories were published in Indian magazine like Femina, Eve’s Weekly and The Illustrated Weekly of India. Her first books were all collection of short stories. Published in 1993, “The Intrusion and Other Stories” is the latest of such collection.

The nineteen stories in “*The Intrusion And Other Stories*” prove once again that Deshpande is a master storyteller. The stories are marked by clear insight and are full of compassion and understanding for the human situation. Though true to her line of writing, women from the foundation of the stories, Deshpande’s women in these stories encompass all ages and all social levels and context. Indian classical literatures as well as history are here in two stories: “Hear me Sanjaya” and “The Stone Women”.

The voice of Deshpande’s female protagonists is even more pronounced in her short stories. Her collection of short stories, *The Legacy*, has had the distinction of being prescribed as a textbook in Columbia University for a course in modern literature. The primary focus of attention in her short stories is woman-her frustration, pain and anguish. Her stories revolve around middle-class women in India who are unable to defy social
convention and seek a compromise as a way out of their dilemma. "An antidote to Boredom" is the story of a woman dissatisfied with her existence as the wife of an indifferent man and finds her involved with a young widower. Plagued with feelings of guilt towards her son (not husband) and nagged by the doubt whether she is merely seeking an antidote to boredom in her affairs, she lets the opportunity goes, bitterly regarding it later. According to G.S Amur who has prefaced the book and considers this the best story in the collection, the story "Dramatizes the suffering of a woman who makes an unsuccessful attempt to escape from the prison of her fixed role as wife and live a life spontaneity."^18

"The Intrusion" records the horror of newly married women who's crass and insensitive husband violates her body exercising his conjugal rights. "A Liberated Woman" is the story of the catastrophic result of a marriage between a popular woman doctor and a mediocre college lecturer, because of the wounded male ego. Deshpande apparently felt that she could not do justice to them within the framework of a short story. Hence, she subsequently expanded the same idea in the form of her novel, The Dark Holds No Terrors. "Death Of a Child" is the story of a lonely woman and her experience of guilt and shame caused by an abortion for which she is to be blamed. "Why Robin" is a highly sensitive story of a mother who feels isolated from her only daughter who has more in common with her father. The situation changes dramatically, however, when the child clings to her mother for comfort and security, on attaining puberty, thus giving a new meaning to the mother's life.

"It Was Dark", the title story in the volume of short stories by the same name is a moving tale of the rape of school-girl. Deshpande evocatively
brings out the despair and anguish of her parents, particularly of the mother, who feels crushed with the feeling of guilt for having never cautioned her daughter on the dangers that might befall her. In “The Inner Rooms”, Deshpande recreates a passage from The Mahabharata making the readers empathize with the plight of Amba bringing a new dimension to the oft-told story. “A Wall is Safer” highlights the injustice meted out to a woman who is expected to sacrifice her career to safeguard her marriage. The protagonist, Hema, a professional qualified and practicing lawyer has no option but to throw up her career and follow her husband, Vasanth into wilderness, close to the project he has undertaken. Hema’s friend and colleague Sushma is aghast and ask Vasanth what he expects Hema to do in the ‘middle of nowhere’. Vasantha replies without hesitation that she cans take-up teaching. Sushma retorts that she is a lawyer and not a teacher and asks him if he would change his profession overnight. She makes a valid point here challenging most men’s attitude towards their wives’ careers.

The title story in the volume It Was the Nightingale is written in contrast to “A Wall is Safer”. Here, the protagonist, lovingly called Jayu by her husband, is all set to go abroad for a couple of years to pursue her career. Though she is aware that the long separation will equally painful for both herself and her husband, she is determined not to let the opportunity go. She justifies her decision by saying, “To me, our lives are intertwined, yet they are two different strands.” The protagonist in “A Man And Woman” is a young passionate widow who develops an illicit physical relationship with her younger brother-in-law. “The Duel” is the story of a widow who succumbs to the seduction of a male writer. These stories are examples of Deshpande’s
bold assertion of woman’s sexuality. In “A Day Like Another”. The wife is aware of husband’s infidelity but does not revolt, for the sake of domestic harmony. She would rather suffer the pain and humiliation than revolt and upset the relationship, which has taken years to build.

The story, “I want,” in the volume, The Miracle and Other Stories, revolves around the protagonist whose opinions are never taken into account – first by her father with regard to her marriage, and later by her fiancé with regard to her career. As a girl who has crossed the generally accepted marriageable age, she is expected to marry the first man who agrees to marry her. She is also expected to give in to his wishes and express no such desire, which might jeopardize the proposal. Her opinions and aspirations therefore remain unvoiced. The husband in the story, “The Shadow,” is broad-minded enough to accept his wife who has committed adultery, but his generosity does not stretch any further to accommodate the child born of this union. Perhaps this is expecting too much from men who normally do not tolerate even the slightest deviation from socially accepted behavior on the part of their wives. “The Awakening” is a pathetic story of a young girl’s sudden awareness of the harsh realities of life. Deshpande very sensitively depicts the dreams and aspirations of a young girl on the threshold of life who is forced to come to a compromise and take on the responsibilities of her family on her young shoulders.

Most of the short stories are reprinted in a single paperback edition entitled The Intrusion and Other Stories, published by Penguin India in 1993. Almost all her short stories are women centered, dealing with woman in different roles wife, mother, daughter and an individual in a society
conditioned by the rigid codes laid down by man. Modern women, as her novels, therefore as true to life and representative of the dilemma faced by modern women, as her novels. As G.S. Amur rightly observes: "Woman’s struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer, and this appears in all her important stories."  19

A comprehensive analysis of all her work leaves one in no doubt about where Deshpande’s sympathies lie. It would be unfair to label her ‘feminist’ and categorize her with several other writers who differ from her in varying degrees. She can at best be called an articulator of women who are caught at the crossroads of change in a society, which is undergoing the birth pangs of transition from tradition to modernity. It is a difficult job, indeed, to give voice to women who themselves are not sure of their own suffering and who stand in an unenviable position today. They are acutely aware of the injustices heaped on them but are condemned to live the life of suppression, which was the lot of their predecessors. In many ways, their condition is even more pitiable than that of women of earlier generation who unquestioningly accepted their secondary position in society. Her novels contain so much that is the material of feminist thought- myriad roles of woman as mother/wife/daughter, identity crisis women’s sexuality- that all those who have interviewed her so far have inevitably asked her as to what extent she considers herself a feminist. She says:

“I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my
feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it.\textsuperscript{20}

Perhaps, the reason why Deshpande takes exception to her works being labelled ‘feminist’ is the misconception in the minds of most people regarding the term, feminism.

Other women writers have voiced similar apprehensions and it is interesting to observe their reactions to being thus classified. In an interview conducted by Sue Dickman, many important women writers in English and the regional languages in India have, not surprisingly, expressed similar sentiments. Mahashweta Devi, the well-known Bengali writer Sahitya Akademi Award winner, who is also a social activist, says: \textquote{I am a woman, and I am writing. But I am not writing of women alone. What I am writing, most of my books, it is about class exploitation, the under class is exploited, men, women together. Of course, women get the worst part of it, but not always.}\textsuperscript{21}

Mahashweta Devi, like Mulk Raj Anand, is more concerned with exploitation than gender exploitation, but she admits that women are at greater disadvantage among the exploited lower classes. C.S Lakshmi (Ambai), a Tamil writer, who also has a few film scripts to her credit, has reservations about being called a woman writer. She says: \textquote{When a man writes, even when he writes about a woman, it has universal qualities. But when I write, if it is about a woman, it gets particularized.}\textsuperscript{22}
Deshpande is equally uncomfortable about being categorized as a woman-writer and denies being a feminist writer with a mission. She does not trace the influences in her writing of the feminists like Simone de Beauvoir or Germaine Greer, though she agrees that they helped to place her confusions, and put them in order. She, however, maintains that she read the works of these feminists much after she started writing. The issues, which she feels strongly about, are the degradation that women experience and continue to experience and the subordination and inequality. According to her:

“Feminism is not a matter of theory. It is difficult to apply Kate Millett 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 husbands, children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences. And I actually feel that a lot of women in India are feminists without realizing it.”

Deshpande feels that women have a tremendous inner strength, but so much of that strength is used up in merely enduring. Her idea of feminism is best summed up in her words: “For me feminism is translating what is used up in endurance into something positive: a real strength.”

1.2 AIMS AND APPROACHES

For ages, women have been under the duress of every possible authority - man, community religion-which deems itself the custodian of their life and morals. An independent identity has always eluded them: they are
programmed by society. The categorization of women as homemakers, not allowed to cross the ‘threshold’ has been handed down from generation-to-generation, and is a world-wide phenomenon, cutting across all barriers of race, community and country. This myth of womanhood has created more of a cocoon rather than a halo, around the woman suppressing her individuality, and has been carefully nurtured over the centuries –thus creating the notion of two worlds- the one within and the other without. Men have traditionally passed over the threshold unchallenged and partaken of both worlds but women have been expected to inhabit only the one world contained by the boundaries of home. A step over the bar is an act of transgression. Having committed that, they may never re-enter then designated first world. Thus traditionally the world beyond the threshold is an unknown arena of male activity, and the woman had to be contended with being designated as Griha Lakshmi. It is this myth of womanhood which gives rise to all the subsequent does-and-don’ts that are strictly adhered to while bringing up the girl child.

One of the dictionary definitions of the word myth is: “A widely held but false belief… an exaggerated or idealized conception of a person or thing” Thus it is with this connotation of the word with which this present thesis is concerned. There are widely held views and ideas with regard to women who are placed on a pedestal in our country but the reality is very different. Ours is a male dominated society, which desires to keep women in a traditional status quo. Our society doesn’t like changes, it prefers keeping people in their place be it have-nots, scheduled castes or women. For hundreds of years women have been exploited. The only difference in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century is that at least the glass is half full.
Throughout history, most societies have held women in an inferior status compared to that of men. Women’s status was often justified as being the natural result of biological difference between the sexes. In many societies for example, people believed women to be naturally more emotional and less decisive than men. Women were also held to be less intelligent and less creative by nature. But research shows that women and men have the same range of emotional, intelligence, and creative characteristics. Many sociologists and anthropologists maintain that various cultures have taught girls to behave according to negative stereotype (image) of feminist, thus keeping alive the idea that women are naturally inferior not only in ancient times but an in modern times. Society characterizes women as ideally warm, gentle dependent and submissive. Family life and the work patterns convey the idea that woman should be subordinate to and dependent on man. She is the mother of man who subsequently rules over her and wants to protect her and keep her under his control.

In the pre Aryan age woman was free and equal to man. It was only in the Middle Ages down to the present one that the male-ordained moralist society raised four walls for her to prohibit her from the rights equal to man. Her position in the family as well as in society kept changing all through the ages and is almost invariably an inferior one. She is hardly given any freedom Shantha Krishnaswamy, explaining the position of women in society, points out:

“She is a creature who, as a child is sold off to strangers for a bridal price, or when she grows up, serves as a supplier of dowry for her husband’s family, or who as a widow, in a final act of obliteration
immolates herself on her dead husband’s funeral pyre to be acclaimed as ‘Sati-Savitri’ as an immortal”

The emergence of women writers writing in English in India is of great importance. It brings a new age of brightness for Indian women. Social reformers influenced by the great personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi and the foreign personalities like William Bentick had its great impact on the status of women in Indian society and brought them out of the tyranny of social evils. But the subordination still lingered long in the society and

“The relief from dependency was still out of the reach of most women. So the battle for emancipation was taken over by a few educated women who, in their effort to communicate to the world their own bitter experiences as women as well as their ideas of social reform, turned writers”

Professor Alphonso Karkala observes,

“They tried to tell the world the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give from and shape to their autobiographical accounts, which attracted publishers both in India and abroad”

Many sociologists find that a woman suffers due to her emotional attachment with home. She does not want to bear the pain of being away from home as a wife and mother. But since her sense of individuality has matured by introduction of education, she does not want to lead a passive married life of a sacrificial and creature. She expects a measure of satisfaction. Promila Kapur, a sociologist analyzes the change: “With change in women’s personal
status and social status has come a change in her way of thinking and feelings and the past half century has witnessed great changes in attitudes towards sex, love and marriage”. 27 an Indian woman has to perform many roles at a time. Promila Kapur thinks that the husband is mainly responsible for the tensions.

India is a country that has faced many changes in her past and has always managed to adapt itself to new situations, similarly the woman of India, is malleable enough to adjust to different situations and the modern Indian novel keeps reflecting the changing images of our contemporary life.

1.3 A SCHEMATIC DESCRIPTION

Now a word about the scheme of the present thesis: Chapter Two Section One will analyze “Roots And Shadows” which was Deshpande’s first novel published after the “Dark Holds No Terrors” and “If I Die Today”. This is the first novel depicting woman at the crossroads of modern Indian society.

The next section will analyze “The Dark Holds No Terrors” which was Deshpande’s first published novel which grew out of an early short story written by her, “A Liberated Woman”. This Novel throws light on Saru’s quest for identity against gender discrimination.

Chapter Three will comprise three sections: The first section will analyze “That Long Silence” and deal with Jaya’s journey from crisis to affirmation.

Section two will discuss “The Binding Vine” as a study of the trauma of rape, both, within marriage as well as outside it. There will be a consideration of Mira and Kalpana as victims of such rape. The third section deals with the theme of female bonding.
Chapter four will be divided into two sections wherein there will be an in depth analysis of "A Matter Of Time" emphasizing multi-layered relationships in the novel.

In the first section there will be an analysis of Sumi’s search for identity and self-awareness. Section two will highlight Kalpana’s self-abnegation and Aru’s positivism.

Chapter five which will have two sections deals with "Small Remedies." In Section One I shall analyze the character of the main protagonist ‘Savitribai Indorker’, and describe her evolution from rebellion to success.

Section two will consist of an analysis of the other two relevant women character: Madhu and Leela there will be an emphasis on gender issues arising from gender inequality and the small remedies suggested by Deshpande.

The final chapter will conclude the thesis with a discussion of Deshpande’s narrative style and method of writing and will further attempt to place the author in the general tradition of Indian women writing in English.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


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