Indian fiction in English has been enriched by several highly talented women novelists including Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Attia Hosain, and Shashi Deshpande. They have focused on Indian women, their conflicts and predicaments against the background of contemporary India while doing so they have analysed the sociocultural modes and values that have given Indian women their image and role towards themselves and the society.

Shashi Deshpande is a novelist who has given space and voice to Indian women as few Indian English novelists male or female have been able to do so. The earlier novels by Indian women novelists project the traditional image of women: the characters like their creators were torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. Their crisis of value adaptation and attachment with family and home pulled them as under. The plight of the working women was still worse, aggravated by her problems of marital adjustment and quest for her identity. The predicament of new Indian women has been taken up for fuller treatment by novelists like Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. They have however, concentrated on the plights and problems of educated women mostly with an urban base. Shobha De and Namita Gokhale, too have
portrayed the challenges of educated 'socialite' woman with an urban base. But Shashi Deshpande deals with the middle class Indian women who represent the overwhelming majority of Indian women and are struggling to adapt to it rather than liberating from the traditional world.

The other women writers like Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal also share Deshpande's attitude regarding the position of woman. Shashi Deshpande's following observation unravels her bitter experiences as a woman in the male dominated world:

And yet the problem of women's writing being marginal remains. For it still is and continues to be a man's world. And therefore a woman is seen as not a man her mind is not a man's mind, her writing is not a man's writing. The very later that Sahitya Akademi addressed to me about this meet, wrote of the writer speaking about himself, his struggle, his achievement, his view of life as presented in his works. It's no use saying that he includes she'. That kind of usage is no longer possible. If man includes woman, why do we have two separate words? Why we have the comprehensive word 'human'? The insensitivity of language towards women is but one tell in aspect of the whole problem. The problem faces me all the time for I am constantly referred to as a 'woman writer'—why is the word 'woman' necessary? Do I as a writer have to always carry my identity tag of 'woman round my neck? Why is it relevant? Would the phrase 'male writers' have been used for a man?!

Shashi Deshpande reflects a realistic picture of contemporary middle-class woman. She concentrates on the images true to contemporary society and analyses the image of woman throughout the historical changes of society which
characterises women as ideally warm, gentle, dependent on man. She is the mother of man who subsequently rules over her and wants to project her and keep her under his control. Manu, as quoted by Hunter college women's studies collective, declared:

"Day and night women must be kept in subordination to the males 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".2

Shashi Deshpande was born in the small town of Dharwad in Karnataka, India in 1938. She is the daughter of renowned Kannada writer and sanskrit scholar Adya Rangachar better known as Sriranga, a cerebral man who wrote plays of ideas. Shashi Deshpande was educated in Bombay and Bangalore and acquired an M.A in English from the Mysore University. Besides the novels and short stories, Deshpande has also published several children's book in English and written the screenplay for the Hindi feature film 'Drishti'. Deshpande's first collection of short stories was published in 1978, was called The Legacy and Other Stories. Her collections of short stories are: It was Dark, The Miracle, It was Nightingale and The Intrusion and other stories. She began writing rather late in life at her father's insistence. She has published till date eight novels -
1. The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980)
2. If I Die Today (1982)
3. Come Up And Be Dead (1983)
4. Roots And Shadows (1983)
6. The Binding Vine (1992)

She also wrote four books for children. Though not original, *A Sum Adventure*, *The Only Witness* and *The Hidden Treasure* — all are on the lines of Enid Blyton, who has defined the parameters of children’s fiction in the West. Her fourth novel for children, *The Narayanpur Incident*, is based on the Quit India Movement and the role of children in it. Despite their immaturity, these novels are readable and the last of them made a great impact on the world of children’s literature. *Roots and Shadows* was awarded "*Thirumathiri Rangammal Prize*" for the best Indian Novel of 1982-1983. Shashi Deshpande was the recipient of the *Sahitya Akademi Award* (1990) for her novel, *That Long Silence* Published by Virago Press, London. Her collection of Short stories is prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University U.S.A. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has been translated into German and Russian. *The Dark Holds No Terrors is her*
"Favorite work". She told an interviewer: "It has a simple theme and fewer characters. It gripped me as much that I whipped through the writing". The wife had a better job and there was a very obvious tension between them. He was aggressive and surely. That set is off Roots and Shadows. "started by trying to be a detective novel" and is a continuation of her short story themes. Asked as to which work is her "best", Deshpande told her interviewer, Geeta Gangadharan, That Long Silence is "more Meaningful" than any other of her works, for it "deals with a much larger issue-the Long Silence of women".

Shashi Deshpande's writings are characterised by a racy style of narration and crisp language. Like any great artist, she is not yet fully satisfied with what she has achieved till today. She told Geeta Gangadharan in no certain terms: "None of my books has so far realized my dream of a good novel. I wish I will one day be able to write one such book which will survive the test of time. My best book is yet to come". This would explain Deshpande's serious efforts to venture into fresh fields and pastures new.

Along with Shashi Despande there are a number of writers who in the recent years, have projected a picture of modern Indian woman as 'new woman' in their writings. In this connection, it is significant to note that there are three categories of women as projected in Indian fiction. First, we have rural women - poor, hardworking and sincere - as
portrayed by Kamala Markandaya. In the second category, we meet educated, middle-class women who are married and working as well - like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Jaya in *That Long Silence* in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. Finally, we meet women 'of the' upper strata of society belonging to the urban milieu. These are women who are socialites, have easy morals and do not mind extra-marital relations - like Paro in Namita Gokhale's novel *Paro* and the female protagonists of Nayantara Sahgal and Shoba De.

Novels written during the last two decades of the twentieth country provide a glimpse into the female psyche and deal with a full range of feminine experience. The Indian society which had been so conventional and tradition bound could not remain impervious to the new forces that had started impinging on the minds of people. No wonder, the portrayal of women by creative writers is truly reflective of the social changes which the Indian society is undergoing. A phase of transition has set in and a greater role is to be played by the 'new woman' of emerging out of the social fabric. Literature is supposed to be the mirror of life and this New Woman chiefly concerned about her identity which she lost perhaps ages ago. The 'New Woman' is thus a product of the inevitable transformation taking place out of society as the country marches ahead to catch up with the rest of the world.

The 'new woman' of our study is not simply the
contemporary woman or even the modern woman. The concept of modernity keeps changing from time to time and from one social milieu to another. The roles of women as well as those of men undergo a change along with the change in the parameters. These parameters are the set of contingencies which determine the changing roles of the persons who are governed by these contingencies. In this sense, every age will have its modern woman, who might not necessarily be the 'new woman'.

In the works selected for this study, there are women characters who in every sense are modern yet they can not be viewed as representatives of the 'new woman'. The study points out such characters who are modern but not 'new'. Similarly, there are character who can not be called modern yet they belong to the category of the 'new woman'.

Also the 'new woman' of the present study is not merely a projection of the modern feminist movement into literary characters. The feminist theories, which originated in the West, are however valid for all societies. These are the socialist theories, especially those of Marx and Engels. The author under study is not only aware of the feminist movement but to some extent may be said to be an embodiment of the emancipated woman of the feminist movement. Therefore, if her characters sometimes display an awareness of the feminist movement, it may be a case of the author projecting herself into them: In the words of Susan Bassnett, "Feminist fiction is
the most revolutionary movement in contemporary fiction - revolutionary both in that it is formally innovative and in that it helped to make a social revolution”.7

A woman is 'new' if her basic concerns are deeper than merely seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and insisting upon her own rights as a woman. Seen from this angle, even a rebel or a revolutionary woman can not be called a 'new woman' on this account alone. The woman is 'new' when she analyses and reflects upon her position essentially as a woman in the scheme of things which includes the social, moral and spiritual fields.

However, it is not only the 'new woman' who reflects along these lines. Every woman, at some time or other, does the same but such reflections are conditioned by the thought patterns handed down to her by moral, intellectual and social order which has been formed by man. The 'new woman' not only reflects on her position as a woman in the scheme of things but at the same time she does not use the thought patterns given to her by this male - made order. She attempts to evolve her own thinking process, her own intellectual pattern in such a reflection. - This she generally does through the use of metaphors. The characters of Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai use such metaphors in reflecting on the scheme of things. The metaphors reveal the moral and spiritual urges of the 'new woman'. These metaphors deal with the themes of suffering, dominance, urge
for companionship, etc. It is through these that the moral and spiritual needs of the 'new woman' are projected. These women also explore the entire domain of their family life, their social and interpersonal relationships, their roles as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers in a new frame of reference which they have evolved for themselves. They also evolve their own 'moral code' in the light of which they evaluate the social norms set by the society. This, however, might not always be conscious. Therefore, the entire gamut of the social norms of man-made social order which are the bases of evaluating the various roles imposed upon woman are also covered. But this evaluation of the 'new woman' is secondary to the examination of her moral and spiritual needs. The analyses of the novels of Shashi Deshpande seeks to explore this aspect.

However, woman having remained suppressed for thousands of years might be tempted to level her score with man in the present social order and so she might even demonstrate that she can not only have her way in all matters but she can also beat man at his own game of gender dominance, which may be characterised as the 'Moll Flanders syndrome'. But at the very roots this has only a negative significance. It is a sort of reaction which ignores the moral and spiritual quest the study seeks to investigate as an important trait of the 'new woman'. However, the temptation to label such characters as the 'new woman' is there. But even in such modern women there is evidence of the awareness of
moral and spiritual needs, though they might be hidden beneath the glamour of the emancipated modern woman. So in some respects, even these women can be considered as representative of the 'new woman' because a deeper analysis of these characters reveals the existence of these needs at the core while the life of glamour and modernity is only at the periphery of their psyche.

In the literature of the modern age, the first example of the 'new woman' is Nora of Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*. But even Nora is not a 'new woman' until the last part of the play. Before that she is a conventional housewife accepting the moral code for nineteenth century women. She also accepts her role which the man-made social system has set for her. She becomes a 'new woman' when she tells her husband, Helmer "Let us sit down and discuss". This is the moment when she has suddenly developed a new insight into the man-made social order and the position of a woman in it. She suddenly sees her role as a woman, a wife, a mother in a new perspective which is condensed in a single phase 'a doll's house' and she leaves this *A Doll's House* to discover her self, and this quest for identity is an important characteristic of the new woman's persona. Yet this insight only covers the domain of the social order while the 'new women' of our study go beyond the consideration of the social order and their position in it.
It is not in modern literature only that we come across a woman analysing her role as a woman and reflecting on her position in the light of such an analysis. Homer's Iliad is perhaps the first example in Western literature where we meet such a situation. And it is Helen of Troy who perceives her position in this light. Whenever she refers to herself in *The Iliad* she never does so without using such expressions as 'my abhorred and miserable self, 'my unhappy self', Although she is reflecting on her own lot, yet it is significant that the woman, who to male eyes symbolised nothing but attraction and physical charm, sees herself in a totally different light. Even the 'elders of Troy', who were too old to, fight, are struck by her beauty. Faustus is enraptured at the vision of her face:

"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships, And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
O Helen! make me immortal with a kiss." This shows how man is incapable of fathoming a woman's psyche, much less of, appreciating it.

The Iliad gives further insight into women bewailing their own lot while appearing to weep for someone else. The Greeks, during the course of their ten-year siege of Troy, had ransacked many other towns in the neighborhood and had brought their women to their camp and divided them up among themselves. When the Greek hero, Patroclus is slain these 'bonds women' lament over his dead body 'making as
though their tears were for Patroclus, but in truth each was weeping for her own sorrows. This shows how in the male-dominated society a woman has to evolve the indirect technique of expressing her sorrow through projecting it as the grief for some other person. Thus, women are forced to evolve their own pattern of exteriorizing their feelings.

Homer is the father of epic and Aristotle has called him the father of tragedy and also of comedy. It may also be added that he is the first male to develop an insight into women's psyche which this study, too attempts to provide.

It would be worthwhile exploring how the aforesaid traits of the 'new woman' feature in the novels of Shashi Deshpande under study. The women characters of Shashi Deshpande's novels, though not fully conscious, and not fully aware, are concerned with the fundamental question - the lot of women. This they analyse through the metaphor of dominance or through the metaphor of suffering. In this sense, it gives evidence of a new kind of thinking which finds full flowering in later writers. Also, when subjected to stresses and strains, both internal and external, the women characters evolve a set of responses to protect their psyche from being bruised, thus giving credence to the fact that every woman needs to evolve her own defence mechanism in this world of male dominance.

In the novels of Shashi Deshpande, nearly all women figure in the first person narrative, yet they don't assume the form of a narrative. The women characters of the novels have
more concern about their reactions - moral, spiritual and emotional. Thus going deeper into her own personality or exploring her own self is the trait of the 'new woman'. The attempt at self-realization may or may not lead to self-fulfillment, yet it does not invalidate her quest. Like the traditional woman, the 'new woman', too, tolerates, makes adjustments for the family and the husband, understands him and even forgives him but nowhere do we find her changing or moulding her basic personality. In this sense, the 'new woman' of Shashi Deshpande is very much like her male counterpart who may be tolerating, may be indifferent, may even revolt but never changing his basic personality for the sake of his wife or the family. Basically, the woman protagonists of Deshpande's fiction aim at spiritual fulfillment which may be analysed through various metaphors such as that of barrenness, moon, violence, etc. Also, her heroines enter the domain of speculative philosophy thereby exploding the myth it is only the preserve of the male. An insight into the consciousness of Deshpande's women characters reveals that they seem to toying with the idea as to whether it is possible to reconstruct the social order based on the psyche of woman. In this regards, her novels are in themselves a metaphor of deconstruction, or in deconstruction reconstruction is inherent.

Lastly, the women characters of Shashi Deshpande can
in all likelihood pass for 'new women' since most of them are economically independent and socially emancipated. Judged in terms of one feminist school of thought, they deserve the epithet, for in every walk of life right from earning a living to most blatant issues of sexuality, they are on a level of parity with their male counterparts. However, when compared with the manner in which the women characters of Namita Gokhale and Shobha De, are 'aberration'. The women characters of Shashi Deshpande are appear to be a new. For example: Deshpande's That Long Silence, a Sahitya Akademi Award winner novel, look', at social history from the perspective of the family. While exploring man wife relationship in Indian society, Deshpande in this novel offers readers an intimate and domestic chronicle of the subtle tyrannies suffered by women and the pain of coming to self-knowledge. It is the story of personal journey; the heroine learns as she undergoes the mental torture and suffering at the hands of her husband. The smooth course of Jaya's existence, has been disrupted due to her husband's business problems. The novel thus opens with Jaya and her husband shifting from cosy, comfortable house to their unfashionable, old apartment at Dadar, Bombay. They shift this house at a time when Mohan has been caught in some business malpractice and an inquiry is in progress. Here, in a small old flat, Jaya gets confined and becomes an introvert. She broods over the situation and fondly recalls her past.
In the Indian context, once a girl gets married to a man, the husband completely dominates over her. If the wife does not conform to the norms and ideals set by the husband, there is disharmony and tension. Jaya is essentially a modern woman rooted in traditions, whereas her husband, Mohan, is traditionalist rooted in age-old customs. The difference between their outlook is so marked that they fail, time and again, to understand each other. Their relationship is forced not a natural one and this greatly affects their marital life. It becomes more of a compromise than a relationship based on love or mutual understanding. There grows a silence between the husband and the wife. It creates a tension between them. Mohan had left home without a word after Jaya unconsciously laughed at him. His absence shatters Jaya and she thinks that the world would fall apart. Then the situation changes. Mohan sends a telegram informing her that all is well, implying that the corruption case involving him has been settled without any harm to him. And finally Jaya goes back home. Her protest has ended in futility. With the "All is Well" news from Mohan, she finds herself slipping into the grooves of her marital life again. But a change has been wrought in her situation. By giving expression to her story, she has achieved articulation of her predicament and thereby broken her silence. Though Jaya makes a compromise with Mohan to save her marriage but at the same time she asserts her identity. The novel thus seeks to portray a woman who becomes aware of the based
attitude of her husband. Jaya, who stands for the modern emancipated woman, has asserted her individuality by challenging the taboos and destructive social norms. Deshpande has also accurately described the silence which has been thrust on Indian women for centuries.

This awakening amongst the feminists and women writers has helped them to project in their writing the image of a 'new woman'. At a time when radical changes are taking place all over the country, it becomes quite imperative in the circumstances for women to redefine their role and once again determine the parameters so as to become an integral part of family and society, striking a true balance between extreme feminism and the conventional role of subjugation and self denial. The family in India, during the last few decades, has been under a process of social change, thus substantially affecting man - woman relationship. This social change is marked in the Indian society, large; it has touched the fringes of the family and this interaction has brought a significant change in the structure and various relationship in a family unit. There is a conspicuous change in the spheres of roles and values. From the sociological point of view, the role of husband - wife is the principal component in a family context that has undergone a vital change due to growing enlightenment and the movement for women's emancipation. In this regard, literature has played a sterling role in raising the readers' consciousness. In various forms, it has provided a
glimpse into female psyche and health with the full range of female experience. It portrays, without inhibitions, the new woman who refuse to play a second fiddle to her husband in various walks of life.

For Deshpande, "Every novel starts with people". Character thus occupies a pivotal position in her fiction. In delineating characters, a novelist like her has no choice." There are some may be several, choices in the technique, "she says",..... But not in the characters". Deshpande has carefully avoided creating wooden, characters to serve her need." I don't think ,"she told Lakshmi Holmstrom", any character in my novels comes out of necessity, to serve some need of mine".12.

It's necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife are or mother you to do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing. What I Don't agree with is the idealisation of motherhood the false and sentimental notes that accompany it.13

There is in Deshpande's novels a revulsion to normal physical functions such as menstruation, pregnancy and procreation. Women's must not be reduced to the level of a breeding machine:

I have a very strong feeling that until very recently women in our society have been looked upon just as 'breeding animals'. They had no other role in life. I have a strong objection to treating any human being in that manner..... The whole chronology of their life centers around child birth.....The stress laid upon the feminine functions, at the cost of all your potentials as an individual, enraged me.....May be too much of thinking has made me express a
sort of dislike for the purely physical aspects of feminine life, make it seem as if I am not totally against all feminine functions which is not the truth at all.14

Even if Deshpande seems to be little the signficance of women's physical functions, her writings redress the balance by highlighting the fact that a woman is not merely a conglomerate of such functions. She has to be judged at par with her male counterpart on the basis of her potential. Despite imaginative flashes and the role player by memory in her novels, Deshpande, is at heart a realist. She presents a plausible story of alternative characters and not shadowy abstiaicturis - "airy nothing" without "a local habitation and a name". Realism as an Engel says implies "besides truth of detail, the untruthful representation of typical characters under typical circumstances". Deshpande observes this kind of realism in her novels. Hers is the India of eighties "She believes in presenting life as it is and not as it should be", and like Jaya of That Long Silence, many Indian wives keep on "Perennially grouping about their fate, but unwilling to do anything that could result in their being issued out of their comfortable ruts and into the big, bad world of reality to fend for themselves"15. The narrator in If I Die Today declares that these are "not characters created by Agatha Christie" but "real people" (p.166).

Shashi Deshpande is a widely read person, though she has never identified herself with any group of writers, whether
of India or abroad. Her love for Somerset Maugham was "Just a passing phase". "I think Jane Austen had more lasting influences". She told Vanamala Viswanatha "I still read her regularly. But I don't think there have been any conscious influences on my writing as such". She also enjoyed reading Dickens and Tolstoy.

And a careful perusal of her fiction would reveal some influences of Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, Margaret Drabble. Her writings were stimulated at the same time by Simone De Beauvoir and Germaine greer. Deshpande told her interviewer: "When I read them, they stimulated me". But this happened pretty late in her life: "Quite late much after I started writing-it helped me place my own confusions and put them in order".

Shashi Deshpande approaches contemporary Indian novelists with an open mind. She does take cognizance of their merits but is not over rowed by their popularity. Shashi Deshpande does not like Desai's vision of India which is "a forieger's" and finds most of her novels lacking in the "density of human relationships", which Deshpande values so highly. In an interviewer she told:

"My characters take their own ways. I've heard saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are".

Deshpande's women characters have a strength of their own and inspite of challenges and hostilities remains
uncrushed. Urmila, in The Binding Vine, for example declares;” I am not going to break”. As compared to Deshpande's women characters her male characters are generally "thin" and "typed". Admitting her inability to create a rounded character of the opposite sex as, Tolstoy's Anna she said:

I'm not Tolstoy in the first place. Tolstoy had so many years of all writing behind him. The female Tolstoy is yet to come. As Virginia wolf said, Shakespeare's sister is yet to come.

Shashi Deshpande novels generally center around family relationships particularly the relationship between husband and wife and latter's dilemmas and conflicts. Deshpande told an interviewer: “Human relationship is what a writer is involved with person and person to society relationships. These are two primary concerns of a creative writer and to me, the former is of immense importance. My preoccupation is with interpersonal relationship and of human emotions.

According to Deshpande "everyone has to live within relationships and there is no other way". Its needed, she reiterated to Vanmala Vishwanatha that does not feel a "kinship" with an Indian English writers of today. She however calls Rushdie a Pathbreaker Deshpande would not approve of Rushdie's theory of marginalisation of some writing outlined in his imaginary Homelands! and elsewhere "To me as a reader
there are no margins", she declares and adds: "Let's not be 
overcome by the 'Empire strikes Back' phenomenon that we
forget the context in which most of us here write".

Shashi Deshpande is a very recent author in Indian 
writing in English. She was so much fascinated by her woman 
characters that she laid emphasis on Woman. She herself says 
that she knows how the woman feel and she knows the mood 
of India. Shashi Deshpande maintains a unique position 
among the contemporary, up-coming Indian writers in 
English. We find that Shashi Deshpande has minutely dealt 
with the phenomenon, arriving at the conclusion that women, 
after attaining all types of rights are now struggling to adjust 
rather than to get free from the traditional world. She deals 
with the middle class woman who represents the majority and 
covers a wider area in the modern society. She takes up 
Women characters very carefully. She portrays modern 
education and career - oriented middle class women who are 
sensitive to the changing time and situations. They are aware 
of the social and cultural disabilities to which they are 
subjected in the male-dominated society. They want to rebel 
against them in their search for freedom and identity but they 
find themselves up against well-entrenched Social inertia
conscious of the predicament of a women in a male-dominated 
society, especially when she is not economically independent, 
the author presents her women daring to become economically 
and ideologically independent. She finds them caught up in a
conflict between their family and professional roles between individual aspiration and social demands Indu (Roots & Shadows) and Jaya (That Long Silence) being women writers, are torn between self. As Maria Mies pertinently observes, “Her problem arises firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a social situation and them from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity. Her women like saru succeed in overcoming Social Stigmas asserting their potential in the professional are a Deshpande’s career women. Are not satisfied with the rehetoric of equality between man and woman but want to see that the right to an individual capabilities are realized in their own lives”22

Shashi Deshpande’s women stand at the cross-roads of traditions. They seek change between within the cultural norms, seek not to reinterpret them but nearly to make them alive with dignity and self respect. Her woman seek anchorage is marriage. They perceive it as an alternative to the bondage imposed by the Parental family and opt for it. Soon thereafter, they realize that one restrictive set-up is replaced by another “new bonds replace the old, that’s all”. Her women Protagonists are caught in the conflict between responsibility to oneself and conformity to the traditional role of wife. They do not accept to be considered merely as the objects of gratification. They challenge their vitalization and seek a new balance of power between the sexes. Yet their concept of
freedom is not imported from the west. They believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of the relation of domestic harmony rather than result which might results in the disruption of family relationships. Deshpande's woman protagonist generally seeks to come out. From inherited patterns of thought and action in favour of new modes arrived at independently after much consideration of the various aspects of the problem keeping also in view the kind of society she lives in.

Deshpande's protagonists are women struggling to find their own voice and are continuously in search to define themselves. But they "become fluid, with no shape, no form of ....[their] own" (Roots and Shadows,) Jaya in That Long Silence, undertakes a futile search for her 'self' : "The real picture, the real 'you' never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces ". The experiences of Indu , in Roots and Shadows, also are not different . " This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself" (p.34) . She bewails she thought that she had found in Jayant, her husband, " the other part of my whole self ", but she came to realise that "this was an illusion." But can perfect understanding ever exist "? She asks that Deshpande has been genuinely interested in issues pertaing to the lot of women in India is irrefutable. Matrimony is often regarded in India as the summum bonum of a woman's life. It serves as a
weapon in the hands of patriarchy to coerce and silence. Manju, in If I Die Today, summarises the common predicament succinctly: "A marriage, you start off expecting so many things. And bit by bit, like dead leaves, the expectations fall off. But two people, who have shut themselves off in two separate glass Jars who can see each other but can't communicate. Is this a marriage? In the Long Silence this is undoubtedly not an enviable situation. In India, a wife finds it impossible to relate to the world without her husband, for it is held that "A husband is like a sheltering tree" (p.167).

Marriage is no longer a sacrament; it is a convenient arrangement always to the disadvantage of woman. The central character in Roots And Shadows speaks: " ...... What was marriage after all, but two people brought together after a cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue" (p.3). "It's a trap" She adds, " .... that's what marriage is. A trap? or a cage? ..... with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other ......... And it's not a joke, but a tragedy" (p.59).

To Urmila of The Binding Vine, the back of the bride's neck nervously awaiting the first night onslaught, looks " like a lamb's waiting for the butcher's knife to come down upon it " (p.63). In That Long Silence also, a couple is compared to "a pair of bullock's yoked together":

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Two bullocks yoked together ..... It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go indifferent direction, would be painful; and what animal would voluntarily choose pain? (pp.7, 11-12).

In the Dark Holds No Terrors Saru also find her marital condition unbearable and feels "the desperation of a trapped animal". Her grandmother, deserted by her husband, "had never....... complained" and had accepted her plight as her 'luck', believing that "It was written on my forehead" (p.62).

The novelist is pained to notice ways of subordinating women by male members of the society. Economic deprivation and rape are main instruments employed to curb the spontaneous growth of a woman. We are reminded in The Binding Vine that "If a girl's honour is lost, what is left? The girl doesn't have to do anything wrong; People will always point a finger at her". (59). The role of wife in the present times is nothing less than walking on the razor's edge. Realising this fact, Saru was obliged to give ironically the following imaginary advice to future wives in Nalu's college:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband .... That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive secretary, Principal teacher role ...... women's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That's nonsense Rubbish. No partnership can be equal. It will always be unequal but take case that it's unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God help you, both of you (p.124).
What makes matters worse for Indian women is that three are no choices before them. Like marriages, their decisions are made in heaven in their husband's mind. As Roots and Shadows puts it,

Millions of girls have asked this question millions of times in this country........ what choice do I have? Surely it is this, this fact that I can choose, that differentiates me from the animals. But years of Blind Folding can obscure your vision so you no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out of your cage of no-choices (p.125).

This is a sad commentary on the incompatibility in and hypocrisy of married life, which novelist has presented realistically. As the narrator in If I Die Today says. "These were not characters created by Agatha Christie. These were real people. People I knew " (p116).

Deshpande has taken up for discussion some crucial aspects of woman's life such as "sex is only a temporary answer ", declares The Binding Vine (p.139) but it is an answer nonetheless. The 'pseudo-puritanism' and 'shame' mentioned in That Long Silence (p.3), have to be set aside Indu in Roots And Shadows, for example resents her womanhood and as a woman feels "hedged in my sex "(p87). In a male dominated, family a woman is expected to be 'passive' and 'unresponsive' for it shocks people like Jayant "to find passion in a woman ". In this atmosphere, Indu finds herself just " an anachronism "- " A woman who loves her husband too much, too passionately. And is ashamed of it "(p.83)
Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, is painfully conscious of the fact that around her husband's "needs and desires" her life revolves. She ruminates "we seemed to be left with nothing but our bodies, and after we had dealt with them we faced blankness. The nothingness of what had seemed a busy and full life was frightening" (p.25). She finds even a touch so soothing and welcome, claiming that "physical touching is for me a momentous thing ..... it was never a casual or light-hearted thing" for her and her husband (p.15). In *A Matter Of Time* Sumi admits to have fallen in love with Gopal's physical being first " (p168). And to Gopal : " The life of the body - why do the saints disdain it so ? It is through our bodies that we find our first connections to this world "(p.68)

The realistic treatment of human predicament in Deshpandes' fiction along with the contemporary *angst* in an existential manner might appear to be depressing, but the final impression of her works is far from gloomy or depressing. Significantly, her woman characters learn in due course how to arrive at a compromise and find a sense of balance in life .at the end of *The Dark Holds No Terrors Saru*, for example goes back home with ...

"All those selves she had rejected so resolutely at first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife ..... all persons spiked with guilt. Yes she was all of them, she could not deny that now. she had to accept these selves to become whole again. But she was all of them, they were not all of her. She was all of these and so much more" (p.201).
This behavior on the part of Saru is meaningfully
different from the like of Nora of Ibsen's A Doll's House even
Urmila in The Binding Vine, who thinks that human nature
is the "hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept, [and] to live
with" (p.201) does not remain unaffected by the healing touch
of love. She says at the end of the novel:

"And yet I think of Vanaa, heavily pregnant, sitting by me,
holding my hand during the pains before Kartik was born, I
remember Kishore's face when he first saw Anu. I think of
Akka crying for Mira, of Inni's grief when paper told her
about his illness, or papa's anguished face watching her of
the touch of grace there was in Shakutai's hand when she
covered me gently at night while I slept, of the love with
which she speaks of her sister, of Sandhya....." (p.203).

And to cite one more case, Jaya taking stock of her
'achievements' in life, remarks in That Long Silence:

I'm not afraid any more. The panic had gone. I'm Mohan's
wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had
refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of
fragmentation is 'not possible' ..... Two bullocks yoked
together ..... that was how I saw the two of us the day we
came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image if I think
of us in that way, I condemn myself to a life time of
disbelief in ourselves. I have always thought -There's only
one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But
in this life itself there are so many cross roads, so many
choices. 'Yathecchasi tatha kuru', ..... If I have to plug that'
hole in the heart', I will have to erase the silence between us
.....we don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not
change overnight. It's possible that we may not change
even over long periods of time. But we can always
hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is
Deshpandes' protagonists finally try their best to conform to their roles, and the novels end with an optimistic note with the possibility of some positive action in future. The novelist emerges in them as a bridge-builder between the old and the new, between tradition and modernity. For this and for portraying the basic reality of Indian society and the place of women in it a sensitive and authentic manner her novels are of immense value.

The publication of That Long Silence by the Virago Press made its own contribution to this belief. Deshpande herself regards the novel as "more meaningful" than any other of her novels, for it "deals with a much larger issue the long silence of women." Deshpande's apparently contradictory remarks to her interviewers lent further support to it. Asked whether she would like to call herself a feminist. She replied to Geeta Gangadharan:

"Yes, I would. I am a feminist in the sense that, I think, we need to have a world which we should recognise as a place for all of us human beings. There is no superior and inferior we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simone De Beauvoir that "the fact that we are human, is much more important than our being men and women." I think that's my idea of feminism."

Deshpande is against categorizations "when you deal with just my work", she added, "then take me as an individual
writer and deal accordingly don’t call it women’s writing or feminist writing. Today we have women writing about women, for women, criticized by women read studies Department and so no. I hate ‘this women’s lib’ separating women writing. It is just self defeating”.

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 reforms 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 tyranny of the social evils. 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 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” 30 Professor Alphonso Karkala observes : “They tried to tell the world obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give form and shape to their autobiographical accounts which attracted publishers both in India and abroad”.31

Shashi Deshpande has made it absolutely clear that she has nothing to do with feminism in the narrow sense. In her
interviewer to Ashvini Sarpeshkar-Tondon, for example, she declared: "I do not like to be branded this or that because life is more complex than that. My enduring concern is for human relationships. I certainly do not think my novels are a man vs woman issue at all" (Femina, May 1993). Deshpande is all for spontaneity in creative writing and believes that good literature and propaganda do not go together. Being a woman herself, she sympathises with women and "If others see something feminist in my writings", she told an interviewer, "I must say that it is not consciously done. It is because the world for women is like that and I am mirroring the world" (The Sunday observer, 11 February 1990). Deshpande does admit the influence of the western feminist writers, but only "to a small extent". She candidly told M.D. Riti:

"One never knows what influences one as a writer. I have read a lot of feminist novelists, and understand what they are trying to say easily. However, I began reading feminist writing only recently, while my writing has reflected feminist ideas right from the start."  

Deshpande's concerns for Indian women must be considered. Arbitrary appellations and dragging her work into the fold of militant feminism of the western variety would be unjust. 

Feminism surfaced in the western world as a movement in support of the same rights and opportunities for women as for men. By 'feminism' is meant both the awareness of women's position in society as one disadvantage or inequality compared with that of men and also a desire to remove those disadvantages."
According to Alice Jardine, "feminism is a movement from the point of view of by and for women". Deshpande has portrayed the new Indian woman and her dilemmas, her efforts to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife-mother and above all as a human being in the tradition bound male dominated Indian society. Virginia Woolf points out the differences in male and female experiences, and their expressions in literature are different. She says: "There is the obvious and enormous difference of experience in the first place; but the essential difference lies in the fact not that men describe battles and women the birth of children, but each sex describes itself."

Deshpande's novels contain various ideas related to feminist thought: Women's sexuality, the gender roles, self discovery. But she can be called a 'feminist', if at all, only in a certain specific sense. The interview given to Lakshmi Holmstrom throws light on her stance.

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 then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it. To Deshpande's mind, no amount of theorising will solve women's problems - specially in the Indian context.

But to me feminism isn't a 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 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.\textsuperscript{36}

This is highly sensible approach. Deshpande, unlike hard-core feminists does not agree that being a wife or mother is something that is unnecessarily imposed on a woman. According to her, "It's needed she craves for "a greater sense of balance ", self confessedly, she feels trapped in the woman's world. She ways "... may be I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women or men.... For I don't believe in having a propagandist or sexist purpose to my writing". If her writings present such a perspective, it is only a"coincidence".\textsuperscript{37}

Infact the images, whether they be of men or women, are not constructed in a vaccum. The social context has a great deal to do with the perspectives from which we observe the society. A woman may be seen and understood by her father in one way, her husband in another way, her son and daughter in some other ways and by herself in yet another way. The opinion of each of the perceivers depends on his/her interaction with her in different situations. So the writers especially woman writers, having experienced different phases
of women in different roles, have reflected the same in their fiction resulting in a feminine form. As Hunter College Women's Studies Collective points out: Infact most women's literature is personal to such a degree that the confessional style of writing has been labelled "feminine" even when men employ it. Owing to the circumstances of our lives women writers have often turned inward to explore, the private rather than the public sphere. 38

Feminism in Indian English Literature is a by-product of the Western Feminist movement but it got sustenance from various native sources such as Indian freedom movement, Independence, spread of education, employment opportunities and laws for woman rights. The indiscriminate application of western theories may be misleading because cultural contexts should not be overlooked and the application of western critical modes and paradigms for a literature having its roots in a different native tradition is neither judicious nor desirable. 39 The novelist presents a subtle analysis of conflicting phases, underlying reasons and to some extent, to suggest a way out of it. It becomes more interesting to analyze the image of woman in the novels when it is portrayed by a woman. Woman today plays diverse roles both indoors and outdoors. She participates in all the hitherto male-dominated spheres. Shashi Deshpande has succeeded in presenting a realistic picture of this woman who is presented in her novels in the family set up as well as outside the family.
The strong points about Deshpande's novels is her delineation of the woman's inner world. She herself admitted to Geetha Gangadharan in an interview:

"We know a lot about the physical and the organic world and the universe in general, but we still know very little about human relationships. It is the most mystifying thing as far as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it and still find it tremendous intriguing, fascinating."

Feminism is by no means a monolithic term. If we seek a common strand in a number of its varieties, it is the critique of the patriarchal modes of thinking which aims at the domination of the male and subordination of the female. It brings to fore the concepts of gender which are man made. Simone De Beauvoir is of the view that the history of humanity in a history is a systematic attempts to silence the female. She states, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is the civilization as a whole that produces this creature...... which is described as a feminine." Very often what has been termed great Literature is preoccupied with the androcentric ideology which focusses on the male protagonists providing the female secondary roles, different. The vastly different scenario in India encompass contradiction of a kind undreamed of in the mainstream (western) feminist philosophy. Factors such as caste, economic deprivation; over population, fundamentalism superstition and Hinduism
are necessary for the appreciation of the Indian Society. The western individualism may prove impractical in the Indian context because the collective unconscious still operates on the principles of faith and dogma. John Oliver Perry\textsuperscript{43} recognises the unsuitability of an arbitrary application of the essential values of a European based culture in Indian context which is entirely different and composed of various and mixed cultural value systems. What he says about Indian poetry criticism may well be applied to the feminist parameters as well R.K. Gupta is also of the same opinion. He says "Not having graduated to the militancy of the west Literary feminism in India has also largely escaped the excesses of the western model- its reductionism and at times simplistic view of reality which turn it into what one might call 'Vulgar' Marxism, and 'Vulgar' Feminism"\textsuperscript{44}

Looking at the world created by Shashi Deshpande, the reader is impressed by the variety of characters she has portrayed, the subtlety of the portrayal and the authenticity of her picture. \textbf{The Dark Holds No Terrors}, this proliferation of characters is controlled, but even here such minor characters as the comfortably plump neighbour who later turns obscenely obese are equally sharply delineated In \textbf{That Long Silence}, the novelist also includes women from a lower class, who are sympathetically, even admiringly, portrayed. Jaya's servant jeeja, the sweeper girl Nayana are all fighters. At the other extreme, we have Ashok, Rupa and their kids belonging to the
sophisticated upper middle class Jaya's own family is a sprawling one. The overlist has included Jaya's grandmother's, her material relations, fathers relations, her husband's family, the neighbours in the Dadar with equal care.

The social realities in Shashi Deshpande's novels become significant. In *Roots And Shadows* Akka's martial life is a picture of the Indian reality of that age". She was just twelve when she was married. And he was well past thirty. He was a tall bulky man with large coarse features. And she ..... she was small and dainty....... six months after her marriage. She "grew up" and went to her husband's home. What she had to endure there no one knows ....... The child, they said, cried and clung to her mother in law saying, "Lock me up again, lock me up ". But there was no escape from husband then "45 .The first Lady Doctor of India, Dr Anandibai Joshi, also had gone through similar experiences . She didn't even know what the sex act, a bewildered Anandi asks her husband ;" wouldn't you do today what you'd done yesterday? 46

The uncommonly intense desire for a son among Hindus is well recognised. It is traditionally attributed to the doctrine that unless his son performs the obsequies, a man's soul cannot go to heaven "47. This fact lies at the base of most of the miseries of Indian women. In all levels of society, a son is much more welcome than a daughter. So Saru (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*) is unwelcome Indu's kaka (*Roots And Shadows*) who has only daughters feels ashamed of himself .
Jaya's mother *(That Long Silence)* shows a marked preference for her sons. In the lower class, women learn not only to accept their secondary position, but to support the good for-nothing males of their families, like Jeeja in *That Long Silence*. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya observes the servant woman with bruises working silently. She overhears a man beating his wife in the next door house and the wife only saying "Mother-Mother". These are all part of the Indian reality lending authenticity to the portrayal of Shashi Deshpande's characters.

Most of Shashi Deshpande's novels and many of her stories are in the form of the first person narrative. And it is usually the protagonist herself who is narrator. He is limited entirely to his own thoughts and feelings and the angle of view is that of the fixed centre. But when the aim of the novel is to pursue the protagonist's personality development, the first person narrative suits it well.

Shashi Deshpande is thus one of the most important Indian novelist writing in English. Gifted with a rare literary bent of mind she has matured with experiences in life and reading for her fictional concerns and arts, she has made a niche for herself among Indian English novelist. The transparency of her language and spontaneity make her novels highly readable. Her real contribution lies in the
portrayal at of Plights and problems. Trials and tribulatures of
the middle class Indian women—specially those who are
educated and have chosen a career for themselves. Deshpande
knows this segment of the Indian society very well. Once she
remarked: “I realize that I write what I write because I have
to. Because it is writing me. It’s one point of view world from
within the women, and that I think is my contribution to
Indian writing”. (Society December 1989) Deshpande is not
unconcerned about Indian reality in respect of the lot of
women, but she is not a strident and militant kind of feminist
who sees the male as the sole causes of women’s problems.
Her concern, in fact is nothing less than human predicament.
As a chronicler of human relationships she is superb. The
interplay between tradition and modernity and tension
generated by it have been faithfully presented. Deshpande
does not inflict ready-made solutions, for she believes, in
Literary writing “One does not pose a problem and present a
solution. Its not maths”48 but the vision of humanity and the
value based fabric of life that she projects are of great
significance. Her best work, she says, is yet to come, and
hopefully it will realize one day all the potential of the novelist.
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