CHAPTER -I

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Indian novel in English has been enriched by many highly talented female novelists like Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Attia Hosain, Santha Rama Rau and Shashi Deshpande. They have written about Indian females, their conflicts and predicaments against the background of contemporary India. While doing so, they have examined the socio-cultural manners and values in which Indian Women have mirrored their images and roles in the society in which they live. The changing contexts have placed these women writers in an unenviable position. Their principal contribution exists in exploration of their moral and psychic dilemmas, repercussions and the challenges that they face and cultivate a harmonious relationship with changing scenario of the society.

Women are natural story-tellers as well as story-makers themselves even when they do not write or publish. But the spread of education and the liberating ideas of social reformers like Raja Rammohan Ray, Mahatma
Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, there emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century some Indian women writers who contributed to the world in all seriousness. The earlier fictions by Indian women novelists project the traditional image of female. But as times changed, the portrayal became realistic with a thrust on her sense of frustration and alienation. The characters, like their creators, were torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. Their crises of value adaptation and attachment with family and home pulled them asunder. The plight of the working women was still worse and aggravated by her problems of marital adjustment which questioned her identity. Such predicament of new Indian women has been well-conceived with for fuller treatment by novelists like Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. These novelists, however, have generally concentrated on the plights and problems of educated women mostly with an urban base. The self-avowed aim of writing fiction in the case of Indian novelist like Shobha De and Namita Gokhale has been to portray the challenges of educated 'socialite' women with an urban base and such sensibility came into force. But Shashi Deshpande
occupies a unique position among contemporary Indian novelists in English as Meena Shirwadkar writes."

"Writers appear not to have paid much attention to the recent phenomenon of the educated earning wife and her adjustment or maladjustment in the family"\(^1\)

Shashi Deshpande deals with the middle class Indian women who are struggling for her adjustment and freedom from the shackles of traditional world.

Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad, in Karnataka, India. She is the daughter of renowned Kannada Writer and Sanskrit scholar Adya Rangachar, better known as 'Sriranga', a cerebral man who wrote play of ideas. Talking about him, Shashi Deshpande told her interviewer Vanamala Viswanatha that he was "dominant, never domineering" (p.23) The only point that she is sure about is that he was "somewhat detached" from his family and "never guided" them. "May be if he had directed us at an early age, I could've done better"\(^2\) Shashi Deshpande further adds from her father, nevertheless, Shashi Deshpande must have acquired an intellectual bent of mind and love for reading and scholarship, which have
won for her degrees in Economics, Law and English and a diploma in Journalism.

Shashi Deshpande is a widely read person, though she has never identified herself with any particular group of writers, whether of India or abroad. Her love for Somerset Maugham was "just a passing phase" and added that "Jane Austen had more lasting influence," she told Vanamala Viswanatha: "I still read her regularly. But I don't think there had been any conscious influence on my writing as such." She also enjoyed reading Dickens and Tolstoy. And a careful perusal of her fiction would reveal some influence of the Bronte Sisters, Jane Austen, Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing and Erica Long. Her writings were stimulated at the same time by Simone De Beauvoir and Germaine Greer. Shashi Deshpande told her interviewer: "When I read them, they stimulated me." But she realised that this happened pretty late in her life," and added "Quite late, much after I started writing- it helped me place my own confusions and put them in order."4

Shashi Deshpande approaches contemporary Indian novelists with an open mind. She recognises their merits
but is not overwhelmed by their popularity. Shashi Deshpande never wished to toe the line of these novelists. While speaking to Stanley Caravalho, she pointedly remarked:

".........of the few (Indian English novels) I have read, I like Anita Desai's book. I like Amitav Ghosh's books too. His *Shadow Lines* was brilliant. The writers are dated now. I cannot link myself to that kind of writing"\(^5\).

It is for this reason that she insists on her writing being considered "a part of Indian literature," but she would not approve of "Indian consciousness perched on top like a cherry on a wobbling pile of ice-cream"\(^6\).

Notwithstanding her reading and familiarity with works both Victorian and Modern, Shashi Deshpande is essentially a self-taught writer. She began her writing career rather late. About what sparked it off, she told in interviewer:

"My husband was a commonwealth scholar and we went to England. We were there for a year. I thought it would be a pity if I forgot all our experiences there. So I started writing them down and gave them to my father. He
gave them to "Decan Herald '........... which published them promptly. So it began very accidentally.

Then I was working for 'The Onlooker' when one of the sub-editors said to me "Why don't you write a story?" So I wrote one- for a first story. I thought it was very good- a somewhat Maughamish kind of story. And then I wrote on and on as though I was crazed. There was no thinking or worrying about them, technique or publisher. I simply wrote"7.

Shashi Deshpande's first collection of short stories, published in 1978, was called *The Legacy and other Stories*. Her other collections of short stories are: It was Dark, The Miracle, It was the Nightingale and The Intrusion and other Stories. Some of these stories were later developed into fictions, and share many of their concerns. In his preface to the *Legacy and other stories* G.S. Amur aptly remarks:

"Women'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. In respect of technique also, these stories contain the germs of the most of strengths and limitations of her novels.

Till date Shashi Deshpande has published seven novels—The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), If I Die Today ('1982), Come up and Be dead (1983), Roots and Shadows (1983), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding vine (1992) and A Matter of Time (1996). While her novels were taking space, she also wrote four books for children. Though not original, A sum- Adventure, The Only Witness and The Hidden Treasure, all are on lines of Enid Blyton, who has defined the parameters of children's novel in the west. Her fourth fiction for children, The Narayanpur Incident, is based on the Quit India Movement and the role of Children in it. Despite their immaturity, these fictions are readable and the last of them made a great impact on the world of children's literature. Shashi Deshpande's reputation, however, rests on her mature fictions. The Dark Holds No Terrors is her "Favourite work" as she told an interviewer:
"It has a simple theme and fewer character. It gripped me so much that I whipped through the writing." She further added, "The wife had a better job and there was a very obvious tension between them. He was aggressive and surly. That sat it off".

Roots and Shadows "started out 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 yet another interviewer, Geetha Gangadharan, that That Long Silence is "move meaningful" than any other of her works, for it "deals with a much larger issue------the long silence of women".

With more than group of twelve fictional works to her credit, Deshpande has produced a niche for herself. Roots and Shadows was awarded The Thirumathi Rangammal prize of the best Indian novels of 1982-83, and That Long Silence received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1991. Her collection of short stories The Legacy and Other Stories is prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University. The Dark Holds No Terrors has been translated into German and Russian languages while the publication
of her fiction That Long silence by the Virago Press, London has established Deshpande as a reputed novelist of English literature. Her writings are characterized by a racy style of narration and crisp language. There has been, however, no cause for complacency on the part of the novelist. Like any great artist, she is not yet fully satisfied with what she has achieved till today. She told Geetha Gangadharan in no uncertain terms:

"None of my books has so far realised 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"\textsuperscript{13}

Feminism emerged as an important force in the western world in the 1960s. The early feminists were active members of the Civil Rights Movements who struggled for the abolition of slavery. The Feminist studies emerged as an offshoot of the women's liberation movement. In India, many writers especially Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, and Kamala Das took up the cause of female in their writings. A study of the recent Indian English novel reveals that the women protagonists are quite conscious of
their identity and no longer meek and submissive. There is a marked difference in their attitude as compared to the heroines of early fiction. Shashi Deshpande's heroines are courageous enough to revolt against the attempts of men to marginalize them that we can witness in her novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*.

For Deshpande, every fiction starts with "people". Character thus occupies a pivotal position in her novel. In delineating characters as a novelist like her has no choices. "There are some, may be several, choices in the technique", she says, "-----.

But not in the character's and 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". The novelist excels in the portrayal of the female characters. She is, however, *averse* to idealising or sentimentalizing them. "My characters are all human beings one sees in the world around, "she pointed out to Stanley Carvalho.

"No superman" To another interviewer she told:
"My characters take their own ways. I've heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are"  

Deshpande's female characters have a strength of their own, and in spite of challenges and hostilities, remain uncrushed. Urmila in The Binding Vine, for example, declares: "I am not going to break". It is about such human beings that Arthur Hugh Clough had said: "Amidst the bludgeoning of Fate/ My head is bloody but unbow'd". As compared to Deshpande's woman characters, her male characters are generally "thin" and "typed".

Deshpande has nevertheless created authentic female characters in flesh-and-blood with recognizable credentials. She has successfully delineated their problems and plights, yearnings and aspirations, failures and foibles and made them life-like.

Deshpande's novels, like those of Jane Austen's, have a narrow range. They are more or less a fictionalisation of personal experiences. Most of the novels present life of a typical, middle class housewives. Deshpande's main concern is the urge to find oneself, to create space for
oneself to grow on one's own. One striking thing about her novels and short stories is the recurrence of certain themes in them. But the predicament of female characters specially those who are educated and belong to the middle class has been most prominently dealt with. Many of her characters are persons who are frustrated either sexually or professionally. Her novels generally centre around family relationships-particularly the relationship between husband and wife. According to Deshpande, everyone has to live within relationships and there is no other way. She reiterated to Vanamala Viswanatha:

"It's necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you 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 idealization of motherhood-the false and sentimental notes that accompany it"18

We can find in Deshpande's novels a description of females normal physical functions such as menstruation, pregnancy and procreation of children. But she feels that females must not be treated as a breeding machine:
"I have a very strong feeling that until very recently women in our society have been looked up on just as 'breeding animals'. They had no other role in life. I have a strong objection to treat any human being in that manner"\textsuperscript{19}

The strong point about Deshpande's novels is her delineation of the women's mind or her 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 relationship. It is the most mystifying thing as far as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it, puzzle over it and write about it. And still find it tremendously intriguing, fascinating"\textsuperscript{20}

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."\textsuperscript{21} Jaya, in \textit{That long Silence}, undertakes a futile search for her 'self:

Nor am I writing a story of a callous, insensitive husband and a sensitive, suffering wife, I'm writing of us.
of Mohan and me. And I know this— you can never be the heroine of your own story. Self revelation is a cruel process. 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.

 Readers are like mirrors, who reflect different types of images of the author and her created characters according to their perception and understanding. In other words, a reader performs the role of a mirror in reflecting the image of the characters of the novel.

 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,"

 In her modesty, Deshpande thinks of herself as "an ordinary woman who writes sitting at home" But she would not like to compromise with the dignity and essential freedom of a writer. Without Coverning her under the myth of elitistics' "inverted snobbery," she emerged as a novelist of Indian writing in English that she told
Stanley Carvalho in an interview: "every one has a right to choose a language"\textsuperscript{25}

As a novelist, she is honestly concerned with expressing herself in English as clearly and effectively as possible. Asked whether she 'thinks' in English while writing her novel, she told Carvalho:

"When I write narrative, I think, in English, when I write dialogue, I think in Kannada or Marathi, which are my languages" (Ibid) justifying this kind of code switching, she added. "In our middle class families, most of us converse in English but automatically switch over to our mother tongue when we speak to our elders, relatives, and so on. At places, the dialogue in her novels reads like translation from Kannada, Marathi or Hindi, but her narrative is generally free from Indian coinages "I do not use Indianisms to make my writing look Indian," and further added "I never try to make India look exotic either"\textsuperscript{26}:

Shashi Deshpande is uniquely Indian in her use of Marathi words which evidently presents the customs and traditions of the people belonging to Maharashtra and
Karnataka. For example, words such as Kaka, Kaki, Atya, Dada, etc, are essentially Marathi words and might be a bit difficult to grasp by readers who do not know the language. Shashi Despande finds English most convenient mode of self-expression and she did not have a choice in the matter:

"I never did study Marathi or Kannada. And ever more importantly I have n't actually used these languages as working tools"\(^{(27)}\).

Shashi Deshpande is, nevertheless, aware of handicaps of doing creative writing in a language other than one's mother tongue, and writing in English makes even Deshpande somewhat "Inhibited" She frankly admits: "I lose the range of nuances which are available in Marathi......for example, the richness of the phrases that make up that language. So I lose out on that, but I gain in other ways because English has its own special qualities too."

She further added "one has to work a little harder when one writes in English" and while revising her manuscripts, Deshpande has to look "particularly closely
"...I am different from other Indians who write in English, my background is very firmly there, I was never educated abroad. My novels don't have any westernness, for example. They are just about Indian people and the complexities of our lives our inner lives and outer lives and the reconciliation between them. My English is as we use it. I don't make it easier for anyone really. If I make any changes, it's because I think the novel needs it, not because the reader needs it."

Regarding her technique of novel writing, she says,

"Technique is something which I have to worry a lot about. I have to work at it and think about it and it takes me a long time to hit upon it exactly. It's like sitting the tanpura...before a concept begins. The orchestra goes..."
on strumming, tuning up, while you wonder what it's all about............suddenly you know that this is exactly night for your needs. But you know at the beginning that this is the way. The beginning is much more fumbling, blundering and very chaotic. There is always too much"31.

Thus, Deshpande, has been so much careful about the technique in her novel. Her writings are singularly free from strain and form has never been allowed to smoother the content of her works. Consequently, despite their serious tone, her novels make a fascinating reading.

One may find in some of Deshpande's novels occasionally autobiographical strains, but her characters and incidents are not directly lighted from her own life. What the novelist does is to make creative use of her experiences and memories in her works. This is particularly true of her early writings. In an interview, Deshpande quotes Dom Moraes approvingly who says:

"Most of what a creative writer writes is his autobiography: if not of his life, of his thoughts. All one's life doesn't go into one's writing and all one's writing doesn't consist of just one's life" 32
Deshpande adds-

"-------------- certainly, some of my thoughts are always there." They are there for the reader to pick and choose.........all that I can say is "This is what I, as an individual, believe in".33

It may, however, be remembered that the novelist does not always give her thoughts to the first person narrator. She told an interviewer about _The Binding vine:_

"...........it is n't the first person narrator who has my closest sympathy. It is someone else, in the novel."34

The autobiographical flashes impart human interest and credibility to her works. Memory, as said earlier, plays a significant role in Deshpande's novels. The narrative keeps on moving back and forth in time. Deshpande says:

"I come to the end of one incident, but then I have to go back because it links on to something else. I'm interested, I think, with what we do with our past as well as what past does to us."35

The non-linear arrangement in her fiction gives them the integrative structure they have. The novelist also uses some devices of the stream-of-consciousness
technique novels like flashback, light of memory, interior monologue and so on to probe into the psyche of her character. Jaya says at the end of That Long Silence:

"All this I have written it's live one of those multi-coloured patchwork quilts the kakis make for any new baby in the family " (p.-22) while quoting this statement, the novelist told Lakshmi Holmstrom that this was now she viewed the novel writing; " And I think that is how we really see our lives when we look back upon them"36

Creditable enough, this kind of presentation never degenerates into a senseless collage. Deshpande does not write for foreign readers and there is no attempt in her fiction at "Window-dressing:"

"If you try to make every thing easy for everyone, then, you end up belonging nowhere. So I've left at that......characters in their locales, without providing glosses for the western readers.

......... Also literature can be appreciated even without understanding every word of it...one can still respond to the call of it"37
Since Deshpande does not write for western readers and her novels are free from surplusage and padding which has affected even some very competent Indian novelist's writings. Her novels have an interesting beginning and both the beginning and the end are convincing. The novelist never taxes her readers' credulity, nor does she give unexpected jolts to them. Most of her novels and short stories are open-ended, and the reader is free to supply the conclusion the way he deems fit. This has been done to encapsulate the reality which is certainly not unidirectional.

Shashi Deshpande has used various narrative methods to convey the experiences of woman's mind and her true feelings. The use of interior monologue or stream-of-consciousness technique is one that attempts to convey the inner life of character's thoughts and feelings which are otherwise unarticulated in the text. *In A matter of Time, Deshpande uses interior* or something monologue to reveal the character's inner perceptions. Pramod K. Nayar in his brilliant analysis of the novel discusses the handling of this device by Shashi Deshpande. He also looks at some
of the implications of the technique of such a "double" narrative. An examination of the text shows that Deshpande is adept in her narrative technique and is capable of using unique methods to heighten the effect of her subject matter.

Shashi Deshpande's latest novel Small Remedies was published in the year 2000. In her article on the novel Y.S. Sunita Reddy points out that the novel has the protagonist, Madhu Saptarishi attempts to write the life-story of a famous classical singer Savitribai Indorekar, doyen of the Gwalior Gharana, who denied a marriage and a home with a view to pursuing her genius. In remembering and retelling the stories of Leela, Savitribai and Munni, Madhu presents the glaring inequalities of gender prevailing in society. A study of the scholarly articles by eminent academics make us conclude that the novels of Shashi Deshpande successfully present a sensitive portrayal of women's quest for identity in a patriarchal world.

Shashi Deshpande is thus one of the most important Indian novelists writing in English. Gifted with a rare
literary bent of mind, she has matured with experiences in life and readings. For her fictional concerns and art, she has made a niche for herself among Indian English novelists. The transparency of her language and her spontaneity make her novels highly readable. Her real contribution lies in the portrayal of plights and problems, trials and tribulations of the middle class Indian female—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 within me. It's one point of view, a world from within the woman and that I think is my contribution to Indian writing."38.

Deshpande is not unconcerned about Indian reality in light of the lot of women, but she is not a strident and militant kind of feminist who sees the male as the sole cause of woman'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 tensions 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. It's not maths"\textsuperscript{39}.

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 realise one day all the potential of the novelist.

The present study is proposed to high-light the emerging faces of female characters in Deshpande's novels which mirror in light of females problems, predicaments, challenges and search for her identity. The novelist neither idealises womanhood nor underestimates her but she has projected the woman in her correct image in the mirror of society that we will study in the coming chapters. She is still hoping her best novel to come in the context of Indian middle class society to which she belongs. She is a realist in her approach while handling her female characters.
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