CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

Gender and literature are closely related to each other in the sense that neither can be conceived apart from society and culture. Gender, as differentiated from sex, has nothing to do with biology. Unlike sex, which is biological, gender is a social and cultural construct. It is a straight jacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance. No wonder, men and women are biologically different from each other; but they are just different. The sex differences do not imply sexual inequality and male dominance. Yet in a patriarchal social set-up, ‘Masculinity’ is associated with superiority whereas ‘Femininity’ is linked with inferiority, and while masculinity implies strength, action, self-assertion and domination, femininity implies weakness, passivity, docility, obedience and self-negation.

Sex is the creation of God and sexual differences are essential for procreation, but gender is not God’s creation. It is the creation of patriarchy and serves the male flair for domination. A patriarchal social set-up firmly asserts men’s superiority over women and is based not on mutuality but on oppression. Although, women have played a vital role in the creation of society and have been active agents, the actors in history, yet patriarchal thought has always tried to relegate them to margins, ‘to obscure their history’. Gerda Lerner has observed, “Women had no history-so they were told, and so they believed. And because they had no history they had no future alternatives” (222).
The subordination of women to men is believed to be older than civilization itself. The image of woman was created by man. It was what he wanted her to be and he never wanted her to be an equal, a co-sharer of all the privileges he was enjoying. Because the image of woman was created not by women or by men and women jointly but by men alone and the standard of womanhood was set for women by men, women could not have a clear perception of themselves. So, ‘Woman, presented with an image in a mirror has danced to that image, in a hypnotic trance. And because she thought the image was herself, it became just that’ (Figes, 13). Thus, patriarchy undermined women’s sense of self-worth and made them believe that their infelicity was pre-ordained, and that gender was a ‘given’.

Literature is closely related to society. It reflects social reality. It not only reflects but also shapes the complex ways in which men and women organize themselves, their interpersonal relationships and their perception of the socio-cultural reality. The attitude of the male author towards the men and women depicted by him in his works and the attitudes of the characters, male and female to one another highlight gender relationships as well as the author’s attitude towards these relationships. Literature, thus, offers the best possibility of exposing the politics of gender.

Hence the images of women in literature have been of slaves who could be easily sold or bought by men who were their masters. It was not inconvenient for Hardy, for example, to show Henchard selling his wife and daughter at a country fair. Neither Hardy nor Henchard, it seems, considered the selling of women as an obnoxious, dreadful, monstrous and mean act.
But descriptions like this did not shock Victorian readers, most of whom, being male, shared with the author the patriarchal notion of male monopoly over women. In fact, it was difficult for men to read literary works which portrayed women as self-actualizing beings who rejected the ‘Angel in the House’ image and refused to be female stereotypes. They enjoyed reading about women who existed as non-entities. Critics, like Irving Howe, for example, derived tremendous satisfaction from the scenes like the one in which Hardy’s Henchard sells his wife and daughter. Commenting on this scene, Howe writes:

To shake loose from one’s wife; to discard that drooping rag of a woman, with her mute complaints and maddening passivity; to escape not by slinking abandonment but through the public sale of her body to a stranger, as horses are sold at a fair; and thus to wrest, through sheer amoral wilfulness, a second chance out of life - it is with this stroke, so insidiously attractive to male fantasy, that *The Mayor of Caster bridge* begins.(84).

Irving Howe, as Jonathan Culler (43) points out, seems to be celebrating the opening of Hardy’s *The Mayor of Caster bridge*. He is in complicity with both Henchard as well as his creator i.e. Hardy.

Thus, Literature could provide pleasure to the readers by depicting women as passive, docile, dependent, helpless victims at the mercy of men. The inner experiences of women were rendered invisible because these were considered to be trivial and not worth-considering. The roles of women were restricted by their womanhood and, therefore, the experiences of the muted female half of the society were not reflected by literature. After all, ‘what wisdom can there be in menses?
What source of knowledge is the milk-filled breasts? What food for abstraction is the daily routine of feeding and cleaning?' (Lerner 224) Since the literary tradition was primarily patriarchal, ‘the proper woman’ in the male-authored texts was the selfless, self-effacing, submissive one who was prepared to internalize the idea of her own inferiority, an ‘Angel in the House’ who accepted, without questioning the gender-defined role assigned to her by the patri society.

But with the rise of feminism, women became aware of the fact that their inferiority is not ordained in heaven, that gender is neither natural nor immutable because it is the creation of patriarchy and patriarchy is not a ‘given’. It is a construct which can be deconstructed. Women realized that the system of patriarchy, which has been with us for a long time, no longer served the needs of the rapidly changing society where women were trying to emancipate themselves from subordination, where they were trying to explore their possibilities and to define their potential. They were disgusted with the male notion of women’s ‘place’ and wanted to redefine themselves as well as their proper place.

They grew intolerant of their exploitation and victimization by men and revolted against their marginalization. They started questioning the sexual politics, the gender arrangements. They challenged traditional society’s role - prescriptions because there was no logical connection between the anatomy of a woman and the roles she was expected to play except that of child-bearing. Women grew intolerant of patriarchal oppression whose victims they had been ever since Eve tasted the forbidden fruit. They started struggling to dethrone the myth of femininity, to reject the constructs of patriarchal thought and to reorder the world.
This kind of awakening in women, their realization of self-worth, led to a social revolution; women were no longer prepared to accept the definitions given to them by men-the definitions which suffered from the male bias to women. They sought new definitions and hence tried to redefine themselves. With this significant social change, came the change in images of women in literature and one could find in literature women characters involved in activities which were not expected of a proper lady, ‘an Angel in the House’. The roles of women in literature now are no longer restricted and a woman can earn appreciation for reasons other than playing well her roles as a daughter, a wife and a mother. She is not required to find her total fulfilment in submissive domesticity. Literature now has no dearth of women characters making efforts at self–actualization, at proving self-worth.

The definition of Literature is being enlarged to include biography, autobiography and memoirs. In its attempts to raise consciousness, literature now provides a glimpse into the female psyche and deals with the full range of female experience. In fact, literature is making attempts at redressing the imbalance, at creating as well as reflecting a new social order which is congenial to the physical, social and psychic well-being of women-a social order which longer wishes to doom women to immanence but rather considers them as autonomous and transcendent, and instead of imprisoning women’s thought in a patriarchal frame work, allows women the full right of free conscience to create its own values. Literature today reflects the change in the relations of power. It is seriously concerned with changing perceptions of man-woman relationship.
Literature now portrays, without any hesitation the New Woman, who refuses to be a toy in the hands of men, a determined woman who insists on falsifying the old belief that it is a man’s world and woman’s place is in the home. A large number of texts being written now depict women who are trying to deconstruct the myth of male sovereignty, who are trying to come out of the margins and to occupy subject positions. Changes in the socio-economic conditions have changed our patriarchal attitudes to gender and these are reflected in literature.

‘Feminism’ represents one of the most important social, economic and aesthetic revolutions of modern times. The Feminists recognize that all over the world, simply because of their gender, women experience discrimination and unequal treatment in terms of basic food, nutrition and health care, education, employment and participation in decision-making in social, cultural, religious political and economic processes. The Feminists not only fight against discrimination but also fight for emancipation and liberation from all forms of oppression by the state, society and men. They declare to the world that women are also human beings and women’s rights are human rights. As Kamala Bhasin puts it: “Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women’s labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation”

The term ‘feminism’ was first used by the 19th century French dramatist, Alexander Dumas, to refer to the then-emerging movement for women’s rights which was mostly limited to politics. It gradually spread across the world, securing complete
rights for women-political, social, economic and educational. One of the most succinct definitions of feminism has been given by Karen Offen: “Feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women’s subordination within any given society”. (57)

According to the main slogan of 4th World Women’s Conference held at Beijing in 1995, ‘Feminism’ implies looking at the world through women’s eyes. It seeks to bring about a change in patriarchal ideology and mentality, according to which women are considered inferior and subordinate to men. Patriarchy is a social system where men control members of the family, property and other economic resources and make major decisions. Also linked to this social system is the belief that man is superior to woman, that women are and should be controlled by men and are a part of men’s property. The feminists reject male-female polarity and stereotypes. They have broken the silence about unequal man-woman relationships and have exposed the inequalities and violence that exist within families. It is about re-examining, rethinking and restructuring of all aspects of patriarchal society which marginalize women.

Feminism is a multi-vocal, multi-focal and multi-dimensional practice. In addition to being action-oriented, feminism is also an ideology, a belief system. Feminism is a doctrine advocating social and political rights for women, equal to those of men. It is also the body of knowledge, thought and theory that feminist thinkers, and writers have created to challenge patriarchal knowledge and ideology.
According to the historian Linda Gordon feminism is “an analysis of women’s subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it” (8).

It is an individual practice as well as an organized movement for the attainment of women’s rights. Feminist studies re-examine society and social theory and uncover the fact that women and women’s perspectives are missing from the social sciences, religion, history, art, languages and literature. The feminists examine the experiences of women from all races and classes and cultures. The main strands of feminism are Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist feminism, Socialist feminism, Eco-feminism, Black feminism etc.

In Liberal feminism, there is a focus on the public sphere, on legal, political and institutional struggles for the rights of individuals. Public citizenship and the attainment of equality with men in the public arena are central to liberal feminism. It suggests that the cause of women’s oppression is lack of opportunities and education.

Radical feminism ascribes a positive value to womanhood. The explanation for women’s oppression is seen as lying in sexual oppression. It sees men as beneficiaries of patriarchy and advocates a revolutionary model of social change. Radical feminists find a particular concern with control over women’s bodies’ and motherhood.

Marxist feminism, following the work of Karl Marx, states that class oppression predates sexual oppression. Sexual oppression is seen as a dimension of class power. It advocates a revolutionary approach in which the overthrow of capitalism is viewed as the necessary pre-condition to dismantle male privilege.
Socialist feminism asserts along with radical feminism that women’s subordination predated the development of class-based societies. It combines the study of patriarchy and capitalism as parts of the social system. It also shows a concern with the social construction of sex i.e. gender in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Black feminism argues that sexism, class oppression and racism are inextricably bound together. This form of feminism strives to overcome sexism and class oppression. The Combahee River Collective argued in 1974 that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression.

Academic feminism flourishes in colleges and universities. Female academics, while participating in women’s studies courses and writing books and dissertations on topics relating to women, generally show little interest in the more radical aspects of feminism, such as women’s community, sexual politics and political campaigns.

Cultural feminism believes that women will be freed via an alternative women’s culture. The emphasis placed by cultural feminism on ‘alternative women’s culture’ results in it being associated with the therapy movement, Meditation, women-bonding, cults of matriarchy, goddess worship, and the study of women in literature and act.

Lesbian Feminism has made, a major contribution to the contemporary women’s movement, especially the radical feminist aspect, both practically and
theoretically. Theories which lesbians have produced include; the concept of ‘women identification’ the idea that lesbian feminist analyses of male power and woman’s community form the basis of women’s liberation in general.

Psychoanalytic feminism refers to the attempts made by feminist theorists to appropriate and reinterpret the ideas of Sigmund Freud, Jacaques Lacan and other authorities in the field of psychoanalysis. The interests and viewpoints of these theorists differ considerably.

Political lesbianism argues that in order to overcome male supremacy one, must first withdraw from the system of privileges derived from men. To this end, political lesbians advocate the cessation of all commitments to men, as far as possible a withdrawal from the economy of male power and privilege, enacted both materially and psychologically.

Revolutionary feminism is an off- shoot of radical feminism and is, in fact, difficult to distinguish from it.

All issues are women’s issues and feminism seeks the removal of all forms of inequality, domination and oppression through the creation of a just, social and economic order nationally and internationally. Arshia Sattar in her thought provoking article on the position of the feminist movement at present observes: “Feminism is no longer a single voice that speaks for all women, irrespective of creed and colour. It is, rather, a ‘rainbow coalition’ of rights, desires, agendas, struggles, victories” (13).
Thus, feminism is based on historically and culturally concrete realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions. It is a movement which aims to transform social structures as well as individuals. Feminism focuses on recognizing women’s contributions, women’s knowledge and helping women fight their own fears and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority and enhancing their self-respect and self-dignity. As a political movement, it struggles to make women economically independent and self-reliant and to give them the control of resources like land and property and foremost the right to control their own bodies. Chaman Nahal defines “feminism as a mode of existence in which women are free of the dependence syndrome, whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group or ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, the idea of feminism materializes” (14).

Women’s struggles are and should be linked to the peace movement, ecology movement, working class movement, human rights movement and movement for democratization and decentralization of society. It is not particularly the ideology of feminism that empowers women but rather their capacities to face bravely the individual and social facts of their real conditions of existence.

Women’s movement may be traced back to the seventeenth century, when there was a sudden female awareness about the male bias in the social and political spheres of life. The need for equality of status in all spheres of life was felt in earnest all over the world. Mary Wollstonecraft has been called the “first feminist” or “mother of feminism”. Her book-length essay on women’s rights, and especially on
women’s education, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, is a classic feminist tract, and a must-read for anyone who wants to understand the history of feminism.

Mary Wollstonecraft is usually considered a liberal feminist because her approach is primarily concerned with the individual woman and her rights. She could be considered a feminist in her honoring of woman’s natural talents and her insistence that women should not be measured by men’s standards. Her work has a few glimmers of some modern sexual and gender analyses in her consideration of the role of sexual feelings in the relationships between men and women. Mary Wollstonecraft can be claimed with some legitimacy as their kin by communitarian feminists: their critique of the “rights” approach echoes Wollstonecraft’s emphasis on duty in the family and in civic relationships. And she can also be seen as a precursor of the political feminists: her *Vindication* and perhaps even more her *Maria: The Wrongs of Woman* link women’s oppression with the need for men to change.

The ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft became the dominating thoughts of the twentieth century. At the turn of the twentieth century, Women’s Rights Groups acquired the centre-stage of the women’s movement in America. In 1920, American women got the long-awaited right to vote. A number of books such as Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second sex* (1949), Betty Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1950), Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1979) and Olive Scheiner’s *Women and Labour* (1911) appeared, vividly portraying the unequal treatment given to women in society and discussed the portrayal of women in the works of male writers and questioned them. Beauvoir’s book lent great force to the women’s liberation movement by drawing heavily on
disciplines like biology, psychology and history, and addressed issues like girl’s education, love, sex, marriage prostitution and domestic drudgery.

As a movement, feminism assumed the form of collective and individual endeavour on the part of women at different times and in different countries. At the same time, in Colonial India, the atrocities practised against Indian women became a challenge the ruler’s modernity and the moral ground on which their ‘civilizing’ mission could be launched. This was the mirror in which Indian men were invited to see themselves when colonial education began. Thus emerged the social reform movement. A wider program of female emancipation was launched by people like Ram Mohan Roy, Savitri and Jyoti Ba Phule, Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Ramkrishna, Sarladevi Chandhurai and Pandita Rambai who agitated against the barbaric practices of Sati, female infanticide, enforcement of celibate and ascetic widowhood, the purdah system and child marriage.

The 1920’s and 1930’s witnessed the peak of the first feminist movement in India. This was the period when women began to organize and mobilize themselves on issues of social reform and civil and political rights. The Indian myths, history, religion and national traditions were re-interpreted. Women took an active part in the reform movements. They demanded that women’s issues should be included on the agendas and women organizations should be formed. The question of women’s suffrage was put forward first before Edwin Montagu, the State Secretary and later before the Congress and Muslim League. The Freedom struggle shaped women’s awareness. The focus of the movement dissipated in the 1940’s as the urgency of the nationalist struggle overrode the priorities of the feminist agenda.
Women writers played a very significant role in this shaping and reshaping of India. Writers like Rasheed Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Indira Sant, K. Sarsawathi Amma and M. K. Indira wrote on women emancipation. Organizations like All India Women’s Conference and The Progressive Writer’s Association were formed. Amrita Pritam’s Pinjar, Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan, Manohar Malgonker’s A Bend in the Ganges and Chaman Nahal’s Azadi dealt with the horror of honour killings and sexual abuse of women during the Partition of India in 1947.

After independence, various committees were formed to invite Government attention to subjects such as women’s education, health, employment, political and economic rights and social evils. The Hindu Code Bill was passed in 1955 to create a uniform law ensuring women, rights to property and succession and equality with men in relation to marriage and divorce.

The second feminist movement in the 1960’s inherited many of the legacies of these developments. The focus in women’s movements thus shifted in varying degrees from the objective of equality to liberation, from emancipation to empowerment in society.

It was in the 1960’s that a new approach to the portrayal of women’s character in works of literature by male and female writers came about as a direct product of the women’s movement of the time.

With the emergence of multiple new critical approaches towards literature, feminist criticism became a vital, ideological and interpretive strategy for a study of literary works. It began when the women writers, readers and critics started re-
examine the reflection of feminine experience in works of literature. They found that a deep-rooted gender-bias has become part of the historical, textual and literacy tradition. The Women’s activists began to question the validity of the role-models assigned to women at home and in society. In the 19th century, several British women writers such as Jane Austen, The Bronte Sisters, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf had already welcomed the significance and tradition of women’s writing.

Gradually from the combative criticism of books by male writers and exposing the mechanisms of patriarchy, feminist literary criticism switched its focus to formulate its own critical strategies and to construct a new realm for women writers. It rejects the androcentric ideology and masculinity-approaches towards women’s literature. It aims at looking things from “a women’s point of view …an outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the centuries” (4-5). Feminist literary critics try to explain how power imbalances due to gender differentiation in a given culture are reflected in or challenged by literary texts. The feminist critical perspective, also seeks to discover the female author’s quest for empowerment through self-expression by escaping the controlling authority of the male in the realm of social/sexual power.

Feminist criticism became much more electric with the publication of pioneering works on women’s condition and women’s writings by American, French, British and Asian Women intellectuals and critics. The focal point of feminist criticism is rooted in the significance of women’s load as an experience.

French Feminist criticism is more influenced by French theorists like Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Helena Cixous and Luce Irigaray. They use concepts such as
“imaginary”, the “semiotic” and “symbolic” notions to bring out the feminine and the female. British feminist criticism is more influenced by socialism, cultural materialism and Marxism. American feminist criticism is partly inclined towards post structuralism, psychoanalysis and American deconstruction but tries to retain some of the traditional critical concepts like theme, motif, and characterization, in interpreting literary texts.


Feminist critics have now come to be aligned with ‘Gynocriticism’. The term was coined by Elaine Showalter, “to describe the feminist study of women’s writing”
and is known as *Ecriture Feminine* in French, meaning feminine writing. As Elaine Showalter says the emphasis definitely shifted by the late 1970’s from ‘andro-texts’ to ‘gyno-texts’. Gynocentric criticism concentrates on female creativity, stylistics, themes, images, careers and literary traditions. The idea of *Female Aesthetics* found a forceful voice in this phase of its struggle with patriarchy through the works of pioneering feminist thinkers and intellectuals.

Elaine Showalter calls for a feminist criticism that is genuinely women-centered, independent and intellectually coherent with its own subject, its own system, its own theory and its own voice. The concept of *ecriture feminine* provides a way of taking about women’s writing which reasserts the value of the feminine. It states that a women’s physicality is the corporal ground of her intelligence. Elaine Showalter asserts that self-awareness about female biology can be a profound tool for self-revelation. As Gerda Lerner argues women live a duality—as members of the general culture and as partakers of women’s culture. It is important to understand that ‘woman’s culture’ is not and should not be seen as a subculture (p.52).

Postmodern Feminists have built on the ideas of Foucault, de Beauvoir, as well as Derrida and Lacan. Postmodern Feminists accept the male/female binary as a main categorizing force in our society. They criticize the structure of society and the dominant order, especially in its patriarchal aspect. Many Postmodern feminists, however, reject the feminist label, because anything that ends with an “ism” reflects an essentialist conception. Postmodern Feminism is the ultimate acceptor of diversity. Multiple truths, multiple roles, and multiple realities are part of its focus. There is a rejection of an essential nature of women, of one-way to be a woman. “Post
structural feminism offers a useful philosophy for diversity in feminism because of its acceptance of multiple truths and rejection of essentialism” (19).

Three writers have been instrumental in the establishment of postmodern feminism as a philosophy. Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. Helene Cixous is a writer of prose who built on Derrida’s works to criticize the very nature of writing. According to Cixous, man’s writing is filled with binary oppositions but woman’s writing is scribbling, jotting down, interrupted by life’s demands. She also relates feminine writing to female sexuality and women’s body concepts. Her idea is that the development of this kind of writing will change the rules that currently govern language and ultimately the thinking processes and the structure of society.

Luce Irigaray is a psychoanalyst whose primary focus is to liberate women from men’s philosophies, including the ones of Derrida and Lacan. Irigaray takes on Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of child development, and is one of the thousands who criticize the Oedipal complex. However, since Western culture is not going to abandon Freud, Irigaray has three strategies for women to “experience herself as something other than ‘waste’ or ‘excess’ in the little structured margins of a dominant ideology” (p.227). 1. create a gender neutral language, 2. “engage in lesbian and autoerotic practice, for by virtue of exploring the multifaceted terrain of the female body, women will learn to speak words and think thoughts that will blow the phallus over;” 3. “mime the mimes men have imposed on women. If women exist only in men’s eyes, as images, women should take those images and reflect them back to men in magnified proportions” (228).
Julia Kristeva rejects the idea that the biological man and the biological woman are identified with the “masculine” and “feminine” respectively. To insist that people are different because of their anatomy is to force both men and women into a repressive structure. Kristeva openly accepts the label of feminist, but refuses to say there is a “woman’s perspective”: “The belief that ‘one is a woman’ is almost as absurd and obscurantist as the belief that ‘one is a man’. I say ‘almost’ because there are still many goals which women can achieve: freedom of abortion and contraception, daycare centres for children, equality on the job, etc. Therefore, we must use ‘we are women’ as an advertisement or slogan for our demands. On a deeper level, however, a woman cannot ‘be’; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being” (Kristeva, New French Feminisms, as quoted in Rosemarie Tong).

Kristeva sees the problems of women as similar to the problems of other groups excluded from the dominant: Jews, homosexuals, racial and ethnic minorities. Like other postmodern feminists, she views the use of language as crucial. In her view, linear, logical “normal” writing was ‘repressed’, and writing that emphasized rhythm and sound and was syntactically illogical was ‘unrepressed’.

One of the most prevalent criticisms of Postmodern Feminism, and Postmodernism in general is its apparently nonsensical writing. Much of the writing of Postmodernists rejects linear construction in their writing. And so accusations of eclecticism have been levelled at Postmodern Feminism as a whole. Critics contend that only few academics can participate because the jargon is so thick, and that “true” feminists address issues of political import. Considering that Postmodernists reject
essentialism, there is an obvious lack of conceptual understanding of Postmodern Feminism reflected in these criticisms.

Feminist discourse shares many similarities with post-colonial theory and for this reason the two fields have long been thought of as associative, even complementary. Firstly, both discourses are predominantly political and concern themselves with the struggle against oppression and injustice. Moreover, both reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system, which is dominated by the hegemonic white male, and vehemently deny the supposed supremacy of masculine power and authority. Imperialism, like patriarchy, is after all a phallocentric, supremacist ideology that subjugates and dominates its subjects. The oppressed woman is in this sense akin to the colonized subject. Essentially, exponents of past-colonialism are reacting against colonialism in the political and economic sense while feminist theorists are rejecting colonialism of a sexual nature.

Both women and ‘natives’ are minority groups who are unfairly defined by the intrusive ‘male gaze’, which is a characteristic of both patriarchy and colonialism. Both peoples have been reduced to stereotypes (virgin, whore, savage, heathen) and denied an identity by the system that entraps them. In recent times, post-colonial studies have reacted to this viewpoint and subsequently involved itself with the issue of gender, questioning to what extent this affects the lives of colonial subjects who also happen to be female, i.e. investigating whether gender or colonial oppression is the more significant political factor in women’s lives.

Similarly, feminism has become much more aware of its post-colonial counterparts in recent times. In the 1980s, feminist critics Hazel Carby and Sara
Suleri began to sense that Western feminism was rooted in a bourgeois, euro–centric prejudice that had to be remedied in order to avoid the continued neglect of the so-called ‘Third World woman’. Chandra Talpade Mohanty for one, is severely critical of regarding all women as a homogeneous group, without taking into account inevitable differences in ethnicity and circumstance.

Feminists also tend to apply this intolerance of blanket terms to post-colonialism and have subsequently been highly critical of post-colonialists’ tendencies to construct a single category of the colonized, thus ignoring the important issue of gender difference. The undeniable fact that colonial oppression affected men and women in different ways should be recognized, as females were often subjected to what has been called a ‘double colonization’, whereby they were discriminated against not only for their position as colonized people but also as women. According to Gayatri Spivak, this differentiation is essential for an exhaustive examination of colonial domination.

Feminism in Indian English novels, as commonly conceived, is a very sublime and over-the-top concept, which is most subtly handled under restricted circumstances. However, with the passage of time, feminism has been established in India, setting aside the patriarchal predomination to a certain extent. Leaving aside the crusaders and activists of the social and political scenario, an enormous body of work on feminism has been accomplished through Indian English Literature. But, prior to realizing a closer look into feminist literature in India, it is essential to understand the term ‘Feminism’ in the context of India, beginning from its inception. The history of
feminism in India can be looked at as principally a “practical effort”. Feminist writers in India today proudly uphold the cause of ‘womanhood’, through the write-ups.

Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to Indian literature. Indian English literature has developed over a period of time and writing in English did not start in a day. It took many years and several distinguished personalities to bring the present status and distinction to Indian English literature. Indian literature is not only about novels, it is also about poetry and short stories. Before the rise of novels, several women writers composed songs, short stories and small plays. It is still believed that women are the upholders of the rich Indian tradition of fables, storytelling and more. In the mid nineteenth century, more women started writing in the English language. With the passage of time, English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing patterns. Women novelists have incorporated recurring female experiences in their writings and thus affected the cultural and language patterns of Indian literature.

In the past, the work by Indian women authors has always been undervalued because of some patriarchal assumptions. Indian societies gave priority to the worth of male experiences. During the 18th century, these factors led to the decline of Indian women writing. In the 19th century, more and more women actively participated in India’s reformist movement against the British rule. In the 20th century, women’s writing was considered a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statement. The last two decades have witnessed a phenomenal success in feminist writings in Indian English literature.
Since long, feminism has been used by women novelists. Their novels show that the present-age woman has realized that she is not helpless or dependent. Today, Indian women writers explore feminine subjectivity and use themes that range from childhood to womanhood. Through their novels they spread the message of what actually feminism is. These women writers say that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in silence.

Indian English writing started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. This great poetess charmed the readers with her writings. Feminist themes have also been used by authors like Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta. Novelists like Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai captured the spirit of Indian culture and its traditional values. During the 1990's India became a popular literary nation as a number of women authors made their debut in this era. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Suniti Namjoshi and Anuradha Marwah Roy used realism as the main tool in their novels. The list of Indian women novelists also comprises popular names such as Bharati Mukkerjee. Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Malati Chendur, Gauri Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Ruth Jhabvala, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more. They are known for their contemporary approach to the novel.

east-west encounter, different roles in women’s life, and to some extent the conflict between tradition and modernity—an attitude towards change. Her novels are artistically made as she has a flair for writing.

Nina Sibal, like Suniti Namjoshi has effectively used fantasy in her novels. Her singular novel *Yatra (1987)* is reminiscent of Rushdie’s work in its use of magic realism. In Rushdie’s *Midnight Children*, the hero Saleem Sinai is endowed with the mysterious gift of entering into the mind of others. Later his body developed cracks symbolizing the partition on India. Similarly, Krishna Chanai, the heroine of *Yatra* is endowed with a magical skin that changes colour in response to the changes that takes place in India immediately after independence. So Krishna is evidently a sister to Rushdie’s Saleem Sinai.

Dina Mehta’s singular novel *And Some Take a Lover (1992)* gives an insight into Parsi life as against the westernized lifestyle in metropolitan cities. Roshni, a beautiful young girl belonging to an upper middle class family has many admirers around her who are quite rich. But Roshni loves a simple Gandhi follower and the novel delves into the situation of India in the 1930s and 1940s.

Jai Nimbkar has written only two novels – *Temporary Answers (1974)* and *Come Rain (1993)*. Her characters range from illiterate farmers to socio-culturally-conscious writers drawn from society around her. Writers like Somerest Maugham, Graham Greene, Margaret Drabble and Steinbeck profoundly influenced her.

Suniti Namjoshi writes novels, which are quite different from those of her predecessors. She effectively uses fantasy and surrealism in her fiction. Rushdie
adopts this technique in almost all his novels and Suniti is responsible in bringing it in women’s fiction. In her first novel *The Conversations of a Cow* (1985), the protagonist Suniti is a lecturer of Indian origin; her Guru appears in the form of a cow and the tale slips into the realm of fantasy with the cow and Suniti moving around Canada. Her second novel *The Mothers of Maya Diip* (1980) is a more substantial work. Her latest work *Building Babel* (1997) gives a foretaste of what shapes modern fiction may take in the age of IT, computers and e-mail.

*Difficult Daughters* (1998) by Manju Kapur emphasizes the plight of the protagonist, a young Punjabi girl Virmati, who breaks away from the tight control exercised by her tyrannical father and traditional society, by obtaining a Masters Degree and marrying a person of her choice.

Gita Mehta’s *Raj* (1989) unravels the history of India’s independence through the autobiography of a young girl whose marriage is arranged with a prince. An Indian royal family is described vividly with its entire splendor in the novel. Her second novel, *A River Sutra* (1993) exhibits the story telling technique of India. A civil servant on his duty retires in the evening to a guesthouse on the banks of river Narmada. The people in the surrounding area come to meet him and everyone has a story to tell him-some of them fascinating, mysterious as well as puzzling.

Namita Gokhale has four novels to her credit in a span of fifteen years. Her first novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984) deals with the fashionable upper class society in metropolitan cities where the characters’ morality seems to lose control over their body. *Gods, Graves and Grandmothers* (1994) is a satirical novel expressing contempt towards the way religious leaders are revered in India through
the narrator protagonist -the young daughter of a prostitute -aspiring for a good future. The third novel *A Himalayan Love story (1996)* is the story of two lovers in Nainital, their hometown. The descriptions come out lively. Ghokhale’s fourth novel *The Book of Shadows (1999)* is considered to be her best wherein reality and an element of the supernatural are combined to bring out different stories in a gripping manner with a touch of historical evidence.

Laxmi Kannan is a bilingual writer whose mother tongue is Tamil. Her novel *Going Home (1999)*, was written originally in Tamil and then translated into English. It is concerned with the Indian tradition that denies women a fair share of ancestral property. The themes of home and exile are brilliantly portrayed. Lakshmi has also published poetry as well as literary criticism in English.

Bharati Mukherjee also has made efforts to make a representation of the suppressed voices of women through her novels. Unlike the novels of Anita Desai and those of Shashi Deshpande, her novels deal with the external world and are not set in the internal mind of the protagonists. Bharathi Mukherjee seeks a synthesis of gender and cultural ideologies affecting the mental spectrum of her female protagonists. She emphasizes that in a multi-cultural community woman is ‘colonized’ struggling against the taboos of gender ideologies and distinctive cultural orders. In this current trend of feminist fiction, the contribution of Shashi Deshpande gains paramount significance. With her awareness of the plight of the Indian woman caught in the cross currents of tradition and modernity bearing the burden of family and familial relationships and making desperate efforts to find alternative spaces, she explores new horizons in the realm of Indian English Fiction.
Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, a small town of Karnataka. She is the daughter of the renowned Kannada writer and Sanskrit scholar, the late Adya Rangachar popularly known as “Sriranga”, a cerebral and intellectual man who dedicated himself to the writing of plays. His literary creed and intellectual horizon was a major influence on the life of Shashi Deshpande. She belongs to a traditional Brahmin family. In spite of her faith in the sanctity of family and personal relationships, she is neither a traditionalist nor conservative in her attitudes and lifestyle. She accepts that her innate affinity with Brahmin tradition significantly moulded her vision and attitude.

Shashi Deshpande was married to Dr. D.H. Deshpande, a neuro-pathologist in 1962. These diverse influences from the cross-stream enriched her vision and moulded her creative sensibility. She said: “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” (11).

Shashi Deshpande is one of those artists who instead of adhering to any established tradition of fiction, created her own tradition of fiction that provided her ample space to explore the inner world of female consciousness. Under the influence and inspiration of her father, she started her literary career in 1970. In one of her interviews she confessed that she began writing most casually and without any intention of settling down to a career in writing. Even since her visit to England with her husband in 1969, she felt an internal compulsion to express her inner experiences in the form of creative writings.
This observation makes it evident that like Wordsworth and Hardy, creative writing was an internal compulsion with Shashi Deshpande. For her each experience had its own intensity and it was difficult for her to sustain that emotional intensity for a long time and it used to come out like spontaneous poetic expression. She wrote several short stories that were published in reputed magazines. Later on, they were published from the Writer’s Workshop, Calcutta in five different collections. Her first collection of stories published in 1978, was titled *The Legacy and Other Stories*. Her other collections of short stories are: *It Was Dark and Other Stories* (1986), *The Miracle and Other Stories* (1986), *It Was The Nightingale and Other Stories* (1986), *Stone Woman and Other Stories* (2000).

In between, Shashi Deshpande tried to make experiments with detective writings and was successful in producing two detective serials. Out of them, three were subsequently expanded into regular novels *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983) and *If I Die Today* (1982). Later on, the ideas presented in these stories were developed into novels. This indicates that Shashi Deshipande sustains integrity and clarity of vision as a creative artist. Instead of fragmentary shadows, consistency and stability can be accepted as the basic attributes of the mosaic of her fictional world. She constructs the plot of her novels to discern and draw conclusions about the predicament of the emotional and the mental crises of the modern middle class educated woman.

The instinctive urge of Shashi Deshpande to express her sensibility as a woman motivated her to make a representation of it in her novels. The novels written by Shashi Deshpande prepare a comprehensive pattern of female experiences in a gender-based social structure. These novels are *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980),
Roots and Shadows (1983) is the first serious attempt by Shashi Deshpande to study the nature of conflict emerging in the life of the “new woman” who has to struggle against the cross currents of tradition and modernity. The novel highlights the mental crisis experienced by the protagonist, Indu. The character of Indu is portrayed as an unconventional woman who finds herself alienated when she refuses to conform to the rigid codes of life laid down by society. She resolves to marry a man of her own choice. However, the reality existing behind the illusion of marriage only brings disillusionment and suffocation in her life. She finds that her husband is in no way different from an average Indian male. However, Indu registers her protest against the meaningless customs and rituals that are closely associated with the idea of male chauvinism.

In the novel, The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980) Shashi Deshpande seeks to expose the problem of masculine ego that makes harmonious conjugal relationships impossible. The events in the novel are focused around the idea that the social images related with gender ideologies are so deep rooted in human consciousness that the construction of the periphery of life conditions beyond them generates only grief and shame. Sarita (Saru), the protagonist of the novel The Dark Holds No Terrors, in spite of her childhood insecurity, makes alternative spaces with her success as a doctor. She enjoys a better economic security and social status than that of her husband, Manohar. Her success becomes the cause of inferiority in the mind of Manu
and it subsequently converts itself into sexual sadism. Sarita’s trauma of being the victim of her husband’s frustration that manifests itself in the form of sexual sadism is successfully presented by Shashi Deshpande. Besides, through the antagonism of the personal relationship of Sarita and Manu, Shashi Deshpande recreates the horrible effect of the myth of preference of a male child on the psyche of a sensitive young girl. Saru’s life reveals the apathy of the parents and the hostility of the husband. But these negative pulls inspire her to construct an identity beyond socially-accepted images.

Shashi Deshpande achieved the Zenith of her creative career with the publication of *That Long Silence* in 1988. The novel deals with the self analysis of Jaya, the protagonist who passes through a maze of self doubts and fears towards the affirmation of her female self. In her preoccupation to play the role of a successful wife and mother, Jaya realizes that she has lost her hold on her own talent as a writer. Jaya represents the predicament of a self conscious, educated woman who in spite of having a realization of the oddity of life finds herself helpless against the stronghold of tradition.

The unfolding of the narrative in the novel *That Long Silence* has become a process to catch the conscience, beyond self-imposed silence. Jaya, after her marriage with Mohan, follows all his decisions without any choice of her own. She bears two children Rahul and Rati and the third child is aborted. When Mohan is found guilty of embezzlement and is expecting Jaya’s implied consent in the whole affair, her inner self revolts. She decides to break *That Long Silence*. About the genesis of the novel, *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande Comments: “And then I
wrote *That Long Silence*, almost entirely a woman’s novel, nevertheless, a book about the silencing of one half of humanity. A life time of introspection went into this novel, the one closest to me personally, the thinking about ideas in this are closest to my own” (*TLS*, 210).

Jaya in the process of narrating the story of different characters unconsciously discovers a voice for her own silence. It is not only the question of the silence of Jaya but also of the silence of entire womankind. Vimala Rama Rao appreciates her efforts and opines that, “Jaya is one of the rare narrative voices in Indian English Fiction who possesses and displays a literary sensibility commensurate with her fictional role as a writer telling her own story one whose college education and reading habits are in evidence in her speaking voice. Thisindeed is an achievement (Rama Rao:1993).

In the novel *The Binding Vine (1992)*, Shashi Deshpande presents an elaborate thesis on the idea of sexual colonialism both within marital relationship and the relationships outside marriage. Through Urmi the narrator, Shashi Deshpande records the humiliation of woman by male passion. The novelist makes a bold attempt to portray the agony of a wife who had witnessed the trauma of marital rape – a theme which perhaps has not been touched upon by any other Indian writer in English. Urmi reconstructs the pathetic story of a bright and attractive girl Mira, who wrote poems in order to release her suppressed sensibility. Urmi also tries to represent the voice of another victim, Kalpana, a teenager who was brutally raped and tortured. With these two references, Shashi Deshpande highlights two contrasting but complementary situations–rape committed within marriage and rape committed outside marriage. The novel proceeds with the vision that sexual harassment is the
worst of the calamity in the life of woman. It ruins the “real self” of a woman and it is only through narrators like Urmi that a voice of protest can be registered. In the novel *The Binding Vine*, there is an extension of her vision asserting that woman in order to seek her identity is bound to express her rage against the irrational control of tradition. Indira Nithyanandam identifies a rare dynamism in the vision and attitude of Shashi Deshpande developed in this novel. To quote her: “*The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from the first three novels of Deshpande. Protest comes easily to her protagonist here and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. The hope for Indian women lies in the happy fact though there are Mira’s and Kaplana’s and Shakuntala’s, we also have our Urmila’s” (*TBV*.46).

In this novel, Shashi Deshpande also exposes the weaknesses existing in the legal and social system. Her social consciousness overwhelms her feminist concerns in this novel. The novel *A Matter of Time* (1996) is a male – centered text. Here Shashi Deshpande focuses her attention on the confusion and uncertainty existing within the mind of Indian males. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande emancipates herself from the narrow confines of women and their world and she tries to investigate human frailty through the metaphysical world of philosophy. The novel is centered round the character of Gopal who leaves his family without any substantial reason. The life of Gopal, the pivot of the novel, is revealed and defined in the context of three women from three generations from the same family.

The idea of the quest for individual identity is marked by the conflict between the inner and outer selves of the protagonist. Sumi, the protagonist appears as a deserted wife and desperate mother of three young daughters. For Sumi it is a
challenge to face life and society in the absence of her husband. Beneath these chains of events, Shashi Deshpande seeks the solution to the problems related with the responsibility of the parents towards their children. For Sumi, Gopal’s desertion is confined to the needs of her own life but it also involves the issue of the mental and social security of her daughters. The philosophical ground of the arguments presented in the novel reflects the profundity of thought, but it makes the social criticism integrated in text, weak and insignificant.

In the novel *Small Remedies (2000)*, Shashi Deshpande makes a experiment with autobiographical fiction. It reflects her strength as a novelist her deliberate denial of sentimentality and her total control over the diverse issues presented. To create a novel with the technique of biography within the biography is something new in the history of the Indian English novel. Madhu, the central character appears as a journalist who undertakes the task of constructing the biography of Savitribai Indorekar, an aged but consummate singer of Hindustani Music. She fails to fulfill the traditional responsibilities of family life to pursue her mission as a musician. She also ignores her commitments in personal relationships - as a mother and as a wife. Along with Savitribai, there are also references to the life of Leela, Bai’s sister. Leela also adopts an unconventional career and arranges a marriage of her own convenience beyond the traditions of her caste and family. At the centre of this sprawling narrative is Madhu who in the process of revealing the life of Muni, Savitri and Leela starts making introspection on her own life. From a distant observer, she becomes an insider of the whole affair. The entire fabric of the novel *Small Remedies* seems to be an investigation to conclude how far a woman can escape her femininity to construct her own identity in a patriarchal social structure.
Shashi Deshpande’s *Moving On* came out in the year 2004. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande presents the struggle of a woman to find a meaningful definition of her own life. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the underworld through the life of Manjan’s uncle Laxmanmama. Along with the concern with the criminal world, Shashi Deshpande focuses her attention at the central theme of the crisis of balance in personal relationship. Manjari, the narrator tries to reconstruct the life of her parents as having individual identity. Manjari’s efforts to discover the past of her parents, helps her to understand the enigma of her own unfathomable self and makes her realize the need to create an individual self rather than get involved in forced relationships. In the novel *Moving On*, Shashi Deshpande, through the conflict of Manjari presents the riddle of mother-daughter relationship, father-daughter relationship, and the issues of female sexuality, man’s conditioning to social images and man’s dependence on gender stereotypes.

Shashi Deshpande’s *In the Country of Deceit* was published in 2008. The novel has been divided into four segments entitled “Ground Zero”, “Epiphany”, “In The Country Of Deceit” and “Unspooling” where the first two segments appear to be a kind of preparation for the third segment whereas the fourth one supplements the whole narrative with a meticulous summing up. The title of each segment metaphorically informs the content. The story begins with a detailed description of the background where the heroine Devayani is shown recovering from the demolition of her ancestral home for building a modern house.

*Shadow Play* (2013), is the latest novel by Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author Shashi Deshpande. It starts simply, with the no-frills wedding of the eldest
daughter of a middle-class urban family. This happens to be a family we’ve been introduced to earlier, in Deshpande’s novel *A Matter of Time*; Sumi and Gopal, and their three daughters. Gopal had walked out on his family, for reasons not fully explained, leaving his wife and daughters struggling to come to terms with his humiliating betrayal and the societal scorn that they suffer as a result of it. Then tragedy strikes a second time, and Sumi and her father are killed in an accident.

*Shadow Play* starts here, with Sumi, the central character in *A Matter of Time*, dead, and her daughters all grown up. Aru, a lawyer, is married, and is slowly coming to terms with her father’s decision to leave them in her childhood. He is now backing in their lives, and Aru must deal with the residual bitterness that his earlier desertion has left her with. At the same time, she deals with her inability to conceive, her ambivalence about adoption, and her relationships with the (mostly) women around her; her sisters, her boss, her colleagues.

Shashi Deshpande also made experiments with detective fiction *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983) and *If I Die Today* (1982) are two detective serials which have been expanded and published in the form of novels. Shashi Deshpande’s interest in the detective serial first reflected in her review of *Woman’s Eye: New Stories by the Best Women Crime Writers*. The chief female characters in *Come Up and Be Dead*, the school teacher Kshama and her house keeper cousin Devayani are spinsters. In spite of her concern for the world of crime, Shashi Deshpande represents the issue that modern woman in spite of her administrative abilities, suffers from internal emptiness. Kshama is an efficient administrator but her life reflects her internal complex and insecurities. Devayani seems to be contented with her role but in the
company of one of her partners, she realizes the uselessness of her life. Through the lasciviousness of Mridula, Sonali, Sharmila and Mrs. Raman. Shashi Deshpande hints at the different dimensions of female sexuality in the context of the world or crime. In the novel If I Die Today, the narrator Manju is quite different from the average Indian woman who regards matrimony and motherhood as the ultimate happiness in her life. She accepts that children are the barrier in her dream of an emancipated life. She is prejudiced about the concept of motherhood and she acknowledges it as “a trap, keeping you in a cage until you lose the desire for freedom until you forget what the word ‘Freedom’ means” (IIDT, 47).

During her fictional career, Shashi Deshpande also published several children’s books in English and also wrote the script for the Hindi feature film Drishti. On the lines of Enid Blyton, she wrote three detective serials. A Sum Adventure, The Only Witness and the Hidden Treasure. Her fourth novel for children The Narayanpur Incident is based on the Quit India Movement. These novels in spite of being too weak in literary excellence are highly significant as explorations of new possibilities in the realm of children’s literature.

Shashi Deshpande through her concentrated and confined spectrum of fiction has created a niche for herself. Her collection of short stories The Legacy has been prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University. The Dark Holds No Terrors has already been translated into German and Russian. Her literary works have been translated into different languages. With her efforts to articulate the voice of women in the world of men, she has been acknowledged as the most celebrated
post colonial writer struggling to establish and to explore the identity and position of woman in the traditional society of India.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels have received a great deal of critical attention.

P.G. Joshi in the book *Shashi Deshpande’s Fiction: A Study in Women Empowerment and Post Colonial Discourse* (2003) analyzes Shashi Deshpande’s novels in the light of post-colonial theories, with reference to their socio-economic and political situation. The emphasis is on the concept of ‘unlearning of the inherent dominative mode’. The silence and loudness of the gendered subaltern has been examined in the light of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s theory.

Jasbir Jain, in her book *Gendered Realities, Human Spaces: the Writings of Shshi Deshpande* (2003) attempts a close reading of her fiction, non-fiction and interviews in order to interrogate the strengths and limits of various ‘feminist’ positions as implied in them. She goes on to free Deshpande’s work from a reading confined only to the woman question and opens them out to aesthetic evaluation as socio cultural analysis.

Satbir Kaur in her “Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Interpretation” has offered an incisive and insightful reading of Deshpande’s works from the feminist point of view.

Indira Nityanandan in her article “Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine: Silent No More” has well-brought out the emergence of the emancipated woman in the chosen novels of Deshpande.
Beena Agarwal in her work, “Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande” offers a comprehensive picture of the variegated women characters in Deshpande’s works.

Siddhartha Sharma’s “Shashi Deshpande’s Novels: A Feminist Study” probes Deshpande’s works from the feminist angle.

Mukta Atrey’s article, “The Girl Child in the Fiction of Shashi Deshpande” takes a look at the realistic portrayal of the girl child by Deshpande.

Sarla Palkar’s article, “Breaking the Silence: That Long Silence” deals with the traumatic silence undergone by Jaya and her ultimate overcoming of it.

Sarita Prabhakar has made a comparative study on the narrativization of realities in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Gita Hariharan.

Gahlawat Singh Dalvir’s “Turmoil and Turn: Women in Shashi Deshpande’s Novels” offers a study of the trauma and triumph of Deshpande’s women.

S.Indira’s “A Bond or A Burden? A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine” probes the human relationships depicted in the novel chosen for study.

Shanthi Sivaraman’s article, “The women in The Binding Vine” is an incisive study.

J.P. Tripathi’s article, “The Binding Vine and the Indian Ethos” discusses the Indian Ethos depicted and discussed in the fictional mode by Deshpande.
Usha Bande in her article, “Mother, Daughter and Daughter’s Daughter: A Study of Shashi Deshpande” has made a study of the mother characters in Deshpande’s works.

Apart from these, eminent critics have reviewed the novels of Shashi Deshpande.

Shama Futehally has reviewed Roots and Shadows. Vimala Rama Rao and Mario Couto have come out with reviews of That Long Silence.

Shashi Deshpande has given full length interviews to Lakshmi Holmstrom, Vanamala Viswanath, Vijay Kumar and others expressing her stand on gender issues and revealing her artistic credo.

The present study is an attempt to consolidate existing Literature and evaluate the problems of women in Shashi Deshpande’s novels. It seeks to reveals Deshpande’s instinctive ability to articulate the feelings of the contemporary, urban, educated, upper middle class woman who is caught in the transitional period between tradition and modernity. A culture – specific approach has been adopted to unravel Deshpande’s genuine concern with women issues. The study will offer a fresh perspective for critical analysis linking literature with real- life situations. The study, it is hoped, will make a contribution to women’s studies and feminist criticism.

Apart from the Introductory and Conclusive chapters, this research work has five more chapters.
The *Introductory* chapter starts tracing the link between Gender and Literature; then the images of women in literary works are traced. The chapter proceeds to explain the concept of Gender issues; then the origin and evolution of Feminism and its variations and the link Feminism has with Postmodernism and Post-colonialism are presented. This is followed by an introduction on Indian Women Novelists who have enriched Indian English Literature; and finally, the life and works of Shashi Deshpande are outlined. A survey of Literature and the chapter scheme also form part of this chapter.

The second chapter entitled, *“Theme of Victimization”*, deals with the victimization of Deshpande’s women characters at various levels and ways. The chapter describes how the freedom and dignity of these women protagonists are denied by rigid patriarchy.

The third chapter entitled, *“Man-Woman Relationship”* deals with the relationships that exist between the two sexes; and explores relationships between husbands and wives and other kinds of relationships like those between father and daughter, brother and sister and the bonds of friendship that develop between men and women.

The fourth chapter, *“Mother-Daughter Relationship”* brings out the complexity of this relationship. In patriarchal societies, mothers give preference to male children and treat female children as unwanted. Ironically, mothers were dominated in their childhood and they in turn, dominate their daughters, training them to conform to social stereotypes.
The fifth chapter titled, “Survival Strategies” highlights woman’s ability to survive a hostile-cum-indifferent environment in Deshpande’s novels. The women of Deshpande are able to attain an understanding of life and become successful, both at the familial and societal levels.

The sixth chapter, “A Study of Deshpande’s Narrative Technique” makes a study of the narrative technique used by the author in her novels. In fact, Deshpande has used various types of story-telling techniques like an adept mixing of past and present, employing the first person narration and using simple words, phrases and homely images. She makes deft use of diaries and letters to highlight events as they impact the human mind.

The seventh chapter sums up the main ideas discussed in the earlier chapters. Areas for further research are also suggested.