CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER-1
INTRODUCTION

I

HUMAN RELATIONSHIP: CONCEPT AND BACKGROUND

The fact is that our identities do not contain just us; by ourselves we mean nothing. Any identity becomes active, positive and meaningful only in relation to others. The whole potential of who we are and what we are is realised only through our relationship with others. (*MO*: 2004:56)

Human relationship is the source and the maker of man’s identity. The moment one is born in this world, one’s identity is defined in relation to somebody else-father, mother, brother, sister and so on. One comes to the world as a guest constantly striving to forge relationship with everyone-human relationship by birth and continues to be in it even after one’s death-people refer to their ancestors to mark their identity. The inherited blood relationships cannot be broken. They follow human beings just like shadows and help them perform their role given by family, society and nation conforming to the existing tradition and culture and facing the emerging situations and circumstances. Badri, an important male character in *Moving on*, writes in his diary: “We can never deny the ties of the body; we can never leave them behind us. The ties we forge through our bodies are the strongest, the hardest to sever.” (114) It is because of blood relationship that filial and conjugal relationships are considered to be central relationships which impact all other relationships.

Human relationships form the core of man’s survival at the beginning of life. It is a common knowledge that human beings are only capable of survival on their own after nine years of age and before that they depend on their parents and relatives for survival and learning the art of living. When they grow old, they do need the help and affection of others for survival. Moreover, from birth to death their success and failure are measured by the kind of relationships they had with other people.
Apart from inherited relationships, we struggle to forge new relationships with others. We need to connect and communicate with them and enjoy their love, affection, friendliness and playfulness. Relationships make us seem more attractive, friendly and less threatening. We also seek relationship to be able to shed our inhibitions about sharing personal details and relieve ourselves of emotional distress. Moreover, a sense of being related to other people enables us to discuss personal issues with others and helps us put things in right perspective because others act as mirrors and their issues resonate in us as well. We realise that we are in the same boat. We feel deeper connection with the universe and experience a greater awareness that we have inherent power to deal with whatever comes our way. Undoubtedly, relationship is a very empowering tool.

When a person forges a new relationship, it affects his/her pre-existing relationships with other persons in family and society either for good or for bad based on their expectations. One’s relationship is also influenced by other’s expectations coloured by the general ethos of family and society.

Human relationships often work as catalyst as there is something that makes two people who come together have a relationship in which they bring out the best in each other. All relationships on the earth are forged due to mutual dependence, mutual needs, mutual security and mutual fulfilment. Many people leave together and journey across life in their different age group and forge different kinds of relationships. They define and redefine and discover and rediscover their roles, positions and relationships facing many dilemmas and concerns of life. In extended families people belonging to more than one generation live together and go through the ups and downs of their relationships in emerging situation but stay together. Often relationships are difficult to forge in the beginning because of individual differences but gradually love and understanding overcome these differences and consolidate relationships to bring joy to life. The various human relationships reveal the complexity of human needs and aspirations. Mahdi, an important female character in Shashi Deshpande’s *Small Remedies* (2000) echoes this view when she says:

There are so many selves in us which are created forth by other human beings, selves which depend on others for their existence. I know how I changed because of Leela and Joe, how Adit made me
into a person. I could scarcely recognize myself, how living with Som, some of the fine dust of his generosity, his ease with people, was sprinkled on me as well. Sometimes I wonder, whether, there is, in fact, a pristine self in us which will be revealed only when we are totally isolated from others. ‘Or’ whether, without others, we are nothing. A blank slate. (170)

Happiness which begins with our relationship with ourselves is nurtured by our ties with others and so, we naturally foster closeness with those who are important to us.

Human relationships have scientific basis. Scientific study of human behaviour in psychology and behavioural sciences can explain various shades and colours of human relationships. It is the brain that regulates human behaviours and human relationships. Certain areas- the frontal lobe, lymbic system and hypothalamus do regulate human relationships. Scientific investigations and experiments have revealed that love, affection, sex and emotional bondings which are the bedrocks of human relationship are caused and controlled by the level of certain chemicals or hormones secreted in our body after sense organs send stimulus to brain. Hormones like testosterone, estrogens, oxytocin, endorphins, dopamine, norepinephrine, phenyl ethylamine, vasopressin, and serotonin play vital role in forging, consolidating and continuing human relationships in general and man-woman relationship in particular. However, if hormones control our behaviours, our behaviours too control our hormones and their interplay regulates our relationships. Human relationships involve layers of emotional complications which are often attributed to this interplay.

Though the major categories of human relationships are filial, conjugal, extra-marital, professional and other relationships, broadly speaking, there are only two kinds of relationships: relationship of equality based on love, trust, respect and understanding and relationship of dominance based on power superiority and selfishness. While the former is assertive, the latter is aggressive. Jaya Chakravorty in “A Post-Colonial Analysis of a few Shashi Deshpande’s Novels” (2006) observes that it is man’s innate nature to dominate others and it does matter in human relationships. To quote her:

To conquer, to subjugate, to occupy and to dominate another being are inherent characteristics of a human being. Man is also acquisitive
by nature and acquires things at the cost of fellow human beings.(298)

Human relationships have social, economic and cultural basis as well. Changes in socio-economic conditions, in course of time, affect cultural environment which, in turn, affect human behaviours and human relationships. We do not live our lives in vacuum. We have to function in the social climate and to understand human relationships, we need to understand how our social role impinge on our personal relationship e.g. if we are living in an authoritarian society, we become authoritarian parents, authoritarian husbands and so on. Human relationships are closely linked to the system of control and discipline in the society and society’s perception of human relationships whether liberal or conservative determines the perceptions of its members e.g. a child’s perception of parents’ role often reflects their parents’ perception. P. Rajendra Karmarkar, in “Filigree and Sovereignty of Human Bonds : A Study of Dynamics in Ameeta Rathore’s Blood Ties” emphasises the role of society in shaping and maintaining human relationships in the following words:

Traditions, customs are as important as ‘blood ties’. They hold the people in their places and guide them with the force of an undercurrent and pursue them to follow the etiquette. Though people might neglect the traditions, traditions seem to cling to them, like parents who do not discard their children even if children are unkind to them. In their compass, traditions rule both the rich and the poor. People preserve the relations for the sake of social life, harmony and honour though their love is at its low ebb. (IJES: 43:2005-2006:113)

Society, its organization and activities, the structure of social institutions, their long time traditions and future aspirations express and govern human relationships. Caste, religion, family and marriage are major bonding forces in forging and maintaining human relationships.

Human relationships are also determined by economic factors particularly the modes of earning and production. Those who earn and produce dominate the relationship and those who depend on others are dominated. Recent changes in the Indian society have ended man’s monopoly as earner and producer and brought women as equal partners in earning and production. Many women are now pursuing rewarding careers and earning at
par with men. This has brought a significant change in traditional man-woman relationship as working and independent women now refuse to submit to male dominance and feel free to conduct themselves to any relationship on the basis of gender equality. They have an improved sense of self-worth and self-confidence and tend to be vocal about what they want from relationship. The end of relationship and marriage to economically independent women no longer means the end of life. They move on looking again and leaping again. Obviously, economic changes change the dimensions of human relationships. However, according to Seema Suneel “Economic independence is incidental and not so much important in man-woman relationship, what matters more is an impact of surroundings and environment.” (2011:10)

And last but not the least, human relationships are also based on religious and moral concerns- the human consciousness of something that exist beyond this mundane existence, beyond mere survival. Moreover, apart from obvious religious, moral and social laws, there are certain invisible eternal laws that govern human behaviour and their ideas of right and wrong, and have a deep impact on human relationships. Shashi Deshpande sums up this truth when she says in Writing from the Margin and Other Essays:

The truth which also involves an understanding of the relationship between human beings, the relationship of a human with the inner-self, of humans with society, with the physical universe and the other unseen universe we know we are also part of. (105)

Human relationships are embedded in the matrix of family. The institution of family which governs inheritance, marriage and various other relationships, play a dominant role in weaving human relationships. Traditional human relationships like filial and conjugal relationships are not possible without the concept of family. In India family ties are held in sacred. People meet their relatives on religious or social ceremonies. They buy gifts for their relatives to show their affection for them. Family plays an important role in keeping its members in the main stream of human values and defusing crisis in human relationships. According to Jasbir Jain: “Families have a wonderful way of coming together at times of crisis and of dispersing once things are settling down. The house with its division and space renders it possible.” (2004:222)
This role of family is unique in the Indian context. American and Western writers are hardly able to understand relationship without sexual connotations. They have a morbid fascination for sexuality so, they fail to assign importance to family relationship. In the Western countries, people have to consult their therapists if they have domestic problems but in Indian joint family system, with a very strong family unit concept, people have a mother, an aunt, an uncle, a cousin, etc. who work like therapists for them. Family as a unit of social establishment maintains stability as the family members exclude dissent when it comes to respecting the strict hierarchies within family and extended family. They accept rigid structured relationships without taking any liberty and nourish and cherish them at their best within the family structure. The extended family has played the role of counsellor for centuries in traditional Indian joint family system.

But the spread of modern liberal education, exposure to Western culture, social reforms and constitutional provisions and increased job opportunities owing to economic development in Independent India have led to the disintegration of joint family system and division of human life into personal and professional lives. All these have considerably influenced human relationships and redefined many of them. Change in the attitude to marriage and family as a vital social institution and bedrock of human relationship have a considerable impact on human relationships. Marriage which used to be the most important event in man’s life and the basis of family is losing its importance gradually vis-a-vis the increasing number of divorce, live-in-relationship and single parenthood. Human relationships are no longer enduring because people are becoming autonomous within their personal sphere and their relationships continue as long as they trust each other and as long as the basic emotions last. According to Seema Suneel:

The family in India, during the last few decades, has been under a process of social change, thus substantially affecting man-woman relationship. The social change is marked in the Indian society at large; it has touched the fringe of the family and this interaction has brought a significant change in the structure of various relationships in a family unit. There is a conspicuous change in the spheres of roles and values. From the sociological point of view, the role of husband and wife is the principal component in a family context that has
undergone a vital change due to growing enlightenment and the movement for the emancipation of women.(2011:9)

Parvati Batnagar, in her seminal work “Indian Womanhood: Fight for Freedom in *Roots and Shadows*” recalls that there was hardly any occasion for conflict between husband and wife in old family pattern as the two met only briefly in the darkness of the night.

But with husband and wife constantly thrown together in the present pattern and with the wife sharing in many of the responsibilities which were earlier supposed to be only his, there has arisen the problems of incompatibility and maladjustment and expectations and despair.(2001:49)

However, Manjari, the heroine of Shashi Deshpande’s *Moving On* (2000) makes a sweeping statement about the gradual disintegration of family when she says: “All families follow essentially the same path: a gradual distancing, a tapering off of bonds, hostilities and rivalries between siblings, expectations and disappointments that distance parents and children”(47)

There is disintegration of family values and filial and conjugal love because everyone is guided by one’s own pleasure principles with no bonding among them. There is ever-widening gap in the family relationship because of the growing individuality and autonomy amongst the younger generation devoid of love and togetherness. They give their elders their due in the prescribed manners on formal or ceremonial occasions like weddings and funerals which requires such a show of rank and discipline.

However, human relationships in the present nuclear family set up are more democratic. The elders now consult the kids in key decisions like buying a car, moving home, planning holidays etc. Everybody has an equal voice in the nuclear family; kids and parents are on casual buddy-buddy terms, cracking jokes, sharing clothes, etc. Because of such bonding in nuclear families the cousins, aunts, and uncles have become totally marginalized. Nobody has the time to nurture these relationships or “stay in touch”. Besides, such casual relationships are disorienting to elders who have still to accept the new order of parents-kids relationship. The increasing complex dynamics of Indian society makes it possible for the people of varying socio-economic background to interact and live close to each other. People at workplaces,
offices and institutions come from all walks of life and cut across caste, community, gender and culture barriers. No wonder that many modern children are unaware of their caste, sub-caste, gotra, religion and culture. They eat all food, follow all festivals and interact with all faiths equally. It is difficult to say whether they are getting integration or rootlessness.

The phenomenal changes taking place in different spheres of life since the last century have redefined human relationships and social revolutions such as the Women’s Lib, the cult of the individual, etc. have repatterned the basic premises of human relationships. A good relationship today is not one that just lasts but one that co-exists with self-respect, individuality and the need to grow. As such expectations are hard to fulfil, the world seems to constantly echo with a disconcerting chorus of voices, the result of frustrated filial, conjugal and other relationships as individuals feel disillusioned with themselves for not being able to relate successfully to the changed environment.

Human relationship which has a wonderful power of lifting a theme and driving stories has been a perennial issue to deal with in literature ever since its origin. In ancient literature, the writers mostly dealt with man’s relationship with God as in the Bible, the Ramayana, the Gita, and others. But with the emergence of humanism in the post-Renaissance literature, human relationships became a dominant subject of literature. A writer’s basic focus was always on the human beings in the society. But Seema Suneel contends such a view and asserts that ancient Greek and Indian classics present a complete view of human relationship:

....In fact, for almost all the historical details of the ancient past, our Illiad, and the Odyssey, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, most reliable sources have been the great works of literature. The Chilappadikaram, and Manimekalai are precious treasures that mirror the Greek, Aryan and Dravidian past with great accuracy. They are all intensely human documents that reveal significantly about human relationships. The fraternal love between Rama and his three brothers, the righteous anger and wifely chastity in Kannagi are all familiar instances.

At the same time, these ancient works do not project just one-sided positive view of the human relationship. We are given a clear picture
of the adulterous relationship between Paris and Helen, the fratricidal war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the tragedy of faithless Sali, mother of Aaputhran. Indeed, if we wish to have a total view of family relationships then and now, we must go to the classics.(2011:7)

As we proceed further from the ancient classics, we find that from Shakespearean classics to modern literature human relationship holds the central theme and it would be hardly an exaggeration to say that all works of literature having their central theme of love, which is the fountain head of all relationships, are relationship-driven whether written by men or by women. Human relationship forms the basis of all literature and it is their depiction in depth and variety that is often considered to be the hallmark of a literary genius.

Though human relationship pervades every genre of writing, yet the novel which developed as a form of literature in England in the 18th century and came into India in the last quarter of the 19th century, which is considered to be the latest, richest and most acceptable form of literature for conveying ideas and experiences of the modern time, and which is often described as ‘epic in prose’, has emerged as the most suitable form for the depiction of human relationship in different shades and colours on a comprehensive scale. According to Bijay Kumar Das “Of all the genres of Indian English literature, fiction is the most developed and well received one in the post-modern period both at home and abroad” (2003:55).

Human relationship as a site for fiction has been consistent with the Indian Writers in English and writers like R. K. Narayan, R. P. Jhabwala, Kamala Markandya, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Bharati Mukherjee and others have dealt with the travails of human relationships against the social, cultural and psychological milieu of the time accommodating for the purpose both individual and collective expectations, actions, and reactions. Obviously, human relationships have been a quite familiar turf for modern Indian English novelists and Indian Women Writers in English who have taken up writing novels and short stories as a profession. They are very much inclined to deal with human relationships and move on to explore and experiment with their new dimensions.

As the evaluation of the treatment of human relationship in the present study is confined to those represented in the novels of Shashi
Deshpande, it would be proper to consider briefly the important role of the novel as a form of literature and vehicle of human relationships in the modern Indian context. T. D. Brunton emphasises the dominance of novel as a literary form when he says:

The modern world demands novels just as it demands films and television programmes. Indeed it is only through the novel that literature, the unglamorous written words without colour or illustration, is able to compete with its brash competitors of the screen. (1972:57)

Burton stresses the importance of novel in India- a vast country with such geographical, historical, social, economical, cultural and religious diversity-as it provides a vast scope for the treatment of diverse materials in different perspectives, to the extent that modern literary theory terms novel as ‘hold all’. To quote him again: “The novel at its best has provided a matchless illusion of reality, a sense of both the moment and of time passing, and a compelling vividness as a shared experience. It is the art of everyday life.”(57)

Indian novelists often choose to solve the problem of heterogeneous audience by choosing themes and situations where the basic pattern is equally familiar to all Indians with a great deal of regional variation in social structure, economic status, cultural practices and religious values. Historical events, East-West encounter and National Movement for political developments, which dominated the Indian fiction of the pre-Independence era, gave way to depicting changes in social structure and human relationships owing to the disintegration of the old hierarchical and agrarian society and the breakdown of the traditional large joint families. Meenakshi Mukherjee, in her seminal work The Twice BornFiction(2001) states that Indo-Anglian novel made a marked appearance in the 1920s (before that there were only half-a-dozen Indo-Anglian novels), established itself in the 1920s and 1940s and gathered momentum in the 1960s. She calls ‘novel’ “the genre of imaginative literature which gives artistic form to the relationship of man and society.”(28) and makes the following observation on the modern Indian English novelists:

……there are some novelists who deal with the unchanging values of an Indian small town or village, and find their material in the excitement, strain and the clash of temperaments involved in living
under the same roof in a joint family. The joint family has always provided rich fictional material because of the variety and complexity of human relationships that it offers. (37)

However, the treatment of human relationships in Indian English fiction was different from that in British, American or other Western English fiction. While the British novelists lay emphasis on the individual, the Indian English novelists stressed the importance of the family and the social value system which seeks the renunciation of the individual ego the most desirable. American and Western writers’ fascination for sex as the basis of human relationship is out of place in the Indian context where sex is a marital bliss and comes after love and marriage. Meenakshi Mukherjee quotes a remark of R. K. Narayan to explain the difference: “R. K. Narayan once pointed out in an article that Western society is based “on a totally different conception of man-woman relationship from ours” and it can certainly be demonstrated that marital bliss is a more frequent subject in Indian novels than romantic love.”(37)

But the most significant point to be noted in the depiction of human relationships in the Indian English novels was the idealization of the conventional man-woman relationship—man the leader, woman the led. To quote Meenakshi Mukherjee again:

The man-woman relationship in which the man’s role is dynamic and the woman’s passive is a pattern that goes very deep into the Indian ethos. This ideal is so much a part of the Indian mind that an Indian reader never pauses to wonder whether the numerous novels that portray this relationship and present the woman as the symbol of purity and goodness draw their material from real life, or merely follow a literary convention. It takes an outsider like Dorothy Spencer to ask the pertinent question: “As we observe with the mind’s eye this procession of devoted, submissive, faithful, loyal, self-sacrificing women, the question naturally arises: are these characters intended as realistic portrayals? (153)

But the emergence of Indian women novelists in English in the 1980s onward brought a change in this trend of depicting human relationships as regards woman’s place within the relationship. These writers present the struggle of subordinated women for emancipation in an orthodox
patriarchal set up. The women protagonists of these novelists do not willingly accept their ideal state of subordination; rather they protest against their subjugation and, torn between tradition and modernity, they struggle for reconciliation between romantic aspirations and family obligations. The problems of women regarding the adjustment during the phase of transition have been the preoccupation of most of the Indian novelists in English. Their novels are based not on hearsay or second hand experience but on their personal experience and interactions with women in different situations. According to Bhavana Dwivedi:

During recent decades a fairly large number of Indian women novelists have started writing with the self-imposed task of representing themselves in a style away from the stereotyping of women in fiction by Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and others. This time they do not stand in the patriarchal circle of confinement.(2007:114-115)

These novelists have explored the psychic and moral dilemma and their interactions with the patriarchal reality in their women characters who are seen trying to achieve a new harmony of relationship with themselves and their surroundings. They are caught in the flux of the opposite currents of tradition and modernity. They have to carry the burden of the past as well as feel the aspirations of the future and reconcile both. Their struggle and reconciliation are reflected in their conjugal and filial relationships. According to A. C. Baugh: “A woman’s experience is primarily defined through interpersonal, usually domestic and filial relationships. Her identity exists largely as being others rather than being for itself.”(1989:43) Usha Bande conforms to the view when she says:

The Indian women novelists, particularly of the 1980s onward articulated woman’s aspirations, her professional endeavours, her newly formed relationship with man and the changed perception of motherhood. Authors such as Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Namita Gokhale, Geetha Hariharan, Shobha De and even the diasporic writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Shona Ramaya and others have presented various modes of resistance to patriarchal norms. (2005:190-91)
Veena Singh too, in her article “Women Novelists of the Post-Colonial India” lists the contribution of Indian women writers, specially novelists, in the following words:

Fiction is one of the most powerful and characteristic expression. It is the latest of the literary forms to be evolved and the most dominant in the 20th century. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala, Anita Desai, Geeta Mehta, Geetha Hariharan, Namita Gokhale, Bharati Mukherjee, Nina Sibal, Shashi Deshpande, Uma Vasudev, Shobha De, Kalindi Sen Gupta, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, through their writings very successfully and skilfully capture the Indian ethos. At the same time they show their deep insight into human nature, and their understanding of day to day problems. (2003:166)

The perceptible changes in woman’s place in human relationships have taken place because of the change in woman’s attitude towards sex, love and marriage owing to the change their personal as well as social status. Migration of men and women from home to cities for education, work and career has resulted into cultural dislocation and absence of parental care has affected them emotionally, affecting their personal relationship. A study of human relationship must, therefore, be based on the changes taking place in the society and the crisis in human relationship must be seen in the respect of the crisis of a transitional society.

Though the society is by and large dominated by man, the woman’s gaining legal as well as social liberty and economic power to voice their problems and oppose injustices meted out to them, has made a visible mark in life and influenced man-woman relationship. The Indian woman novelists in English who choose to deal with it are page turners and winners of prestigious literary awards/honours and, despite being often accused of penning unambitious, dull, domestic dramas; of being smug, parochial and even kitchen driven; of having small canvases of relationship, love, family and child-care, they are getting more confident, more independent, more pragmatic and more powerful in the treatment of human relationships and the woman’s quest for identity in the male dominated society. Love and relationship stir the story teller in Shashi Deshpande as she has herself admitted while speaking about her latest novel In the Country of Deceit (2008): “All my books are about relationships particularly this one which is about love between an adult man and an adult.
woman. Most of my novels emphasise love because I am fascinated by the idea of love.”

Shashi Deshpande, like other Indian novelists, has dealt with human relationships with high seriousness because the traditional heritage of India gives great importance to human values and human relationships. Chanchala K. Nayak writes in the ‘Introduction’ to her seminal work ‘Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande’:

Human relationship has always been central to her work and she considers its complexity not as ‘given’ but as a product of the social reality we live in. And this social reality is not a static figmentation but a version of one’s own individualised perception which is ever in a state of flux. (2005:21)

To Shashi Deshpande all that matters is evolving human relationships. In response to a question “What is that inspires you?” she replies:

Human beings. I find us fascinating. Our endless variations our essential sameness. Our strength, our frailties. Our overwhelming desire to live, our anguish at what life offers us. And above all, our relationships with one another. In each novel I explore these things, going beyond the externals to the inner truth of people, of their relationships, asking questions each time, rarely having the answers, but finding that the questions themselves bring in a little more light. If I am able to do the same for even one reader, I am satisfied. (2003:29)

In conversation with Gita Vishwanathan on June 3, 2003 she denies that she writes with a specific agenda i.e. feminism and says:

There are other things that do matter to me and that do come into my writing. I mean human relationships, not just women but what human beings in general are like, what the loneliness of a human being is like—these are equally important parts of my writing and when I am called a feminist writer, these are missed out and this is what I really object to. (228)

Jaya Chakravorty too, in the A Post-Colonial Analysis of a few Shashi Deshpande’s Novels stresses the fact that human relationship is a dominant theme in Shashi Deshpande’s novels and says: