CHAPTER 1

Introduction
Indian English Fiction: A Survey

Indian English fiction has received exceptional praise all over the world in recent times. Many Indian writers have won prestigious literary awards like the Booker and the Nobel Prize for their fictional writings. In India also, Indian-English fiction has gained enviable popularity, reputation and critical attention. The Indian English literary vista points out an interesting fact regarding the approach of critics and the writers involved in the evaluation and writing of fiction. The Indian fiction writers are praised and eulogized for their innovative experiments in themes and techniques that make them different from their predecessors.

Indian English literature is the result of the introduction of English education in India during the colonial rule. In current time, Indian English Literature has achieved massive significance all around the world. It is currently perceived that Indian English writing is not just a piece of Commonwealth writing, but it involves an incredible essentialness in the World writing. Today, various Indian authors in English have contributed generously to advance English writing. Ram Mohan Roy who proclaimed the Indian Renaissance and Macaulay who prescribed English language training in India were presumably aware of what was in store for the Indians regarding their consciousness of literature. Today it has won for itself worldwide approval and refinement. Fiction, being the most effective type of expression today, has gained a prestigious position in Indian English writing. It is for the most part concurred that the novel is the most suitable artistic form to investigate the experiences and thoughts in the setting of our time, and Indian English fiction conquers its appropriate place in the field of literature. There are many critics and reporters in the world who acknowledge Indian English novels. Prof. M. K. Naik remarks:
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One of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction for
though India was probably a fountain head of story-telling, the novel as we
know today was an importation from the West. (Naik 99)

Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao whose development was the most amazing
occasion in the domain of Indian English fiction, were the harbingers of the genuine Indo-
English novel. Bhabani Bhattacharya was likewise a contemporary of these authors by birth,
yet he began composing fiction soon after Indian independence. The written work of these
writers moved the Indian English novel in the right course. They found an entire new world
in Indo-English fiction, and the Indian novel owes much to their endeavors for increasing
strong ground and accomplishing an identity it could call it own. They contours the ground in
which the Indian novel was to work, and brought the Indo-Anglian novel closer to the most
recent books of the West. They lay down the possibility, the way, the idea of character, and
the way of the topics which gave the Indian novel its specific uniqueness. They established
the framework for the true Indo-Anglian novel; each novel was giving the unique Indian
experience to its readers.

Indian fiction in English now appreciates noteworthy place over the world. From its modest
beginnings in the thirties it has progress beyond anyone’s expectations to develop at this very
moment contender to probably the most popular artistic prizes in the realm of literature.
Regarding fame and its penetration in readers has encountered marvelous achievement in the
late years. While it becomes well to praise its prosperity and delight in its wonderfulness, we
ought to additionally enquire into its qualities and shortcomings, its accomplishments and
breakdown and its present condition and future scenario from the edge of the twenty first
century to make it more popular in the world literature.
Indian English literature has achieved good acclaim in short span. Beginning with the three pioneers, in particular R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao, it goes ahead in the hands of the second era authors, for example, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sahgal lastly, it is enriched by late contestants into the field like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Rukun Advani and Boman Desai.

Indian fiction in English has been advanced by a few very skilled women writers including Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Attia Hosain, Santha Rama Rau, Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan, Gita Mehta, Kamala Das, Jumpa Lahiri, Namita Gokhale, Sobha De and Shashi Deshpande. They have written about Indian women and their predicaments and conflicting issues in the environment of contemporary India. At the same time, they have dissected the socio-cultural modes and values that have given Indian women their image and responsibility towards themselves and the society. The changing background has set these female writers in an objectionable position. Their main commitment comprises of their investigating the ethical and psychic issues and repercussion of their ladies characters alongside their endeavors to adapt to the difficulties and accomplish a new harmony of relationship with themselves and their society.

The former books by Indian women authors were extended up to the conventional picture of lady. In any case, presently, the depiction got to be practical about presenting her feeling of disappointment and estrangement. The characters made by them, similar to their makers, were shredded by conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. Their conflict of their values and its adjustment in connection with family and home pulled them asunder. The predicament of the working lady was still more awful, she is exasperated by her issues of married life and journey for self affirmation of her personality. The problem of new Indian lady has been
taken up for more full treatment by writers like Anita Desai, Gita Mehta, Shashi Deshpande and Nayantara Sahgal. These authors have by and large focused on the predicaments and issues of modern educated women basically with an urban base. The self-declared point of composing fiction on account of Indian authors like Shobha De, Gita Hariharan and Namita Gokhale has been to depict the difficulties of modern educated women with an urban base and sensibility. In the contemporary period a decent number of Indian English fiction writers have staggered the literary world with their esteemed contribution. Their works have advanced the world writing, and they have been rewarded with honors and prizes in the field of literature. However, a cautious investigation of their improvement makes it clear that there are two sorts of authors who added to the class of novel: The first gathering of scholars concentrated on the different social issue of India like poverty, class inequity, social creeds, strict religious standards and so forth which are praised by the West. The second gathering of authors incorporates the individuals who are Indian by birth however they have settled abroad, so they see Indian problems impartially. They are very comfortable with the English language and have improved English language with their imagination. Despite the fact that taking care of Indian sensibility these scholars are no more the submissive imitators of English. They have utilized English so artistically that the originality turns into an unmistakable component in their language. They have tried different things with the language and combined Indian soul in the foreign language. They have begat new words and informal expressions in English and included another flavor in English language. Some of these terms are presently acknowledged as English words. The West savored it with excitement and they have their perpetual place in English writing.

Sometime in the past the West used to perceive the ‘Third World’ authors with a sense of compulsion instead of real acknowledgment. It is regularly contended that if one needs to be
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seen in the west, one ought to show the East in unfavorable light. Frequently the Indian authors who present India, its way of life in the unfavorable light are considered for the honors. The west perceives the third world in a different way, where their eyes just see poverty, misery, terrorism, absence of framework, lack of democracy etc. Furthermore, the authors, articulate one of these are certain to be accepted by the West. However, in the most recent couple of years, the situation has changed. The Indian authors contribute a lot to the English fiction and they are no more inferior to their counterparts of West. They have their own English and their authentic experience to share.

Indian fiction in English has progress beyond anyone’s expectations from the thirties’ writers to the modern English fiction writers. The language which was once regarded as a language of the outsider or the language of the exclusive class is seen in a different way. As the quantity of the readers of Indian English fiction has expanded. Its maturity also progressed with the demand of the time. They are the authors who think and write in English. They have gone in different countries and they have their experiences to share with their audience. Indian English fiction is presently occupies a significant share of world literature. Indian English fiction has struggled a lot to make its own considerable position in the world literature and finally it emerges as a champion among the contemporary world literature.

Indian Booker Prize Winners like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and the late champ Arvind Adiga are Indian by birth. They are not conventional Indian English authors. All the three are comfortable with the English language. Medium is not in any manner an issue for them. Furthermore, additionally it is imperative that these authors have mostly lived abroad for, so they have absorbed the Western patterns and it gives them the separation to depict Indian issues impartially.
Women Writers of Indian English Fiction: The Making of a Tradition

Indian Writing in English has achieved a respectable position today and the credit for it goes to a decent number of women novelists. Indian writing in English is a new event as far as world literature is concerned. In spite of the fact that one can follow such authors in India to a century back, Indian writing in English has come into power just in the last couple of decades or somewhere in the vicinity. Some of these scholars have established their reputation among the best writers of the world but some national and regional women writers have to be content with a more contracted circle.

Women authors in India are moving forward with their solid and continuous pace which coordinates with the pace of the world. We see them blasting out in full sprout spreading their own particular individual aromas. They are considered for their creativity, adaptability and the indigenousness which are conveyed through their works.

Indian women authors like Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan, Gita Mehta, Kamala Das, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kamala Markandaya, Namita Gokhale, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Anita Desai and Sudha Murthy just to give some examples, who keep their ground in the women authors’ universe of initial dismissal, downfall, familial bonds, family life and so forth. It is beyond belief to note that these authors and numerous more have gained success slower and in painful way.

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) was born in Mysore. She has completed her education in Madras. She is the first woman writer in the era of Indian English fiction. She is the most exceptional and prominent female writers in the area of Anglo-Indian fiction. She is not the same as the contemporary authors in the portrayal Indian sensibilities but she has her own style of writing. She achieves a unique position among the female novelists of India. She has
made important contribution in Indian English fiction after the Second World War. In her books, she exhibits the reality of Indian society perfectly.

She worked as a journalist and afterward served in the armed force. Soon after Independence, she left the India and settled permanently in England. Her strong point lies in writing realistic and poignant stories of urban and rural India. The focal topic in her works has been the strong human spirit in the changing social and political conditions. As a novelist, she becomes first among the equal by her sensitive creation of individual characters and situations in her novels. Her exposition style is resonant and controlled. She possesses a conspicuous spot among the Indian-English authors. She won worldwide distinction and name after the distribution of her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* in 1954. She is honored with an unprecedented vision of life. She is a pioneer individual from the Indian Diaspora, and her best novel, *The Nowhere Man* (1972) anticipates numerous diasporic issues with which we are distracted today.

Nayantara Sahgal was born in 1927 into India’s most famous political family. Her mother Vijayalakshmi Pandit was the first ambassador to the U.N., the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru was her uncle, Indira Gandhi, the first woman Prime Minister of India was her cousin. Being a part of such an influential political family it was obvious that her works are affected by the political issues related with her family and the country. Her written work is by and large known for her simplicity and boldness. She honestly portrayed the contemporary Indian political situation in her novels.

Nayantara Sahgal has written many fictional and non-fictional works. She received the Sinclair Prize for Fiction, the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize. Sahgal first wrote *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954), a personal diary about her youth.
in the midst of the Nehru family. She then starts to write fiction, frequently setting her stories around individual clashes in the midst of Indian political emergencies. Sahgal wrote other political works like *The Freedom Movement in India* and *Indira Gandhi, Her Road to Power*. The differences between the idealism at the time of India’s freedom and the ethical decay of post-Nehru India that is especially apparent in *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977). It repeats in such Sahgal books as *Rich like Us* (1985), which faces corruption, oppression, and civil disorder while enumerating the inner clashes in a businessman’s family. Two of Sahgal’s later books, *Plans for Departure* (1985) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988), are set in the background of colonial India.

She was determined to write on the women’s issues. She defined woman’s own identity in the Indian patriarchal society. Her emphasis was on the oppressed classes. Her novels bring out Nayantara Sahgal as a novelist with women’s activist concerns and looking for self independent existence of women. She find Indian women to be the victims of Indian patriarchal society and struggling to establish their identity among them. Sahgal’s mainly focuses on the question of identity-crisis for women. She believes:

Through the rewriting women do, new Sitas and Savitris will arise, stripped of false sanctity and crowned with the human virtue of courage. Then at last we will know why they did what they did, and how their lone, remote struggles can help our search for identity and emancipation. (Sinha 222)

Kamala Das, the disputable poetess, was a victim of child marriage and three kids followed by her marriage. Her spouse was in accord that she ought to pursue her instinct and by doing so she can help the family to expand the family income. In any case, being a lady, she couldn’t work in a standard morning till-night working schedule. But her writing timetable
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was a night-till-morning undertaking when the family had all gone to bed. Her writing table was the kitchen table where she used to cut the vegetables; she clears the table and start writing over there. These working hours affected her health adversely but it gave her time to deal with other home chores also.

Kamala Das was a noteworthy Indian English poet and writer and also an important Malayalam writer of Kerala. Her fame in Kerala is mainly because of her short stories and autobiographical work. But in English she is famous for her fiery poems and her unambiguous autobiography. Her bold and transparent treatment of female sexuality, free from any feeling of blame and imbue makes her writing more effective, but it also makes her skeptic in her era. Despite the fact that some may name Das as feminist for her genuineness in managing women’s necessities and wishes but Das has never attempted to recognize herself with any specific variant of women’s activist. Das’ perspectives can be portrayed as strong response that is similar to her poem which is free from other’s thoughts of good and bad. Das has wandered into zones unclaimed by society and gave a new perspective to her contemporaries.

Anita Desai was born in 1935 in Delhi. Her mother was a German mother and father was a Bengali. She can speak German, Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and English. Because of her knowledge of many languages as well as her parents from different parts of the world she came in contact with the vast range of literature which develops her interest in literature. About her feelings towards India once she wrote, “I see India through my mother’s eyes, as an outsider, but my feelings for India are my father’s, of someone born here”. (Andrew 2)

Anita Desai’s first novel ‘Cry the Peacock’ was published in 1963. Following the success of her this novel she wrote many other famous novels like ‘Fire on the Mountain’, ‘The Village
by Sea’, ‘Where Shall We Go This Summer?’, ‘Games at Twilight’, ‘Bye-bye Blackbird’, ‘Clear Light of Day’, and ‘In Custody’. Anita Desai has also written English short stories which are very famous in the English Literature. Most of her novels and short stories’ themes are more or less related with her own life and her personal experiences. In most of her novels her heroines are from the Indian middle class family. She depicts the problems of their life in maintaining the familial relationships. In her novels she has strikingly focused on the ruin of Indian customs and traditions.

During her career as an author she won many awards. She got Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978, Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize in the year 1978, Guardian Children’s Fiction Prize in 1983, Alberto Moravia Prize for Literature in 2000 and Benson Medal of Royal Society of Literature in 2003. She has been three times short listed for Booker Prize.

Shashi Deshpande is a daughter of Shriranga, the famous Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar. She was born in Dharwad in Karnataka, South India. She was graduated in Economics from Mumbai, and then went to Bangalore, where she got a degree in Law with Gold Medal. The early years of her marriage were to a great extent offered over to bring up her two young children however she did a course of journalism and also worked for a magazine. She has delineated various aspects of women’s life.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the broadly read post-independence Indian English authors. Her writings depicted the issues that are related with the modern educated working class woman of middle class families. She addresses to the majority and includes a more extensive region of modern Indian society in her fiction. She is not just aware of the issues and situations of Indian women, but she also tries to recommend answers to their problems. Her writing profession started from 1970, at first with short stories, of which a few volumes have been
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published. These incorporate *The Intrusion and Other Stories* and *Collected Stories Volume I and II*. She wrote four children’s’ books, including *Narayanpur Incident, A Summer Adventure, The Hidden Treasure* and *The Only Witness*. Her other notable novels are *The Dark Holds No Terror, That Long Silence*, which won the Sahitya Academy Award, *Small Remedies, The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time, Moving On* and recently published *Shadow Play*. She also wrote collection of essays like, *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*. She started her work with national magazines, for example, *Femina* and *Eve’s Weekly, The Illustrated Weekly of India and The Junior Statesman* etc.

Deshpande’s novels basically concerned with the issues of women and she sympathizes with them while writing her novels. Shashi Deshpande has depicted the plight and conflicts of modern educated middleclass women’s problems in the Indian patriarchal society. Her heroines are standing at the crossroads where at one side they have to keep their social and traditional values intact and on the other side they want to express themselves, want to celebrate their individuality and want to be independent. In her novels Deshpande has depicted the desire of women to be a complete human being without her roles as a daughter, a wife and a mother.

Gita Mehta was born in 1943 in Delhi in the freedom fighter’s family of Odisha. She is the daughter of Biju Patnaik, the celebrated political head of Orissa. She finished her study in India and UK. Mehta involves an extraordinary position as an author who clarifies extraordinarily Indianness in a reasonable and careful voice. The topic of her fiction and non-fiction is solely centered on India, its way of life and history, and the Western notion about India. Her works mirror that her understanding increased through her journalistic and political environment of her family. Gita Mehta presently is the author of books like *Raj* and *A River Sutra* and non-fiction books like *Karma Cola* and *Snakes and Ladders*. Her literary
work is basically local with a feeling of worldly being which is the main reason of her
popularity as a writer. Her style is powerful, unusual and centered into the Indian brain and
reason. Yet, other than that she has even written various articles for different Indian,
European and American magazines. She made documentaries for European and American
TVs. Her works have been translated in more than thirteen languages of the world and
published in twenty-seven nations.

Shobha De was born in 1948 in Maharashtra. She has started her career as a journalist after
completing her graduation in Psychology. Serious critics of literature do not consider her
novels as a good piece of literature as it lacks that style and content of rich literature.
However, the selling of her novels in India and abroad in large numbers shows that she is one
of the best novelists of India. Shobha De has contributed in the different profession starting
from a journalist, a model, a scriptwriter, a socialite and a novelist. She has moved far from
the generally accepted way to go. She has really embraced a genuine investigation of the
man-woman relationship in the institution of marriage. She has made certain astute remarks
that will help the Indian women to achieve a respectable position in Indian patriarchal
society. She says:

    A woman ought to announce to her partner right at the beginning of the
    relationship that she too has a set of priorities and prerogative(s) other than
    him because men don’t like to be taken by surprise. (Shobha De Scribd)

Shobha De was committed to give exposure to women’s problems and their situation in the
Indian society. She is one of the best Indian English writers who have enriched the world of
Indian English literature with their works. She had a great mastery in discussing sensitive
aspects of Indian society.
Gita Hariharan was born in 1954 in Coimbatore, India. She took her education from Mumbai, Manila and later in the United States. She has worked in Chennai, Mumbai and New Delhi, first as a editor in a publication house, then right now working as a freelancer. She is the author of many famous books, *The Thousand Faces of the Night*, which won the Commonwealth’s best first book award in 1993, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master, When Dreams Travels, In Times of Siege* (2003), and *Fugitive Histories* and her short stories’ collection *The Art of Dying*. She has likewise edited *A Southern Harvest*, a volume of short stories from four noteworthy South Indian Languages. Gita Hariharan’s work belongs to that of Indo-English Renaissance which started with the debut novel of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children* in the mid 80s. Gita Hariharan utilizes the fiction as a medium to transmit the way of life of women and shows how woman survive even in the odd circumstances of her life and analyzes the survival strategy of women. The center of her novels is the inward lives of women. Her works have been interpreted into French, Spanish, Dutch and German, and however she is hesitant to see herself as a feminist writer whose writing has turn into an important part of women’s writing in India.

Arundhati Roy was born on November 24, 1961 in Assam; Her earliest novel *The God of Small Things* published in 1906, in the consequence of the success of *The God of Small Things*, Roy has published numerous articles and worked for social reasons. She won the Booker Prize for writing in 1997 for her first novel, *The God of Small Things*, a novel which achieved a huge response everywhere throughout the world. The novel, *The God of Small Things* is an autobiographical novel in nature. In 2002, she won the Lannan Cultural Freedom Prize. In the wake of winning the Booker Prize for *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy has concentrated her works on political issues. She has been in the news for her resistance to the Narmada Dam project, which she has expressed that project just help the rich land owners.
of Gujarat. The individuals who contend that the dam will advantage poor workers have completely censured this. She composed the screenplays for *In Which Annie Gives it Those Ones* and *Electric Moon*. She has severely criticized the neo-colonialist approaches of the United States. She has condemned India’s atomic weapons program and criticized it in her essay *The End of Imagination*. She has declined to accept the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2006.

In the same way as other Indian authors of the past era including Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Salman Rushdie, Roy addresses the topic of history and the individual; likewise like them she makes a minute observation of political persons and depicted them very effectively in her works. She is greatly connected with her local and national traditions and culture which is apparently seen in her subjects, styles, scene, pictures and obviously, in her effective experimentation with English language. Roy’s Indianness can be reflected in the depiction of her characters. Her Indian sensibility is also reflected from her various themes.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1967 in London. Her first book, *Interpreter of Maladies* was a collection of short stories. She was awarded by the Pulitzer Prize, the first individual of South Asia to win an individual prize. In 1999, she was named by The New Yorker as the 20 best scholars less than 40 years old. Her first novel *The Namesake* published in 2005 has been awarded with the *best book of the year* award. Lahiri’s talent to convey the age old established cultural clashes in the most effective way and to accomplish the voices of a wide range of characters are among the one of a kind qualities that has caught the consideration of a wide group of readers. Lahiri depicts the viable and emotional problems of her different characters in graceful and direct writing. Whether portraying the difficulties of a lonely Indian wife adjusting with life in the United States or reveling the hidden pain of a young
couple as they talk about their betrayal amid a progression of electrical blackouts, Lahiri’s clashing stories maintain a strategic distance from wistfulness without forsaking empathy.

These women writers of India have taken the Indian English Literature at the new heights. They are able to sensitively portray a world that is aptly portrays the problems of women with a great acumen. Their heroines are real women of the society they are portrayed in the background of their society, their men, their children, their families; their mental make-up and themselves.

Presently writing in India has not been dealt with just as a medium for entertainment alone. Female writers in India do not just write simple stories of imaginative world and intrigue. Women writers in India not just impress you with only their practical disposition; however they also make you nod with their wisdom and understanding. The main women novelists snap the normal Indian readers out of their ordinary Indian smugness in regards to gender issues. One may have a tendency to consider ladies authors just in a Mills and Boon context, yet women writers in India have demonstrated that they are made of sterner and a greater number of genuine stuff than that. Indian female writers have pondered over complex issues, for example, sexuality, sensuality, servility, oppression of women, and patriarchal society. They have taken care of these issues with a feeling of parity, never slighting our Indian customs, yet finding that there is all the more in the offing.

Female authors in India can never be declared the property of India alone but their work and art belong to the world. Therefore, this brief study of Indian women writers in English unmistakably demonstrates that these writers have made their unique contribution in the development of Indian English fictions.
Shashi Deshpande: The Making of an Artist

Shashi Deshpande is undoubtedly the most significant of the contemporary Indian woman writers in English. Possessing a exceptional insight into the whole vista of women’s predicament in the present day custom bound Indian society, in her works she has depicted the subtle influences and factors which have contributed to the none happy position of womanhood in India under the patriarchal society. Her female protagonists are from the middle class families and present them as intelligent, sensitive, educated and career oriented women, presenting them as individuals capable of breaking away from the traditional constraints to redefine their identities in tune with the changed social ambience of the modern times. Resembling with the others writers of her time she also deals with the theme of excesses committed upon the women for centuries and their deep but quiet suffering leading to an attitude of passive resignation. But rather than adopting a hostile approach she has consideration for a home — of peace and love — that can give a feeling of security to the women. Her women are not passive sufferers. They revolt against the established customs and try to search their own identity in the hostile world of male Chauvinism.

Deshpande’s representation of things is widely different from that of Desai or Sahgal or Markandaya. In her fictional world there is a mixture of three main facets of human lives which are social, political, and psychological, though in her writings there is an emphasis on the psychological realism of human psyche, yet, her characters are not neurotic characters, neither are they withdrawn from their day to day lives. Though they are deep probing individuals yet fully social with their surroundings. Though Deshpande’s woman also faces various dilemmas and is torn between the pulls of traditional female archetypal values and her individualistic values, however, she skillfully deals with her turmoil and makes a balance between these conflicting values. She emerged in the Indian fictional scenario in the late 70s.
She has formed a position for herself by her important contribution to the Indian English literature. She has a great skill in projecting a true picture of the middle class woman who finds herself standing at the cross-roads of tradition and modernity and is caught in the dilemma of choosing either of the two.

Shashi Deshpande has repeatedly refused to be categorized as a feminist writer. She has taken an impartial view of life from a female’s point of view by bringing in all the wisdom of a sensitive writer that she has. As she has confirmed in many of her public speeches and interviews, she believes in having a contented family life, despite she is pleading for the liberty of woman in the Indian social condition. Her philosophy of life is articulated in many of her novels and stories.

Deshpande is possibly the only Indian author who made an attempt to give voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women, regardless of her vigorous denial of being a feminist. Her novels explore the search of the woman to fulfill herself as a human being, free from her conventional role as daughter, mother and wife.

The daughter of noted Kannada playwright Sriranga, Shashi had a free spirited childhood in Dharwad. Married to a doctor from a conservative background at 24, she refers to a turning point in her emotional life:

Despite marriage and motherhood, I felt very incomplete, even dissatisfied. That’s when I read Betty Friedan’s. *The Problem without a Name*, I felt, I’m not only a woman. I’m not only a mother. I’m not only a wife. I’m not only a female. I’m a human being with a mind. It gave me a lot of unhappiness that my intellect wasn’t being connected to my female self. I was always
Mrs. Deshpande, Raghunandan’s mother, Vikram’s mother…. That anger ultimately translates into feminism. (Deshpande The Hindu)

For Shashi Deshpande writing was a means to self-discovery. She was infuriated when she was known as somebody’s wife, somebody’s daughter and mother. She fights for the acknowledgment of women as individuals. She presents her ideas gently but firmly, her words lingering, long after her exit.

Deshpande grew up in a house which had harmonious mixture of languages. Her father, Adya Rangachar better known as Sriranga, taught Sanskrit in a college and wrote plays of ideas in Kannada, but opted to send his daughters to study in English-medium convent school. From her father nevertheless she must have acquired an intellectual bent of mind and a keen love for reading and scholarship which won her various academic degrees. At the age of fifteen she went to Bombay, graduated in economics then obtained a degree in law, a post-graduate degree in English literature and a diploma in journalism. At present she lives in Bangalore with her pathologist husband and two sons. Deshpande began her literary career rather late. About what prompted her to start writing, she says:

My husband was a commonwealth scholar and we went to England. We were there for a year. I thought it would be a pity if I forgot all our experiences there. So I started writing them down and gave them to my father. He gave them to ‘Deccan herald’ ...... which published them promptly. So it began very accidentally. Then I was working for ‘The Onlooker’ when one of the subeditors said to me “Why don’t you write story?” so I wrote one...and then I wrote on and on as though I was crazed. There was no thinking or worrying about the theme, the technique or publisher. I simply wrote. (Vanamala)
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She chooses English language as the medium of her literary expression yet the Indian sensibility, the Indian experience is echoed in her writings and this fact makes her work more authentic and hence the readers feels more at home. Her writings are characterized by a racy style of narration and a crisp language nevertheless; it always remains the language of common people. It is not foreign to her readers, as it never fails in its expression. At no place does the reader find himself unable to correlate with the writer’s thought as Vanamala Viswanatha, her interviewer, writes about her language “It does not draw attention to itself, nor does it come in the way, there is no attempt either to make it obviously Indian. Most of it seems to be unplanned and spontaneous.” (Varnamala) Deshpande writes in English because she finds it the most convenient mode of self-expression. “I never did study Marathi or Kannada. And even importantly I haven’t used these languages as working tools.” (Varnamala) She is capable of using the English language felicitously as it is no longer a foreign language to her, as she further writes — “My English is as we use it” (Varnamala)

Deshpande’s works reflect a realistic picture of contemporary middle-class Indian woman. She deals very minutely with women’s issues and depicts the plight of today’s educated, middle-class Indian woman. Deshpande shows how the new woman is struggling hard to adjust herself in the conservative and tradition-bound society rather than to get free from it. She is trying to find and preserve a room of her own within the orbit of its society. It is for the courageous and sensitive treatment outstanding contribution in contemporary Indian, English fiction. She sensitively portrays the lot of Indian woman and her much convoluted self-abnegation that she practices in the process of becoming an ideal daughter, ideal sister, ideal wife and ideal mother. Deshpande attempts to intimately analyze human relationships and more emphatically man-woman relationship within the orbit of family and, society therefore her range is rather narrow like that of Jane Austen’s novels. Deshpande confines, herself to
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the ‘experience with in the four walls’ and most of her creative writings present a typical middle class house-wife’s life. Her main concern is to find oneself, to create space for oneself, to grow on one’s own.

Another striking thing about her writing is the reoccurrence of certain themes as some themes of her longer works are the enlargement of her short stories. However, the predicament of women especially those who are educated and belong to the middle-class has been most prominently dealt with. The strong point about her writings is the delineation of women’s inner world, which is quite authentic and unique as there is no exaggeration of things.

It is this oppressed woman whom Deshpande talks about in her fiction as well as in her stories. She concentrates on the psychological and emotional turmoil of today’s educated, self-aware and highly sensitive woman and the emotional and sexual confusion suffered by the new woman in a tradition-bound society. However, in no way does she create any utopia for women, at no place she talks of making any ‘female enclaves’. In fact she does not create the world rather she presents the world as it is and how it looks from a woman’s point of view, and in this way she poses a certain serious questions regarding the lot and-conditions of woman in our country. This is the main concern of the novelist as she herself declares it:

My main preoccupation has been with women and their difficult situations. In all my novels the A protagonist is always a woman...... Being a woman, it was very natural for me to write about the special awareness which I looked at the world in which suffered and struggled as they did. Being a woman I could appreciate their predicament better. (Mukherjee 222)

The above mentioned statement of the writer would sufficiently explain her serious efforts to venture into fresh fields and pastures new. Though other women writers also deal with the
issue of women however there remains a difference between their approach and that of Deshpande, perhaps her being brought up in India only and remaining here gives her works a more authentic and realistic note therefore in her works we find no exaggeration, neither nay vain glorification of the women characters. Most of the Indian writings that deal with woman’s issues, offer only a peripheral treatment of the subject or end-up glorifying the stereotype virtues of Indian women like patience, devotion, self-sacrifice and an abject acceptance of whatever is meted out to them. Such writings tend to present Indian woman as the epitome of all virtues and a demi-goddess.

Deshpande’s works contain-so much that can be regarded as the staple material of feminist thought: women’s sexuality, the gender roles, man-woman relationship, self-discovery and so on. Her fictional world is so clustered with inhibited, vulnerable and dependent women characters that her preoccupation becomes quite apparent as Prema Nanda Kumar writes,

Here is a legion of Indian women who form a colorful quilt so typical of the spreads found in middle-class households what a varied stuffing. Women dying suddenly, women dying slowly, women dying young mothers, women with too many children, women with no children, women who are crazy, women who are pseudo intellectuals, women who are practical, women who are psychos, brother’s wives, husband’s sisters, abandoned wives, widows etc. (Kumar The Sunday Herald)

The statement by the renowned critic proves that Shashi Deslipande is undoubtedly a writer of feminine sensibility if not a feminist. Though Deshpande’s main concern is to bring forth the real plight of the Indian women, she is reluctant to such claims that declare her to be a
feminist. She very strongly refuses any such label though at the same time she does not refuse that she raises women’s issue in her novels.

It is a curious fact that serious writing by women is invariably regarded as feminist writing. A woman who writes of women’s experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, roused her strong feelings. I don’t see why this has to be labeled feminist fiction... Any woman who writes fiction shows the world as it looks to a woman... But to present this viewpoint is not necessarily to be a feminist. It seems that it is, on the whole, difficult for a woman to be judged purely as a writer... I know literature has to be valued in the social context but to apply the tag of feminist is one way, I’ve realized, of dismissing the serious concerns of the novel by labeling them, by calling the work propagandist. (Holmström)

Deshpande shows a great insight into the complexities of human behavior, like other contemporary women writers she too is aware about the predicament of woman in our country and therefore her writings are feminist however she shows a marked difference of approach. Instead of focusing on the sociological aspects, and political and sociological realism (as in the works of Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sahgal respectively) she concentrates on the psychological realism; Though her psycho-analytical treatment of her character brings her much closer to writes like Anita Desai however the essential difference between the two remains that Desai’s protagonists are ultimately lost in the world of their dilemma, confusion whereas Deshpande’s heroines have a strength of their own, and in spite of challenge and hostilities, they remain uncrushed. Though they too suffer from the loss of faith, love and they too suffer from a poignant feeling, of alienation and withdrawal however they never consider existence to be a problem and there is a strong spirit of survival in them.
Shashi Deshpande has presents a logical story of genuine characters and not shadowy abstractions, airy nothingness without a local habitation and name. In fact she believes in presenting life as it is and not as it should be. Her women are introspective, self-aware, inward probing and representative of girls in post-independence India. A time when most parents strove hard to provide their daughters with English education and when there is an exposure to western modes of living and thinking. In this way they develop a duality in their nature. In their character on the one hand there is an impulsive desire to be liberated, be independent in their manners of living and thinking and on the other hand there is an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative so that sometimes they possess a near schizophrenic personality: one side of their personality steadily accepts the traditional norms and values and follow the female archetype in order to avoid any conflict in their lives, on the other hand at the same time in their psyche they remain conscious of all the compromises that shatters peace of mind hence the other side of their consciousness craves to speak, to think and then to express the life of the mind.

For her portrayal of this predicament of middle class educated Indian women, their internal problem and search for identity, issues pertaining to parent-child relationship; marriage and sex and women’s exploitation and disillusionment. Deshpande is essentially regarded a writer of female consciousness. Due to these concerns Deshpande has been called a feminist. She does not deny the fact that her writings are feminist in tone as she says,

I am a feminist in the sense that, I think, we need to have a world which we should recognize as a place for all of us human beings, there is no superior-and inferior, we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simone de Beauvoir that “The fact that we are human, is much more important than our being men and women. I think that’s my idea of feminism. (Tandon 177)
It is in this light that Deshpande’s concern for Indian woman must be considered. Her work mediates between the present state of woman and female feminist consciousness. Her insight and depth of perception ensure that her fictional creations rise above the ‘staple-whodunit’ sort of work or mere ideological subscriptions because to her... “Feminism isn’t a matter of theory”. She tells her interviewer, elaborating her point of view:

....and then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experience. And I actually feel that a lot of women in India are feminist without realizing it. (Tandon 174)

Be that as it may, Deshpande makes gender central to her writings. Her works deal not only with ordinary women in ordinary, urban situations but stem from a firm belief that our lives are to a great extent governed by gender. Women, she feels, have not participated in the process of word-making; the stories myths and legends in our Puranas, epics and katha have been written by men. Moreover, women have been conditioned to a great extent by myth;

To be as pure as Sita, as loyal as Draupati, as beautiful as Laxmi, as bountiful a provider as Annapoorna, as dogged in devotion as Savitri, as strong-as Durga - these are ultimately the role models we cannot entirely dismiss. (Agarwal 76)

Deshpande feels that women never start with a picture of themselves on a clean slate, their self-image honed by the hegemonic influences of myths, movies and current-day soap operas. She sees herself as a writer whose writing comes of, she says:
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My own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, it comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing the different roles enjoyed on me by society, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and something different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of a consciousness, of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman.

(Prasanna 93)

Deshpande’s real concern is to explore the root cause of the fragmentation and dichotomy of her characters and to observe what happens in the psyche. Therefore Deshpande’s fictional achievement should not be seen in terms of her subscription or non-subscriptions to feminism because a writer of substance is committed to human issues and situation and not necessarily to any particular ideology. She chooses the path of conciliation without yielding either to absolute acceptance or to the temptations of embracing the militant feminist mould. Her works mediate between these two extreme. Her introspection and psychological probe make her second to none in revealing the subconscious and unconscious psyche of her heroines and other minor characters. She is much more vociferous in voicing her fears and concerns regarding the future of women in uncongenial surroundings.

Broadly speaking the protagonists in Shashi Deshpande’s fiction can be roughly categorized on the basis of various roles or situations they exist in. Women in her fiction are portrayed in all their myriad roles as mothers to their children, as a daughter, as a wife or as a woman in relationship with a man or simply as an individual in her own right. She has also portrayed some mythological characters in her stories, peeping into their inner selves and giving in the process, a refreshingly new meaning to their personalities. However, whatever the conditions they operate in, through her characters, Shashi Deshpande shows the new Indian woman and
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her dilemma. She concerns herself with the plight of modern woman trying to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all as a human being. Through her writings, Deshpande unveils the subtle process of oppression and gender differentiation that is at work in the family and the male dominated society. Deshpande shows great sensitivity and awareness of the ways and means through which a woman is conditioned to accept her position in the society as one of subservience to men. Woman’s perception of herself in various roles is conditioned by the thought patterns handed down to her by moral, intellectual and social order which has been formed by men. They are confined to their homes, oppressed, suppressed and marginalized and denied the opportunities for fulfillment of their lives. Even in the modern, changed ambience, her position is precariously unenviable. Today’s woman, standing on the threshold of social change, has an intense awareness of her social, economic and political exploitation, but in an attempt to give voice to her feelings of protest she has to reckon with the prospect of social ostracism for daring to question the sanctity of time honored and time tested traditions.

Thus in her fiction, Shashi Deshpande dramatizes some of the important relationships and questions some of the fundamental issues in the power structure and role divisions in the family. On the surface she may seem to be concerned more with ‘female isolation’ than with female achievement, but the fact that her women characters are indignant and capable of rational thinking sets them apart as women who are not average but capable of standing against the general current. By allowing her character to be different, Deshpande allows them to overcome the traditional pattern of womanhood. She takes a great interest in the social conditions that provoke tensions in the lives of contemporary women. If the yearning to exist as an individual can be dismissed as something external to the female goal of life and motherhood then what is needed is social reconstruction and not individual correction.
Deshpande stresses the socially and culturally binding norms that still disproportionately affect the lives of women and the intrinsic capacity of women to confront them with will power and confidence without being completely destroyed. In Shashi Deshpande’s fictions, another discernible feature is the portrayal of home as a place of extra mobility and female resistance. Her protagonists are able to achieve a dispassionate distance from their respective predicaments and make a realistic assessment of their immediate situation.

One interesting feature of Deshpande’s writing is the most of her character review their lives in a first person retrospective. By adopting this device the author manages to steer clear of lengthy descriptions or characterizations through interactions. The first person narrative also ensures the reader’s direct access to the protagonist. In some of Deshpande’s novels the characters remain anonymous. The namelessness of these characters renders them a universality and allows them to perform the function of the ‘spokeswomen’ of the new tradition of womanhood. As the female struggle has assisted in liberating woman for her tradition logged and time honored images, the artistic implantation of this struggle in fiction assumes greater importance. As a result the journey of selfhood and freedom and the female experience and self-exploration becomes a central motive. Rather than focusing on romance in its many variations or on social surroundings, as far as the thematic aspect is concerned, Deshpande is primarily interested in the individual with a predominant concern for the women-centered issues. Hence what is clearly discernible in Deshpande’s fiction is a desire to portray the complexity and sophistication of the modern woman and deliberate moving away from tradition of fiction as romance to a more meaningful and realistic representation of reality. As a result, the women she portrays in her fiction are bright, thinking individuals capable of rebellion, who are no longer ready to accept infinite suffering as their heritage. Deshpande is specifically concerned with the exploration of the mind of her characters. There
is a shift in her writing from the external world to the inner world of the individual. Her focus of interest lies in the portrayal of states of mind rather than in holding up the mirror to society. This probably explains the language given to the protagonists by her. Facilitated by the first person narrative, it creates a sense of authenticity and understanding between the heroine and her readers. The self indignation with a subtle touch of hopelessness that characterizes the voice of her protagonists very convincingly evolves into the final note of philosophical acceptance. Shashi Deshpande stresses the socially and culturally binding norms that still disproportionately affect the lives of women and the intrinsic capacity of women to confront them with will power and confidence without being completely destroyed. The determination of her protagonists not to allow themselves to be crushed by their suffering shows that they have the potential to develop further as individuals.

Through her fiction, Shashi Deshpande documents female resistance against the patriarchally defined concept of ideal womanhood. In her works therefore, the passive female surrenders her place to an intelligent sensitive woman who asks endlessly questions of life in order to elicit meaning of experience. The conflict between self fulfillment and duty is an important aspect of the female experience portrayed by her and it is symbolical of the opposition to the traditional prototypes. Her women are prepared to fight in order to find a way to retain their identities even while they are confined within the conventional moulds of marriage and homeliness. If resigned acceptance of heritage is taken to be failure in her protagonists then her women may present a tragic picture of failure but their success lies in their potential to fight for their survival.

On the whole, Shashi Deshpande has created her women protagonists who do not just stand for themselves but also for the creative ideas which the author wishes to convey. For her a clear cut solution to the women’s conflict is not essential for the survival of her heroines but
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the understanding of the individual predicament is of greater relevance of her. The doubts and misgivings experienced by her women and sometimes their seemingly resigned acceptance of their predicament constitute the central message of the artist. Her women realize how misplaced they are in their familial terrains and assert their need to move further and they are provided with the freedom of thought and speech. In her stories there is no absolute integration into the social and literary norms confirming to the traditional image of woman. On the contrary, Deshpande portrays in her stories, female experience that evolves in a series of movements of being totally victimized by society and man to a personality which consciously assumes control over her life. Most of her women end with an enhanced sense of self worth and are able to perceive fresh choices within the old framework. Her The Stone Women is a response to the male imagination of women, That Long Silence is means to articulate the silence women have been subjected to for centuries and The Dark Holds No Terrors: explores women’s anger. In all of them there is an assertion of feminist and a belief that recognition of women as persons as thinking human beings has to be on the basis of their individuality and not a concession made by men. To get rid of gender discrimination and to support women’s empowerment, their decision making ability must be enhanced inside the family, the offices and in the politics. Increased political influence should have impact for women’s equality in the other realms, which will in turn have implications for country’s performance against all milestones for social progress. The message these women in Deshpande’s fictional world convey is:

There is a need to move beyond the ‘given’ that is the gender constraints, the socio-cultural inheritance, the body as such, to move beyond the margin, the subordination, the captivity, the loss of will, plain and simple surrender. There
is a need to move towards self-realization and freedom and establish new relationship with the self as well as with the other (Jain, 285).

Shashi Deshpande is one of the famous contemporary Indian novelists in the field of English literature. Among the other novelists experimenting with the Indian writing in English, Shashi Deshpande has a unique place in the literary world. She is uniquely Indian and her use of words presents the customs and traditions of the people of India. She does not write for the foreign readers. She is Indian and writes for the Indians. She discussed about the inner world of the Indian females in her novels, as she herself admitted to Geeta Gangadharan in an interview:

We know a lot about the physical and the organic world and the universe in general, but we still know very little about human relationships. It is the most mystifying thing as far as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it, puzzle over it and write about it. And still find it tremendously intriguing, fascinating. (Pathak 197)

Deshpande portrays her heroines in a realistic manner. Basically she writes about the situation of women and their failures in the social surrounding of India. She writes about the conflict between tradition and modernity in relation to women in the middle-class society. A woman is the centre of her fictional world. Her desire, efforts and failures in the traditional Indian society are the main points in her novels. Her depiction of women’s world is authentic, realistic and credible. In her novels she presents middle-class women, those who are struggling for happy married life with their husband and children and with well earning sources.
A close analysis of Shashi Deshpande’s novels uncovers her profound knowledge into the predicament of Indian women, who feel covered and shackled, in a convention bound, male ruled society. She depicts her female characters in the light of their frustrations, fears, aspirations, and hopes, and women are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, but find themselves impeded by the opposition and pressure of society and the patriarchal psyche. She presents their inferior position and the subsequent degradation in a patriarchal society.

Deshpande’s characters are real and alive. They are not cardboards in black and white; they are grey characters that behave differently in different situations. She creates a world of characters and situations that are identifiable, and experience emotions that are at once complex and cathartic. There is so much detailing in her novels that one cannot but feel the joy and pathos of the characters inside oneself. They appear as mere description of one’s own feelings. She leaves back such imprints on the mind of her readers that they cannot let go the experience for a long time. She writes about families, real families, the bondages, the bindings and the confinements of relationships. She has been quietly writing for the last thirty years, without fanfare, without ceremony, about the human predicament, playing out the lives of ordinary people who we might encounter on the streets, bringing into sharp focus the meaning of life itself. Whether she writes short stories or novels, Deshpande writes mainly about everyday India, a society in which we breathe a culture to which we belong. Her major concerns emerge from our own environment, from our immediate world, holding up mirrors to our own lives.
Her Works

Author of eleven novels, six short-story collections, four children’s books, and numerous essays and articles—all in English—Shashi Deshpande has been writing steadily since the early 1970s. Her fifth novel, That Long Silence (1988)—which won India’s annual Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990 for best Indian-English novel—first brought her serious recognition in India, where it prompted a contract from Penguin India for her subsequent titles, and in Britain, where it was published by Virago, the London-based feminist publisher. It was not until the New York—based Feminist Press reissued A Matter of Time (1999) and The Binding Vine (2001) that any of Deshpande’s novels became readily available in the United States. She is married, has two sons, and lives quietly in Bangalore, India, although increasing recognition is requiring more frequent travel. Her work has been translated into five different Indian languages and six European languages.

Deshpande is best known for her close studies of middle—class female characters. in domestic settings. Typically, the married protagonist of her novels, faced with a personal crisis, withdraws from her workaday routine to reflect on her self and her situation. In the process she excavates a painful past, confronting the tragic loss of a family member such as a child or sibling and seeking to understand anew a failed or dysfunctional relationship with a parent or spouse. The resolution generally involves her return with a new attitude toward the seemingly intractable situation, after shed as realized what it will take to implement her new and difficult understanding. She understands that she has internalized a distorted self-image, seeing herself in terms of society’s powerful myths and stereotypes of women- "male fantasies worked into stone"—rather than as a real, multidimensional person. In the end, it is this change in her perspective that is important, rather than any change in her situation.
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The Dark Holds No Terrors is Shashi Deshpande’s first novel which won Nanjanagud Thirumalamba Award in 1980. Dark Holds No Terrors strongly addresses feminist issues of marital rape, the professional woman who earns more than her husband, and a mother’s preference for their sons over their daughters. Saru is a wife, doctor, and mother of two children who married Manohar for love and has been estranged from her parents ever since. The novel opens as Sarita arrives at her father’s home from Bombay, to escape from a husband who rapes her violently every night, but behaves the next morning as if nothing has happened. News of her mother’s death becomes the ostensible reason for Saru’s escape, since her low self-esteem has prevented her from confronting Manohar about his abuse. The rest of the novel consists of Saru’s flashbacks to her traumatic childhood, college and professional career, and married life, as she holes up in her childhood home. At last it is her father who urges her not to run away from her problems again but to face her husband when he comes to ask her to return. The novel ends as Saru is called away to attend a sick child, telling her father to ask Manohar to wait. Her social role as a doctor gives her the confidence to face him, in prompting the recognition that she has a public identity in addition to her private roles of daughter, wife, and mother and that, furthermore, she is “all of these and much more.”

Deshpande’s If I Die Today was published in the year of 1982. This is an interesting novel of Deshpande delineating the story of Mriga and other characters. The writer has attempted to draw attention to the matter of patriarchal society and its issues. If I Die Today is a detective Fiction of Deshpande. The narrator of the novels is a young lecturer Manju, and she has got married to Prem, a pathologist. They are living in the big campus of medical college and hospital. The story gets its turn on the entry of Guru, a cancer patient. His entry in the campus disturbs the lives of the doctors and their families get exasperate. With the advancement of the novel the old secrets are uncovered, two people killed, however the anxiety in the families
is resolved after the offender is unmasked. Mriga is one of the noteworthy characters in the novel; she is a 14-year-old young girl. Her dad, Dr. Kulkarni, seems modern and westernized, but he is seized by the Hindu wish for a son as his heir, and never excuses Mriga for not being his son. Her mom being a frail individual, never lived by her own wishes but have to live according to her husband’s wishes. She is a pitiful, stifled personality and excessively frail which making it impossible to give Mriga the support and affection. The story again focuses on the patriarchal society in an extremely delicate manner. The story of If I Die Today was influenced by Shashi Deshpande’s experience sat medical college campuses in Bangalore and Bombay.

Deshpande’s novel Roots and Shadows (1983) is about the conflict between tradition and modernity. That is how the shadows of progress change the roots of tradition. The misery of traditional women of Indian society in olden days has been brilliantly shown in this novel. Deshpande delineate the male domination in olden days in this novel. The protagonist of Roots and Shadows, Indu, undergoes great mental trauma in her childhood and after marriage due to her husband Jayant’s double standards. Though being highly educated and liberal, he is intolerant about any deviation on her part in performing her duties of traditional Indian wife. He is same like the other uneducated and conventional Indian men when it comes to playing the role of a husband. Moreover, the miserable predicament of Indu’s Kakis and Atyas is revealed to us through Indu’s eyes. The tragic moment of Akka’s child marriage reveals the miserable condition of Indian women of the older generation. Shashi Deshpande has aptly presented the inferior status of women by giving us an insight into the married lives of Indu’s aunts and other relations. Although Indu is educated and has a liberal outlook, she realizes bitterly that her generation is no different from her numerous illiterate and village bred aunts, and she too is a victim like them of the patriarchal society.
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_Come Up and Be Dead_ (1985) is a novel by Shashi Deshpande. In this mental thriller Shashi Deshpande display the flexibility of her creative capacities as a writer. The story deals with the suicide of a schoolgirl Mridula in school. The Head Mistress is not ready to deal with the situation as it is trailed by gossip that people are suspecting at her kin. Two more murders took place, making the school a position of anxiety and suspicion. The murder is unmasked at the end of the novel by Head Mistress’ cousin Devyani and relieve all from the tension in the school. This is an uncommon attempt by Deshpande with significant human rationality.

_That Long Silence_ (1988) was the novel that established Shashi Deshpande as a writer. It employs a first-person, confessional mode, with its setting entirely domestic and its action almost entirely in the realm of the protagonist’s consciousness. The novel’s external crisis is precipitated by the revelation that Mohan, husband of the middle-age protagonist Jaya, has been involved in high-level corruption at his job and must keep out of sight for a time. For that they move to an empty flat owned by Jaya’s family, where Jaya is alone for some time with a tough old maidservant, Jeeja, with troubles of her own. While Mohan travels to Delhi in an attempt to sort things out, Jaya attempts to write her life from within to work out what has gone wrong for people like her. She is not even aware of what exactly her husband has done wrong which shows her the degree to which she has been abdicated from her responsibility for their life together. Jaya returns to her husband at the novel’s conclusion with a new resolve to ‘erase the silence’ between Mohan and herself. While she knows that this resolve may be entirely one-sided and that change in the relationship will not come easily, she resists blaming her husband. While Mohan has not taken “the little woman” and her writing seriously, Jaya has come to recognize that she has been complicit in her own trivialization by playing the socially sanctioned role of the submissive wife. With whomshall be angry?” she asks. “With myself, of course (TLS 134).” Preparing to return to her marriage,
she asserts the necessity of carrying on: “If there is one thing I know It is this. Life has always to be made possible”(TLS 134).

In *The Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande raises up to this point untouched issue of marital rape. Women like Mira, have to tolerate the daily rape by their spouses silently. Other female characters like Sulu, Shakutai, Kalpana and her sister have their own sad stories. Shakutai’s husband is an irresponsible man, who leaves his wife and children for another woman. Kalpana is mercilessly raped by Prabhakar, Sulu’s husband. Urmi takes up initiative to get justice for Kalpana’s benefit and the offender is caught. On the other side is Urmi. Her spouse is in naval force and amid his long absence she hungers for some physical satisfaction. Her companionship with Dr Bhaskar gives her sufficient open door, yet she never violates the limits chalked out in marriage. In any case, the difficult perspective to this is that her virtues remain unacknowledged by her spouse.

*A Matter of Time* (1996) further extends Deshpande’s multigenerational scope in its use of female ancestors as role models and its return to the past to solve the problems of the present. It also extends the range of Deshpande’s earlier novels by giving subjectivity to a male voice for the first time. The novel begins with a domestic crisis that compels the female protagonist to return to the “Big House” her childhood home. Like the sage Yajavalkya of the Upanishads and other renouncers of old, Sumi’s husband Gopal suddenly decides to abandon the role of householder, leaving Sumi with three teenage daughters to raise alone. When she and her daughters are brought back to the Big House by Sumi’s silent father, her mother cries out, “No, no, my God, not again!”(MOT 57) For history has repeated itself: what has happened to the daughter once happened to the mother as well. The novel thus advances a double plot: the resolution of both the traumatic past of the Big House and the predicament of the abandoned Sumi and her daughters, particularly her eldest, Aru, who is angry and
resentful toward her father. In contrast, Sumi, like Yajnavalkya’s wife Maitreyi, accepts her husband’s decision. Rather than blaming him or wallowing in self-pity, she focuses on how she can step out of the shadow of the past to establish a measure of independence.

Deshpande’s eighth novel, *Small Remedies*, was published in 2000 to critical acclaim. Short-listed for India’s Crossword Prize, it has the broadest scope of any of her novels to date. Like *That Long Silence*, it is a first-person narrative, but here Madhu, who is grief stricken by the death of her son, is not writing a personal diary rather, she has been commissioned to write the biography of a legendary female classical singer. The project takes her out of herself at a time when she is paralyzed by her personal loss. In *Small Remedies*, Shashi Deshpande depicts a powerful women character. This novel exhibits the shifting role of women who don’t ready to accept their second rate status of woman in the family and in patriarchal society. Rather than being detached and being passive they fight against seemingly insurmountable opposition of traditions prevailed in the society to discover and uphold their independent identity. The major characters of the novel Savitribai, Leela, Munni and Madhu, with their womanly qualities exercise their freedom, strength, scholarly vitality, wisdom and ambition. They do not trade off with their pride while tackling their problems reasonably. They support their ethical and emotional power to survive in this male controlled society. They don’t permit them to get victimized of oppression, social conditioning, indoctrination, and anxieties. They are mindful of the treacheries piled upon them; they show a determination to confront the difficulties of life strongly.

The novel, *Small Remedies* looks into the lives of three women characters, one is passionate for music, and second one is an enthusiastic and staunch follower of communalism and the third one with creative writing. These three characters of her novel take up their fight alone against the society. Savitribai Indorekar’s defiant act to split from her family for her affection
of music is not an isolated, fanciful, personal decision. It rises above personal outskirts and turns into a piece of the key social and political agendas embraced by the late nineteenth century ladies, for example, Tarabai Shinde, Anandibai Joshi, Kashibai Kanetkar, Pandita Ramabai etc. who had the guts to resist against the repressive social system. The heroine and biographer Madhu exercises her choices, rejects her spouse’s essentialist’s approach and reconstructs her ‘self’. Like Bai, Leela, another significant female character too goes beyond the adequate limits set for women, however less breathtakingly. Shashi Deshpande has significant success in depicting woman as heroines in plots focused around the issues, for example, female underestimation, marital conflict, alienation, sexual suppression and the quest for self.

Shashi Deshpande’s novel Moving On presents the central character Manjari as a bold woman who refuse to accept the patriarchal ideology and live her life on her own way. Manjari shows great courage and commitment in her choice to leave her study to marry Shyam. Manjari also exhibits her strength as a bold woman when she comes to know that her sister Malu is made pregnant by her husband. She has to face a difficult time of tension when her husband commit suicide and her Sister Malu dies after giving birth to her daughter. Being alienated from her own family, Manjari was fighting with many issues to sustain the lives of her and her son. She rejected Raja’s repetitive proposals to marry him because she believes that marriage should take place on the basis of love but a marriage only as a means of protection for a single woman is not acceptable to her.

Manjari represents the image of bold modern woman by learning to drive her car and also trying to drive it as a taxi for her livelihood, by installing and using a computer and typing documents for as a means of self-employment. When she is threatened by the underworld mafia to create a psychological pressure to sell her familial home, Manjari rejected Raja’s
help to protect her life. She says: “I want the brakes under my feet, and not someone else’s. I don’t want a dual control, the control should be mine, mine alone.” *(Moving On 88)* Manjari’s efforts for sovereignty and for being independent are a challenge to patriarchal society.

In *In the Country of Deceits* Deshpande portrays the middle class Indian women who look for an independent identity different from that of the traditional one, who look for a role outside the socially accepted rules. She is one of Deshpande’s most radical heroines to date. After her parents’ demise Devayani decides to live alone in the Rajnur, disregarding the delicately voiced dissatisfaction with her family and companions. Gardening, teaching English and maintaining relations with Rani, a previous actress who settles in the town with her spouse and three kids, Devayani’s life is serene, instilled with a hard-won freedom. At that point she meets Ashok Chinappa, Rajnur’s new DSP, and they fall in love regardless of the fact that Ashok is much more elder to her, already married, and as both clearly aware from the very beginning that it is a relationship without a future. Deshpande’s tracks the predicament and falsehoods that overcome those got in the web of deception. This modest yet empathetic examination of the way of affection, faithfulness and deception builds up once more Deshpande’s position as one of India’s most considerable authors of fiction.

*Shadow Play*, a continuation of a prior novel of Shashi Deshpande, *A Matter of Time* (1996) is really about the delicacy of relationships that give life its significance. The novel reveals the numerous selves of the mass of characters that throng it. Though, the individual chronicles are laced around the heartless facts of the merciless world where we all live, the futile and devastating actions of terrorism, monstrosity against females be it violence at home or infringement displayed on their bodies in the brutal gang rapes. The topics took middle of everyone’s attention taking after the recent gang rapes in Delhi and Mumbai that saw countrywide remonstrations.
The language of the novel is excellent, it must be said that Shashi Deshpande has great capability with words, and obviously she imperatively enhances her language with Kannada and Sanskrit words without dispersing the perfect touch of English. *Shadow Play* is no exemption to the standard with its squad of female heroines possessing positions of prominence in the novel. Kalyani and Aru who integrated convention and advancement to lead dynamic and wholesome lives of Seema who grasps a bold vocation like modelling to satisfy her artistic and professional ambitions. Kasturi, the radical ‘New Woman’ who rejects all the obsolete standards of this savage society. Aru-the eldest amongst the kin in holding together the family after the heartbreaking demise of Sumi, in an accident. Kalyani plays a big role in taking Gopal back to the family, and it is she who segues his transformation from a careless father to a responsible father. Aru conceives it to be her right to safeguard the trust that holds the members of that house together.

The character of Gopal is carved on the lines that men should be forced to expect obligation regarding transforming their consciousness and the cognizance of society in general. Gopal who deserted his family twice to look for comfort in the peaceful Himalayas. Shashi Deshpande gives sufficient space of six chapters for Gopal to portray the story from his viewpoint, and to share his viewpoints, dissatisfactions and euphoria with the readers. The writer accepts Gopal and Kasturi’s another face of love in one another in their last years, deprived of any blame or remorse. In this manner, Shashi Deshpande in an oddity from radical feminists offers belief to male contribution in the women’s feminist movement.

Until recently, Shashi Deshpande’s oeuvre may have qualified as the best-kept secret in Indian-English writing, especially outside India, and there have been particular reasons for this relative invisibility. In India, Deshpande’s writing in English being rooted in a region made her work somewhat of an anomaly and limited its recognition for a time. Out of India,
the global market dictates the terms for the commercial success of an “Indian” novel and tends to sideline writers whose style and content do not conform. To paraphrase Meenakshi Mukherjee, Deshpande’s early novels were published at the time the post—Midnight’s Children generation of writers was becoming big news. Since she refused to play by global rules, she could not be included in this league. The only other exportable slot the media could think of was the “champion of oppressed women.” But anyone who has read her novels carefully knows that her special value lies elsewhere: in an uncompromising toughness, in her attempts to do what has never been attempted in English, her insistence on being read on her own terms, and a refusal to be packaged according to the demands of the market.

Nevertheless, with each successive novel, Shashi Deshpande’s distinctive voice is being heard ever more clearly. Small Remedies locates itself at the confluence between her own vision and the most insistent demands of our time: living with trauma and death, coming to terms with our individual and collective pasts, taking personal responsibility for change, and making life possible by retelling old tales.
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REFERENCES


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