Chapter I

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We talk of revolution-political and economic and
yet the great revolution in a country is one that
effects improvement in the status and living
conditions of its women. -Jawaharlal Nehru.

The social and cultural change in the post Independent India has created a society which generally believed that a nation or a society or even a family could progress only with the active participation of women in the overall development. Thus women have become an integral part of the society and have become conscious of the need to attain self-hood and establish their identity as an individual.

Twentieth century marked the beginning of Indian writing. The last two decades of the twentieth century added a new dimension to the Indian English Fiction. The writers of this period tried to understand problems concerning women and attempted to find solutions to their problems. Virginia Woolf in her work *A Room of One’s Own* emphasized that “women and fiction remain unsolved problems.”

India by the end of the Second World War was divided by all kinds of laws, caste and creed. There were social and psychological problems that were affecting
women in the male dominated societies. There were also all kinds of myths about the female inferiority that summarized the collective historical perceptions of men about women.

The 20th century has witnessed women’s experience explode as a critical form. Studies have been actively engaged with disrupting and denouncing practices that have trivialised and marginalized women. They sought to broaden interpretations and formulations so as to include all kinds of experience. Writers examined the nature of political oppression with an aim to dismantle social constructs that have ignored women’s experience.

Until the nineteenth century the experiences of women were not considered important. Women were invisible and even if their experience was understood as different, it was unimportant and inconsequential. However, the emerging consciousness among women, that their experience was different, propelled them to actively engage in sensitizing women’s experience over the years. Their experience has become a critical force to contend with. Writers sought to throw light on the problems of women to bring an awareness. Thus, trangressive writing at subverting the established canons came into existence.

Right from the Vedic age women were objects of subjugation and suppression. Men suppressed women. In “Manu Smriti” the rules of social behaviour for women is stated clearly. According to the Laws of Manu it is learnt that women are dependent on men throughout their lives. The general perspectives
about woman as a shadow-figure to a male caretaker, be he a father, a husband or a son, continue to persist. Man’s affinity with woman is not often the bond that exist between a master and a slave. It was believed that women should be kept in subordination to the male members of the family and should not have independence. Men dominate and domineer over women. They failed to understand the fact that both men and women are essential parts of creation. Thus woman is never considered an autonomous self, but as just incidental. This state calls for a concerted effort to demolish such notions and assert the dignity and equality of women in the family as well as in the wider social life.

Plato observes in his *Republic* that the only difference between man and woman is one of physical function. One begets and the other bears children. To quote Alfred Tennyson’s *The Princess*: “Man for the field and woman for the hearth; Man for the sword and women for the needle she; man with the head, and woman with the heart; Man to command, and woman to obey; All else is confusion”. (6)

In the late 60’s women’s writings gained prominence because the writers took it up as their bounden duty to discover their women’s self entrapment in the patriarchal society. The urge to discover one’s self and its relation to the world have become the important thrusts of these novelists. Most of them observed that culture and society is male centered - be it familial, religious, political or social and economic fields. These writers began to articulate their observations and
experience which had so far remained hidden secrets. As Gilligan observes, "when the observer is a woman, the perspective may be of a different sort" Gilligan, 1982:5. At this point of time it is essential to quote Virginia Woolf:

It is probable, however, that both in life and in art, the values of women are not the values of a man. Thus, when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values- to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. (75-81)

It would be unfair to refute the difference in gender which permits them to adopt different temperament and characteristic features.

Today woman's quest for identity and recognition and her struggle to assert her identity in an ancient tradition bound society and community has become the most important global phenomenon. Many women's liberation movements and organizations have come into existence. These movements expressed concern for women and strong protest against the patriarchal society. They created awareness about the need for defining the roles of women in the society. This woman consciousness brought about a radical change in man-woman relationship and resulted in the new image and new concept of woman which moved towards the direction of emancipation. By doing so they do not refuse womanhood. Instead they try to redefine womanhood by rejecting patriarchal order. This paved way for the emergence of women writers.
Many women writers and novelists began to voice their problems. Thus the very basis of their feminist writings brought about reform and change in the social milieu against the oppression and discrimination of women. It gave them all courage for questioning the position of women. They believed that every woman is an individual. They expressed concern over the treatment meted out to women in the patriarchal society. According to them women are exploited and oppressed victims of patriarchy and they are being reduced to a secondary position like a cog in a machine. Above all women writers recognized that women are the victims of sexual myths created about them.

In such a phallocentric culture women are characterized as irrational, passive and dependent in contrast to men, who are considered rational, active and independent. The question is: “Are women naturally more submissive or are they taught to be more submissive? Are men inherently more dominant or does our society propel men into more dominating roles? The socialization process of patriarchy shapes and institution alises sex roles and suggests that “the characteristics of maleness and femaleness are not biologically determined but they are based on cultural definitions of a male chauvinistic and sexual society.

The women writers, keeping in view the circumstances and choicelessness that characterize the situation of women highlight their problems. The age long prejudices became the prime concern of the literary writings of Indian, Indo, English, British, South African, Afro - American, Canadian writers all over the
world. R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Henrik Ibsen are some of the writers who significantly represented the place of women in the society and focused their attention on the issues of identity, alienation, suppression etc. In Indian context the spirit of individuality and human dignity was responsible for the rise of fiction in Indian writing in English.

Indian fiction in English is usually associated with the trio Mulkraj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. It includes a few others too, from Bankim Chatterjee, Amitav Ghosh, Arun Joshi, Kushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, and Bhabani Bhattacharya. All these writers dwelt on the themes of emergence of new social consciousness, of aspirations in Indian society.

R.K. Narayan, the novelist of international repute is a minute observer of society and is quite familiar with the developments within an Indian family. In most of his novels he has highlighted the plight and predicament of the common house wife in Indian family. The writer ironically states that helpless woman is a victim of exploitation in the man dominated society. In fact a woman’s economic dependence on man is the important cause for domestic discords in Indian families and hence she is always at the mercy of her father, husband or son throughout her life. The works of R.K. Narayan reflect the everyday minor incidents in the Indian household and society. The social status of an Indian housewife and the plight of women are best understood from what Savitri, the heroine of The Dark Room expresses: “What despicable creation of God are we that we can’t exist without a
support. I am like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without a wall to support it”.

(53) The heroines of R.K. Narayan typify and depict the lives of suffering housewives of modern Indian women who are regarded as goddess on one hand and victims are exploited and deprived of their basic rights on the other. Some of R.K. Narayan’s women characters of everyday life try to assert themselves in their desire for a career, material and physical gratification. He has portrayed meek and submissive women like Margaya’s wife in the Financial Expert, and Savitri of The Dark Room and vibrant, radical women like Daisy in The Painter of Signs and Rosie in his novel The Guide.

Mulk Raj Anand’s concern was the travails of women in his novels. However his protagonist Gauri in The Old Woman and the Cow, is a fine example of his idea of women’s emancipation.

The women of Raja Rao’s fiction aspire for more, but end up feeling bitter and are reduced to mere automatons. The women in his novels are victims of domestic injustice and tyrannical tradition. He proposes no solution to their dilemma, they are passive like Savitri dutifully playing her role as the wife of a government officer in The Serpent and the Rope.

In Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novels the woman is the epitome of all virtues and the picture he paints of the woman is idyllic, tender and charming sometimes too optimistic to be realistic. But inspite of playing an important role in bringing about social reforms in the society like Mohini in Music for Mohini and inspite of
being pure and noble like Kajoli in *So Many Hungers* who reveals an unconquerable will and spirit in the face of endless misery and suffering, yet they are victimized. It is generally said while writing about women, men tend to either highlight their weakness or deify them making them appear unreal.

The history of Indian women’s writing commenced with Toru Dutt. Kamala Markandaya and Kamala Das. In the Contemporary Indian Scenario, the most successful writers of fiction in English are the female authors. It begins with Arundhati Roy, meandering through Shobha De, Geeta Hariharan, Manju Kapur, Anchana Apachana, Radhika Jha, Jayashree Mishra, Anita Nair, Kaveri Nambeesan, ending with Jhumpa Lahiri. All these women writers make it a point to liberate their heroines from being doomed to a slavish and joyless existence. The myth that the male in the house is God is shattered in their narratives. These writers believed in order to put a barrier to the phallocentricism or intrinsic male dominance of culture, women have to find their own space. They constitute the hallmark of Indian English writing. Their writings depict the lives of Indian women and their frustrations. The women writers in India have articulated against gender bias and male chauvinism in a patriarchal society.

The novels of Toru Dutt, *Biacanca* and *Le Journal de Mademoselle d’Arvel* deal with the sweet and sour experiences of the novelist’s life. Although the characters in both the novels are Spanish and French they resemble Indian women—full of love, sincerity, affection and purity. In both these novels agony of two women aiming out of sisterly love is portrayed.
In due course of time the image of the traditional women changed. Women no longer wanted to remain victims of patriarchy instead they expressed their eagerness for freedom, and independence and their desire to emerge triumphant from the deep rooted bondage of male domination. Women became conscious of their identity and they no longer wanted to remain meek and submissive. In short, most of the novels written by women novelists focused on womanhood and autonomy. They provided a glimpse into the female psyche. They turned their attention from desolate, isolated women to fiercely independent women who strove to find some sure remedies for their problems and predicaments. These writers in their works presented different categories of women - rural, poor, hardworking, educated, married, middle class, working middle class and the women form the urban milieu of the upper strata of the society. These novelists reflected on the social changes and position of women in the patriarchal society. Annes Jung observes:

“In this complex pantheon of diversities the Indian Woman remain the point of unity, unveiling through each single experience a collective consciousness prized by a society that is locked in mortal combat with the power and weakness of age and time. There remains still the centre like the centre in a potter’s wheel, circling to create new forms unfolding the continuity of a racial life which in turn has encircled and helped her acquire a quality of concentration”. (1-2)
Most of these women writers explored the eternal flaw of inequality that existed between man and woman. There has been gender discrimination down the ages in the social set up. Women were considered to be a property to be possessed. Home was considered to be the rightful place for her. Through most of their writings women novelists have tried to free the female mentality from the age long control of male domination.

Kamala Das, a novelist and poet protested against the marginalization of women in her works. Her novel *My Story* published in 1970’s is a protest against the conventional and traditional role of women. She shares the miseries of women with her readers. Her poem titled *Suicide* expresses the view that the position of a woman in her husband’s home was that of subordination. She leads a life of obscurity in some corner of the house all the time pretending to be satisfied and happy.

But

I must pose

I must pretend

I must act the role of a happy woman.

Happy wife. (*I–2*)

Thus the woman soon realizes that pretension of happiness leads to frustration. Kamala Das wanted to help women establish their identity, and provide opportunity to express their desires and hopes and assert their rights.
Kamala Markandaya is one of the outstanding novelists in Indian writing in English. Her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) expresses her feminine sensibility and her deep sense of involvement in the Indian society and women. She as a feminist writer is acutely aware of the difficulties of Indian women. Through her novels *Silence of Desire, A Handful of Rice, Some Inner Fury, Two Virgins, Pleasure City, Nectar in a Sieve*, presents a relatively realistic picture of Indian villages, their customs, traditions and cultures. These novels show how the novelist is mainly concerned with the traditionalism and the modernism.

Markandaya is mainly concerned with the fact that the Indian woman is being torn between tradition and modernity, between her duty as a wife, daughter and mother and her dignity as a human being. Above all she is troubled between her desire for autonomy and her need for stature. She portrays a clear picture of women especially the South Indian women who live in villages where life has not changed over a long period of time. She presents a sinister picture of the piteous plight of women like Ruckmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* who face many hardships like, “her husband Nathan’s infidelity, her daughter’s sacrificial going on in the streets to save the family from starvation, death of her child....”

Thus it is evident that the women portrayed in her novels are average Indian women, and her heroines never tend to be pessimistic. Her characters despite many hardships and sufferings survive these disorders.
Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, a contemporary of Kamala Markandaya has also enriched Indian fiction through her contributions. She presents in her fictions the minute details of places, people and their problems. Her novels To Whom She Will, The Nature of Passion, Esmond in India, The House Holder, Get Ready for the Battle and The Heat and Dust for which she received the prestigious Bookers Award present problems of marital discord. Almost all her characters pass through crisis and most of them are in quest for a better partner. Her novels project the stress of urban middle class life combined with domestic problems of an average Indian joint family. Marital discord is her main concern. “The women today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of feminity; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways; but do not succeed in living completely the life of a human being” (29-30) says Simone de Beauvoir. She underlined the philosophy that women are not the weaker sex but only the second sex.

Nayantara Saghal is a powerful writer who through her writings is trying to redefine the position of women as victims of patriarchy in the male dominated society. She examines the constraints imposed on them throughout their lives. Her fiction focuses on Indian women’s search for self realization and sexual freedom. A Time to be Happy, A Time of Morning, The Day in Shadow, A Situation in New Delhi are some of her major novels which have some important political events as their background. Her protagonists reflect the changes and stress on the view that human relationship between a man and a woman can be achieved only through love and interaction.
In her essay titled *Women: Persons or Possessions* she criticizes the concept of women as subservient to men; being possessed by men which is deep rooted in Indian tradition. She boldly condemns the attitude that till a woman is married her parents are her custodian and after her marriage her husband is her rightful owner and he feels privileged to treat her as his personal property or his possession. She expresses the idea that the concept of happy and harmonious marriage has become futile due to patriarchal division of values where women are considered inferior to men.

Indian fiction in English has been enriched by many talented woman novelists including Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Saghal, Bharathi Mukherjee, Arundathi Roy and Shashi Deshpande. These writers have portrayed in their works the conflicts and the predicaments of Indian women, in the contemporary tradition bound India. They have also analyzed through their characters the socio-cultural modes and values, the image of the Indian women, the roles that have been assigned towards themselves and the society. In the changing context women have been placed by these writers in enviable positions. The writers like Shashi Deshpande aimed at communicating their experiences as women and their views on social reforms. As John Alphonso Karkala observes:

They tried to tell the world the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered is an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give form and shape to their autobiographical accounts, which attracted publishers both in India and abroad. (78)
As times changed unlike the earlier writers who projected the traditional image of woman, the modern writers portrayed with a thrust on the plights and problems of the new Indian woman. The new woman was torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity, their crisis of value adaptations and attachment with their home and family; the plight of the middle class working woman aggravated by the marital discord and adjustment and her desire for quest of herself and assertion of her identity.

As a feminist writer, Nayantara Saghal treats love and marriage as an essential need of women in a patriarchal society. Like other women writers she has emphasized in her novels that women characters who till now had not asserted their individuality have started becoming aware of themselves as individuals striving for autonomy.

Anita Desai’s feminism constitutes sensitive portrayals of intelligent gifted women married to gentle, dutiful but insensitive men and the fate of the married women in Indian society today. Her novels are concerned with the compelling urge for a way of living which would respond to the inner most yearnings of women for freedom and self dignity. Her novels deal with female emancipation.

Kamala Markandaya has dealt with the various socio cultural political problems of contemporary society in which she lived, while Anita Desai portrayed the psychological sufferings of women. Her novels deal with the fate of married women in the society. Her purpose is to present their plight, fears, dilemmas,
contradictions and ambitions. The lives of women generally revolve around their husbands whose image as a ‘Provider’ is very significant. Her women express the urge to be respected as an individual in her own right. *Cry the Peacock, Voices in the City, Where shall we go this Summer, Bye Bye Black – Bird* are some of the novels written by Anita Desai. Anita Desai’s women rebel against patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential. These women use the self-chosen withdrawal as the weapon for survival. Thus, Desai’s women characters find their freedom not by living in their own narrow selves but by relating with others and asserting their intellectual as well as economic independence.

The last phase of the twentieth century witnessed a sudden spate of women writers in Indian English fiction. A series of women novelists in their thoughts and in their social dimensions have contextualized women problems on the whole and middleclass and upperclass women categorically. Indian women novelists like Gita Hariharan, Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy, Meena Alexander, Bharathi Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, in all their sincerity have dealt with the physical, psychological and emotional trauma of women.

Every creative artist adopts an effective mode to give expression to the felt experience. Gita Hariharan, no longer remaining satisfied with woman’s passive role as woman and wife, expresses her angry protest. She erodes the age-old wisdom contained in sayings, proverbs, stories, myths and beliefs. Her anger
expresses itself through the mode of satire, irony and sarcasm. Her vision encompasses the whole history of woman’s role and edifies the emergence of a new woman who is true to her own self.

Gita Hariharan has become a literary luminary with her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* which has added a feather in her cap—the Commonwealth prize. The book is the best book from the Eurasian region. It brings alive the underworld of Indian women’s lives—where most dreams are thwarted and the only constant is survival. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a novel of three women—Sita, Devi and Mayamma who walked on tight rope and struggled for some balance; for some means of survival they could fashion for themselves. *The Art of Dying* is the second book by Gita Hariharan. In this, Hariharan offers twenty stories depicting predicament of average man and woman. Her motifs deal with death, pain and loss of self. She debates and analyzes complex socio-psychological problems of the day. With this book, Hariharan secures her position and reputation among the leading writers in India.

Manju Kapur has successfully depicted the inner subtlety of a woman’s mind. She displays a mature understanding of the female psyche and manages to blend the personal with the external. She speaks like the one who has suffered through the unrest of the communal riots, which in different ways have affected the lives of the Indians. They were no doubt an important historical event and Kapur, undoubtedly has entwined them with simplicity and understanding of her characters.
Shobha De, an essential modern novelist and journalist, has focused in most of her works, on the marginalisation of women in Indian society. As a female writer, she has a genuine understanding of the psyche of woman. Her female protagonists struggle hard in their lives, break patriarchal order, protect against male dominance and at last come out in flying colours in their quest for self-identity. She specifically explores the world of urban women. De strives to infuse her creative faculty not only to entertain a large group of readers but also to highlight the pain of women’s struggle in the Indian urban context. The main thrust of her novels is the psycho-sexual stream. She has not only genuinely portrayed the female characters to be the victims of sexual exploitation and harassment, but also the struggle of women for class equality.

Arundhati Roy published her maiden, Booker prize winning novel *The God of Small Things* in 1997. The novel deals with human suffering because of man’s individual limitation and social codes. She deals with man who becomes the victim of many ugly social forces like the shameful inhuman practice of untouchability and the caste bias prevalent in India. Roy raises her voice of protest against these forces which dehumanize human beings. She shows how women and untouchables are treated as non-entities and records her protest against Indian male dominated society which makes a woman a dependent being. To Roy, Indian society is a patriarchal one. Male dominance is in every sphere of life which makes women more vulnerable. To legitimize the inferior status, women are
assigned relative positions like daughter, wife and mother. The degrading status of women, which prevents them from being an independent and an autonomous human being is the main highlight of the novel.

Bharathi Mukherjee is remarkable as an Indian woman expatriate in the foreign soil. She like other expatriate writers living in United States of America has adopted a new approach to life, portraying their life experience in a new light called post-modernism. *Wife, Jasmine, The Holder of the World, The Middle Man, Desirable Daughters* are some of the novels of Bharathi Mukherjee. She with her peculiar sensibility for her cross-cultural crisis in an era of globalization endeavoured to delve deep into the distorted psyche of the immigrants and their conflict between traditional Indian values, and their fascination for Western mode of living that they had chosen out of their professional compulsions or for their desire to attain freedom in liberal and dynamic society of America.

Born in Dharwad in 1938, Shashi Deshpande, a winner of Thirumathi Rangammal Prize for the novel *Roots and Shadows* and Sahitya Academy Award in the year 1991 for That Long Silence and Padma Sri Award in 2009 for her exceptional contributions to the field of Literature and Education, is recognized as a novelist, short-story writer and an author for children of unquestioned talent. She is the daughter of the distinguished Kannada writer, a renowned Sanskrit scholar Adya Rangachar, noted playwright, better known by lovers of literature as
Sriranga. She had a free spirited childhood though born in a Brahmin family. She told her interviewer Vanamala Vishwanatha that her father was ‘a composite sort of person’.

Nevertheless Shashi Deshpande must have acquired from her father the intellectual bent of mind and love for reading and thinking. She had her early education in Dharwad, and then moved to Bombay where she took a degree in Economics, later acquired degrees in Law and English and Diploma in Journalism. She was married at the age of 24 to a doctor from a conservative background. She devoted her early years of her marriage largely to the care of her two sons and her family. However it was only after her marriage that she seriously thought of pursuing a career in journalism.

Shashi Deshpande started writing rather late in life. Initially her career as a writer began with short stories. Writing for *Femina, Eve’s Weekly*, and other Indian magazines while nurturing her two young sons in Mumbai. She refers to a turning point in her life:

Despite marriage and motherhood I felt very incomplete, even dissatisfied. That’s when I read Betty Frieden’s *The Problem Without a Name*. I felt “I’m not only a woman. 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, Raghunathan’s mother, Vikram’s mother”…
That anger ultimately made her write.

Shashi Deshpande is essentially a self taught writer. She told an interviewer about how her writing career commenced. She never thought of becoming a writer. She told the interviewer after they returned from England her husband persuaded her to write about the trip:

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 accidently. (14)

Later, while she was working for the journal *Onlooker* one of the sub-editors suggested to her to write a short story. She told the interviewer that “So I wrote one—for the first story I thought it was very good—a Somerset Maughamish kind of story. And then I wrote on as though I was crazed. There was no thinking or worrying about the theme, technique or publisher. I simply wrote”. (233)

Shashi Deshpande wrote short stories on simple themes like adventure and crime detection perhaps the early reading of Enid Blyton and Somerset Maugham. She viewed short story as the perfect of literary form. Her love for Somerset Maugham was “just a passing phrase” and Jane Austen probably had “a more lasting influence.”

The short stories and novels of Shashi Deshpande portray women’s struggle for life and survival in contemporary India. She delineates the critical human
predicament and emotional affinities especially women. Her attention is focused on feminine suffering, fundamental reality of woman’s life situation. Her novels reveal woman’s quest for self, an exploration into the female psyche and a awareness of the mysteries of life in which the women are placed. In this preface to The Legacy and Other Stories G.S. Amur aptly remarks:

“Woman’s struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all her important stories”. (15)

Deshpande’s first collection of short stories published in 1978 was titled The Legacy and other Stories. Her other collections of short stories are: It was Dark, The Miracle, It was the Nightmare and The Intrusion and other stories. Some of these were later developed into novels. The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), If I Die Today (1982), Come Up and be Dead (1983), Roots and Shadows (1983), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1992), A Matter of Time (1996) and Small Remedies (2000) are some of her important contributions to Indian writing.

A close study of Shashi Deshpande’s novels reveals her enormous sympathy for women and their travails. She has an insight into the workings of a woman’s mind. Her novels highlight the secondary position occupied by women. She presents the debilitating influence of gender stereotypes in women’s psyche and the various forms of their struggle to break out of traditional exploitative forms of patriarchy.
Her novels resist authoritarian designs thereby questioning stereotypes. The feminine quest is seen in her protagonists struggling a way out of society’s expectations about the traditional roles of women both in past and present. Deshpande confronts society not only as a woman but also as a female artist who expresses woman’s freedom through the medium of art.

In one of her interviews with Gita Viswanath, Deshpande emphasizes that she is neither a feminist writer nor a woman writer:

I don’t write as a feminist. I keep saying this over and over again and somehow I need to say it again and again. I do not write as a feminist novelist, but my ideology is going to permeate my writing; and my feelings, thoughts and ideas about women are very important parts of my ideology (In conversation with Shashi Deshpande, 3 June 2003).

It is imperative to understand that Deshpande is not a feminist writer, but like Alice Walker writes for the whole community (humanity), for in her novels she projects human relationships, and not just women but human beings in general.

The traditional joint family is the epitome of patriarchal authority. It is the male ego that has given the woman an inferior status through the ages. Power and authority have come to be invested in the male and women have been reduced to a state of powerlessness. Her novels show her preoccupation with the inferior status accorded to women within the social unit-the family.
In a society which systematically throttles a woman’s possibilities, her characters chronicled underlines the constricting dilemmas of traditional options available within the institution of marriage. The importance that Indian society attaches to marriage is reflected in her works. Marriage is not merely a social institution it is perhaps the most complex of all human relations because it does not provide a semblance of socio-economic and emotional security to a woman within the bounds of a traditional society. Simon de Beauvoir states:

Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society.

It is still true that most women are married, or have been or plan to be, or suffer from not being. The celebrate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to the institution.

Such marriages of convenience include deception, lies and stratagems for the creation and perpetuation of a superficially secure atmosphere at home.

Traditionally women’s roles have been defined only with relation to and with reference to men. According to the various conventions of family life traditional gender roles which were inferior were assigned to them. The affinity that existed between man and woman was like a bond that existed between a Master and a slave. Women had to play the roles the society had assigned - roles of mother, wife, daughters and homemakers. They were associated with the family, children and their maintenance. They had to fulfill these exacting duties
imposed on them. These roles can be overwhelmingly demanding and frustrating in the long run. Dr. Rama in her essay on *Women and Tradition* states that "women undergo multilayered amputations of divorce, abortion, sexual harassment, threat and alienation. Woman was considered to be a shadow figure to a male care taker, whether it is her father husband or her son."(56)

The fundamental reality of women’s life situation called for concerted effort to demolish notions that she is inferior to man and to establish equality and dignity of women not only in the family but also in the wider social circle. A brief survey of the works of some of the significant women novelists show that they were not interested in presenting a rosy picture of women but wanted to create awareness about women and their social responsibilities.

Indian woman whose badge has been silent-suffering and who is an upholder of Indian culture is an oft-repeated type in Indian English fiction. She is shown to be enacting various roles-of a mother, a wife and a sister- a cog in the family machine but never as an individual claiming her life to be her own, wherein she could seek personal gratification and self-fulfilment. This is mainly due to the prevailing patriarchal society where the authority emanates from the eldest male in the family. In the male-dominated society, the inflated male tends to dominate neglect the female who is his partner in life. This male domination in life, which is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society and the consequent relegation of women to a secondary position seemed to have prompted women writers.
These writers stressed the need for women to break from the shackles of their traditional position and give importance to their need for self-fulfillment than the duty of sacrificing themselves for their husbands and children. Indian women took pride in service and self-sacrifice. They had set models like Sita and Anusuya whom they tried to emulate. It is imperative to remember that the Indian women, who was eulogized as an embodiment of sacrifice and suffering, a monument of patience and devotion, a selfless bestower of love and affection was given an enviable position of respect in the Vedic Age. Manu, the law-giver states: "where women are honoured, there the Gods are pleased, but where they are not honoured, no sacred rites yield rewards." Thus the woman was given the supreme place in the household of her husband and she was treated and respected. But the process of woman being made a possession of man is a gradual one.

The general perspective about women as a shadow figure to a male caretaker, be he a father, a husband or a son continue to persist even today. It became essential to assert the dignity and equality of women in the family and also in the society. Her novels present clearly the predicaments and the constraints imposed on them. In *Women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande*: My women protagonists are all very intelligent thinking women capable of self – analysis. They don’t go back to the same point, they move on. Now where they are moving I’m not specifying. The ending is always open. (146)
Deshpande, as a woman writer, depicts women in a myriad of roles- wife, mother, daughter and individual in her own right. Her novels reveal her instinctive ability to articulate the feelings of the educated, urban upper middle class women who are caught in between tradition and modernity. In fact Shashi Deshpande along with the other writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara Saghal, Bharathi Mukherjee has during the last two decades of the twentieth century redefined man-woman relationship. Her novels represent the contemporary women’s struggle to define and attain autonomy and selfhood. Her presentation is a sensitive portrayal of women’s quest for identity in a patriarchal world. In an interview with Geetha Hariharan the novelist discusses the theme of her works: “I believe that the female of the human race and species has the same right to be born and survive, to fulfill herself and shape her life according to her needs and the potential that lives with her”. (146)

She has displayed her concern as a woman writer by endowing her women characters with the potential to live. She takes writing as a protest, a way of mapping from the points of woman’s experience. She describes the traumas of her female protagonists from which they suffer and finally emerge triumphant. The author strives to establish a new identity for women to erase the rigid model role the society has constructed for women. Here feminism has more concern to instill a positive sense of feminine identity by portraying women who are self-actualizing, to change the traditional image of women.
G.S. Amur states of Shashi Deshpande that: “Women’s writing can be seen at its best in Shashi Deshpande’s fiction.” An important reason for this is that its main motivation comes not from borrowed ideology but from authentic experience and understanding of what it means to be a woman in the Indian context.

Deshpande like Margaret Atwood, Tony Morrison, Alice Walker, Bessi Head, Jean Rhye has laid emphasis on the issues of identity, alienation, suppression and the lot of women. Her works offers insight into women’s strong reaction to achieve real freedom from patriarchal oppression and gain autonomous self.

Deshpande has reiterated the fact that woman is the victim of man’s consumerism. Most of her novels deal with the idea of colonial consciousness, the destinies of women as mothers, wives and mistresses and creates an awareness among women to liberate them from their usual associations. Her novels are replete with themes of victimization and survival of women. Her protagonists confront all odds and are involved in grim struggle to transform themselves into respectable individuals.

Deshpande, through her novels gives ray of hope for women all over the globe. Woman’s life is always a treasure to the world, for the man and to the family in every respect. To quote Bessie Emery Head:

A woman is a devotee of the cause of human love, and a care taker of her kids. She is always in the glory of love, but man has no vision to look at it. Her life is a treasure house for the man and the society.
but her irony has been the misfortune because man, instead of exploring her depth of love and dedication, exploits her physical weakness. Instead of basking his immune sense in the gaze of her affectionate heights, man demolishes her ideals with his gruesome activities of suppression. (4)

Thus submissive, domesticated, unprotesting and self sacrificing woman was an essential adornment of the patriarchal social setup all over the world.

A closer scrutiny of Deshpande’s work will convince that her women struggle to obtain selfhood by dissolving their pessimism, by inculcating the strength to survive with dignity and by analyzing their problems rationally. Women constitute the major part of the world population and are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. These women are confined to their homes, oppressed and subjugated. This helps to understand how, under the impact of the conflicting influence of social changes of tradition and modernity the protagonists face the trials and tribulation in response to the emerging situations in life so as to fit themselves in the contemporary society. The protagonists in Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence, The Dark Holds No Terrors, A Matter of Time, The Binding Vine and Small Remedies undergo the thought process at the end of which they see themselves differently.

While many women writers of the modern times are concerned with the political, socio-economic, scientific and cultural fields, Deshpande like other
women writers depict the social and psychological problems affecting middle class Indian women, and their changing attitudes and abilities in confronting these problems.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) is the story of Saru, the protagonist who exists between the two cultural polarities. She searches for her self and ultimately grows into an individual rather than an object pinned down by the Indian society to gender roles. In this society, the biased socio-cultural values, attitudes and practices cripple the personality of women. Freeing herself from the clutches of these chains, Saru chooses the Western education and becomes a doctor by profession but fails as a wife, for her husband is a typical Indian who considers himself the Lord and master. Firstly, her orthodox mother hates Saru for being a girl, and now her dominating husband who abuses her and treats her as an unpaid servant.

The discriminating socio-cultural values, attitudes and practices cripple Saru’s personality, when her younger brother, Dhurva-mythological North star arrives in the family horizon. Saru becomes an ‘asteroid’ as a prefigurement of women who are treated as the eternal mummies. When the untimely death snatches the boy away, Saru was accused by her mother. She develops a sense of hatred towards her mother for she always imposes restrictions on her daughter. The departure of Saru from her mother by marrying Manu, a non-brahmin and a man of her choice is her first step towards autonomy. As time passes, her
involvement in her profession, lack of communication with her husband, difference in social status distance her from her husband mentally. The old flame of regard and care gets extinguished. Learning that her mother is no more she goes back to her parental house. She undergoes mental processes during her stay at her father’s place. She introspects, she thinks, she judges life and relationships. It demands real effort. She endeavours to gain what she has lost—her self respect. She tries to overcome her psychological fears: “The dark holds no terrors. The terrors are inside us all the time. We carry them within us and like traitors they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul”. (85)

In *If I Die Today* (1982) after a series of tragic deaths life sprouts again through the narrator who gives birth to a baby girl at the end. The baby is named Gauri, the name chosen by her husband. She also concedes and this is symbolic of reconciliation not only between the husband and wife not only in the narrator’s family but also in all other families. The novel ends on an optimistic and conciliatory note. Shashi Deshpande’s concern is to show what happen to women after marriage, what they have been and what is in store for them. At the outset all is with the middle class women, they have relatively happy married life blessed with children. But it is distributed by them in balance in education, motherhood, and economic independence.

*Come Up and Be dead* (1983) is a psychological thriller. The setting is a girl’s school somewhere in post independent India. There is suicide of a school
girl in this exclusive school which is followed with rumours pointing at her brother. Two more deaths follow. To put an end to all this Devayani after an attempted murder understands that there is conspiracy behind those murders and accepts the invitation to *Come Up and Be dead.*

In this novel the circumstances of women’s lives and choicelessness that characterizes their situation are highlighted through a microscopic-but not unsympathetic-examination of the familial and domestic, the so-called natural domain of women.

*Roots and Shadows* (1983) is the story of Indu, a middle-class young girl, brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family headed by Akka (the mother surrogate in the novel). The novel begins with the heroine’s return to her ancestral house. The parental home initiates her into an understanding of the human life. It is here that she discovers what her roots are- as an independent woman and a writer, and what her shadows are- a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer. She rebels against Akka, her conventional world, her rigid values and marries Jayant. Ironically she realizes the futility of her marriage. Marriage becomes another enclosure that restricts her progress towards an understanding of herself as an individual and not restricted by the circumstances or the social prescriptions. Indu experiences disillusionment in sex and suffers a silent sexual humiliation. She suffers guilt in her extra-marital relationship with Naren and decides not to reveal it to her husband. She takes firm decisions to do the kind of writing that she
had always dreamt of doing and not being dependent on her akka or her husband or any one for that matter. She sees life endless, limitless, formless and full of grace.

_The Long Silence_ (1988) is an autobiographical narrative of Jaya. Her husband Mohan suspected of business malpractice has withdrawn with her to a small suburban flat in Bombay. The limbo of waiting allows Jaya to reflect on her own life and come to terms with her protean roles—daughter, sister, wife, mother, daughter-in-law, friend, mistress and writer of genteel feminine newspaper pieces. Despite her marriage with Mohan and being a mother of two children, she was lonely. Her husband could not understand her feelings. She goes to the extent of defining her marriage as “a pair of bullocks yoked together…. A man and woman married for seventeen years”. (8)

Jaya was deeply perturbed that she as a writer could not come to light because of her husband. So she gives up writing and ironically subscribes to the patriarchal structure. Her child she hopes must be a boy and tormented by a sense of guilt by an abortion concealed from her husband. She suffers from a sense of inadequacy as a mother. Later her experiences allow her to break out of the long silence. She re-evaluates and re-defines her life. She desires to operate within the self-imposed limits of the family, by renegotiating the power-relations and improving the interpersonal relationships.
The Binding Vine (1992) is a novel of three different stories of three women Urmila, Mira and Kalpana. The novel brings together the lives of Urmila the narrator, a college teacher, who over the loss of her baby daughter, gradually uncovers the story of Mera, her mother-in-law who died at child birth more than thirty years ago. And the story of Kalpana a young Marathi girl, a victim of rape and violence. Urmila brings together the secret life of her mother-in-law. She believes that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of society fearlessly. She is indignant at the uncomplaining attitude of Kalpana’s mother in the name of family honour. She also realizes that love prevents one from being cruel, and it is this same love that makes one to accept as it comes through detachment. This is the only adhesive that binds people with compassion tolerance. Since the main urge is always to survive, Urmila fights for the cause of other women while fighting her own battles. She is depicted as a really liberated woman who exhibits her interest and capacity to help the poor and down trodden and purge the society of its evils.

The novel A Matter of Time (1996) unravels how Sumi, a deserted wife is dauntless in her adversity. The novel weaves an intricate pattern of relationships within an extended family Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi, Aru, belong to four generations of women of the same family, each representing a specific mode of experience. It spans across three generation of strong educated young women of a Tanjore Brahmin family-Sumi, the protagonist, Kalyani-Sumi’s mother, Aru-Sumi’s daughter. Each one of them have their own values and mindsets and a finely
individualized unconventional relationship with each other. The novel begins with Gopal Sumi’s husband walking out of his family and the attempts of the relatives to find out why Gopal was so irresponsible in deserting his family. Sumi sets herself and bitterness linked with the invisible chains of family responsibilities and patriarchal pressures, ultimately reaches a stage of self sufficiency and self-fulfillment with courage, dignity, responsibility and independent spirit even after her husband deserts her.

Deshpande’s *Small Remedies* (2000) is a sensitive portrayal of women’s quest for identity in a patriarchal world. It is the story of Madhu, a lovely daughter, a sensitive and a capable woman, a very vulnerable wife and mother. The novel presents Madhu’s struggle with her shattered family life, as she grows through her husband’s sudden change into suspicious nagging husband who wants to know about her relationships with men before she married him.

In the course of time, Madhu’s son is killed in a post-Babri Masjid bombblast, throwing both Madhu and her husband off their emotional balance. In order to help Madhu recover the emotional shock due to the death of her only son, her husband convinces Madhu to take up the task of writing a biography of Savitribai, a reputed vocalist. Madhu’s healing process takes place when she is confronted with Savitribai, Indorekar, and Leela her aunt whom she had spent her childhood and youth. In the course of her writing Madhu presents the glaring inequalities prevalent in an orthodox society.
The novel highlights women’s oppression in many forms. It is structured as a biography within a biography of Savitribai Indorekar, the narrator tells the stories of Leela, Munni and also her own experience. Madhu’s efforts to write the biography of Savitri Bai brings alive her own vivid memories.

In an interview to Vanamala Viswanatha she said if her father had guided and directed her at an early age probably she would have done better. However she must have inherited reading and scholarship from her father. She is a widely read person. She never identified herself with any group of writers, whether in India or abroad. She says that her love for Somerset Maugham was “just a passing phase,” “I think Jane Austen had more lasting influence,” “I still read her regularly. But I don’t think there have been any conscious influence on my writing as such.”

A careful reading of her fiction would reveal some influence of the Bronte Sisters, Jane Austen, Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing and Erica Jong. She also enjoyed reading Charles Dickens and Tolstoy. Talking about her new novel In the Country of Deceit, Shashi Deshpande talks about dealing with the new theme of love. She opines in The Hindu Literary Review thus:

My novel explores the slippery, treacherous terrain that love takes people into…. It amuses me that I had to get to this age to be able to write one. Once I began, I realized the difficulties of writing about love. Its so easy to slip into clichéd language, clichéd situation, to
become banal and maudlin. But the truth is that love is strong emotion; there is nothing banal or clichéd about it. My gold standard for a love story is Wuthering Heights—the scene where Heathcliff waits outside all night while Catherine is dying is so amazingly powerful. (July 6)

Her approaches to contemporary Indian writers is open minded. She does not feel a kind of kinship with Indian English writers of today. She does not like Anita Desai’s vision of India which is “a foreigner’s” and finds most of her novels lacking in the “density in the human relationships”, which is valued highly by Shashi Deshpande. But she considers Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day and Attin Hosain’s, Sunlight on a Broken Coloumn to be excellent books”. However she calls Salman Rushdie “a path breaker”. According to her his Midnight’s Children is “original, brilliant, bizarre and at times incomprehensible”—it is a novel which changed everything for Indians writing in English. And talking about Vikram Seth’s novel A Suitable Boy, Deshpande feels that although the book is quite readable,.....”it is very unsatisfactory” and the novelist is “too superficial”. She approved a novel like Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines she rates as “a most skilful weaving of national history and private lines”—It may however be noted that Shashi Deshpande never wished to follow the lines of these writers. She said that the older writers are outdated and she couldn’t link herself to their kind of writing. She wished her writings to be considered as “apart of Indian literature”. 
Her writings were also stimulated by feminist writers at the same time she does not approve of being labelled feminist, she told the interviewer that when she read Simone De Beauvoir and Germine Green "they stimulated me". But this happened pretty late in her life: "Quite late, Much after I started writing-it helped me place my own confusion and put them in order." Although she began her writing career late, notwithstanding her readings and familiarity with works both Victorian and modern Shashi Deshpande is essentially a self taught writer.

Shashi Deshpande chose to present the events, actions, and the incidents in the novel in retrospect. Most of her protagonists recollect the past and review the incidents of the present. By adopting this technique of retrospection and recollection the novelist is able to discover connection existing between the incidents of the past as well as the present. The incidents and events are not described in separate chapters but they are interwoven and narrated in a natural process. This technique of retrospection helps the novelist to probe deep into the minds of the characters. She uses the first person and third person narrative along with flash back or stream of conscious technique of straight forward narration, moving forward and backward which attracts the attention of the reader and makes the novel more realistic while the first chapter deals with the present, the later chapters move backwards in time, culminating in the final chapter which again ends in the present. The first person narration allows the author to develop deep into the mind of the protagonist, exposing the fears and frustrations of the characters. C.W.Watson, a reviewer compared Shashi Deshpande to master story
teller, Chekhov: “other South Indian writers have been compared to Chekov, but Shashi Deshpande, in this novel at least, comes closest to the writer, and the tragic-comedy of The Cherry Orchard is constantly recalled in the description of the crumbling house and the squabbling of the family. The writing is beautifully controlled and avoids the temptation of sentimentality which the subject might suggest and again the control is reminiscent of Chekhov.

Deshpande has used a very powerful language, full of catch words and phrases, which get imprinted on the mind of the reader. In order to make her points clear she often uses figures of speech and images. She has not only embellished her language with these figures of speech but she has made it forceful also. The study titled Feminist Concern in the Select Novels of Shashi Deshpande is an analytical study of Shashi Deshpande’s six major novels written during a span of twenty years—a period which has witnessed a tremendous socio-cultural change in India. The study arches over The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence, The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time and Small Remedies. It is an attempt to map the feminist concern expounded through her novels. Deshpande claims that she is not a feminist writer though her novels project the problems and experiences of women within a dominant male culture. In all the seven novels The Dark Holds No Terrors, If I Die Today, Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence, The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time, Small Remedies one finds her feminist concern. She however, insists that she is not a feminist in the narrow sense. Deshpande states: “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; we are two halves of one species”. She fully agrees with Simone de Beauvoir that the fact that all are human, is much more important than being men and women.

The perennial theme in her novels is women’s struggle and their search for freedom and independence, a theme which is predominant in most of the contemporary women writers. Shashi Deshpande’s major concern is women’s struggle in the contemporary Indian society. It dwells on the theme of gender bias and male chauvinism as reflected in her novels. Her characters are oppressed and marginalized in both domestic and social matters. They journey from self effacement to selfhood. It is evident that the predicament of all the women characters in her novels typifies the situation of women in a male-dominated society.

Finally, after a long time of oppression, having been raped, murdered, lynched, spat upon, pushed through back doors, denied human respect, fit only to breed and suckle babies, to wash and cook and scrub and sweat, and sexually depersonalized, women of today crave to be recognized as human beings, as public citizens with public rights and duties, like any other human being of the world. They need to heal and re-create themselves.

The study explores Deshpande’s feminist concern both as a concept and a reality with reference to her fictional world. Deshpande, along with her contemporary writers like Anita Desai, Bharathi Mukerjee, Gita Harihara, Manju
Kapur, Anita Nair and Shobha De directs her creative energy towards the delineation of the survival and pattern of resistance and reconciliations of her women. Her novels provide a comprehensive review of the problems women confront in attaining recognition and freedom.

The introductory chapter titled *Introduction: A Glimpse of Indian Writers in English* traces the growth of Indian English fiction and feminist writings. It gives a picture of contemporary Indian women writers and places Shashi Deshpande, an internationally known, read, translated and critiqued contemporary Indian women fiction writer in her cultural milieu. It also offers a detailed picture of all her works.

The second chapter entitled *My Life is My Own* deals with the two novels, The Dark Holds No Terrors and Roots and Shadows. The chapter examines the politics of gender as it emerges through the novels. The life of the protagonist Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors and Indu in Roots and Shadows in a society governed by age old customs and traditions exposes the silent and hidden operation of gender thereby rewriting women’s history. The characters transcend gender and assert themselves by demolishing gender system, which is the real source of women’s oppression and suffering.

The third chapter *Breaking the Silence* reveals the trauma of Jaya an ostensibly contended wife in That Long Silence smothered under the weight of male dominance. Urmi of The Binding Vine like a crime thriller explores human
relationships through marriage and motherhood. Women are marginalized as “Second Sex.” It is an indictment of ‘male consumption’ of women in a patriarchal society. Deshpande is chiefly concerned with “de-constructing” gender politics in *The Binding Vine* as in her other novels. The chapter lays bare the ruthless and hypocritic postures of patriarchy through the dramatization of identity crisis. It offers a “way-out” of the gender power struggle. It forcefully drives home the message that women are not mere objects of beauty meant for carnal consumption of men. They are no mere edible women. They try to bring about a radical change in gender relations in the society and indicate a way out of gender power struggle by breaking their silence.

The fourth chapter bearing the title *The Healing Touch of Time* is a detailed analysis of *A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies*. *A Matter of Time* is thematically different from the other novels discussed earlier. The chapter attempts to explore the predominant theme of women’s quest for identity through the voice of Gopal, the male protagonist. It also analyses the pattern of resistance followed by reconciliation in the lives of female characters in both the novels. It articulates the idea that time offers great remedy and helps women gain their identity. Thus the distinct voice of Shashi Deshpande which is holistic, anti-militaristic and life-affirming is heard in the lives of Madhu and Savitri Bai in *Small Remedies* and Sumi in *A Matter of Time*.

The summation *Me, A Woman* is an analytical coalescence of all that has been discussed in the earlier chapters—predicament of victims of inequality of gender discrimination and sexual exploitation.
Shashi Deshpande’s vision for a just world is egalitarianism and equality in social relationships. In other words, her novels plead for the attainment of viable equilibrium between sexes. To sum up, men and women should cease to pretend, manipulate, oppress and suppress and thus transcend the battle of genders and live harmoniously to keep the world free from gender exploitation and oppression.

Since the study is thematic, the chronological order of the novels is not followed.