Preface

Born in 1938 in a brahmin family, Shashi Deshpande grew up in Dharwar and has subsequently lived in Bombay and lives presently in Bangalore. She has written nearly twenty books. In itself this is an amazing output and becomes even more so when one realizes that her first publication, a collection of short stories, The Legacy, put together at the behest of her father, appeared in 1978. Two years later, in 1980, her first novel, The Dark Holds No Terrors was published. The Dark Holds No Terrors is however, not really the first novel to be written, the first being Roots and Shadows which was completed in 1978, a year before The Dark Holds No Terrors, but published only in 1983. The year 1982 saw the publication of a crime novella, If I Die Today and in the mid-eighties three collections of shorts came out in quick succession—It was Nightingale (1986), It was Dark (1986), The Miracle (1986).

Later, in 1988, appeared That Long Silence which brought her the Sahitya Akademi Award. And in 1993, after a gap of several years, appeared two novels, miles apart from each other in plot
construction and of thematic thrust, The Binding Vine and Come Up and Be Dead. The latter is once again a crime novel but stands in between children's literature and adult fiction as it is a story located in a girls' school. A Matter of time (1996) and small Remedies (2000) are the other two novels and the Stone Women and other stories is her sixth volume of short stories.

Critics, by and large, have focused on her women protagonists and issues related to feminist concerns and modes of resistance. Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal have brought out a slim volume titled, Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of her Fiction (1998). Suman Bala has edited a collection of essays, Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande (2001). The various essays focus on the self-image of the protagonists, their construction of the self, modernity and memory. Amongst other edited volumes in one by R.K. Dhawan, The Indian Women Novelists, Vol. V (1991) which includes several essays on Deshpande, some of which are repetitive and appear to be recycled material. None of them really interrogates any serious issue. But the plus points are an essay by Deshpandey herself, "On the Writing of a Novel" and perhaps the first critical
attention to the two detective novels. A far better critical evaluation is available in the volume edited by R.S. Pathak, the fiction of Shashi Deshpande (1998). Pathak's volume even though working dominantly through feminist approaches explores other aspects, as for instance myth and folklore (Vimla Rama Rao), imagery (Sengupta) and Indian ethos (J.P. Tripathi).

Of full-length studies, the earliest in Sarabjit Sandhu's the image of women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande (1991), its main value being in being an early work but it belongs to the 'image' studying school which does not explore the processes that 'make' an image. Sandhu locates the women in the roles they are filled into. The second full-length study is the one by Atrey and Kirpal referred to earlier. Atrey and Kirpal referred to earlier. Atry and Kirpal consider her writing, 'gender specific' and feel that it 'necessitates a feminist reading'.

None of these two works necessarily takes into consideration Deshpande's own stand that the impulse behind her work is more than the 'woman question'. They do not look for the
wider meanings of women's protests or for gender neutrality in the art of writing.

The present work proposes to explore her works from the ground reality upwards. Beginning with a close analysis of her fiction, her novels as well as her short stories, it proposes to look at the psychological inputs, the poetics of loss, her use of myth, the narrative strategies she employs, the native concerns-her relationship with the traditions that she has inherited and her departures from them, her Indianness and her stance vis-a-vis contemporary critical positions. The attempt will be to free her from the confining image of being a feminist writer.

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