Chapter 1

New Colours and Shadows of the Past: Introduction

“Life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backwards” (98) elicited in Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time* explores the simultaneity of past and present in one’s life. It has been recognized that tradition and modernity need not be opposing or dichotomous. It is not necessary to resist modernity to remain rooted in tradition. In fact individuals and cultures derive a lot from their past, mingle it with the experiences of the present and make necessary modifications for a better future. Thus, the past and the present in a way overlap and help strengthen each other.

The present research project undertakes a study of emerging, potent voices of two women writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, now settled in the United States and Shashi Deshpande who is an Indian resident. Belonging to India gives these writers certain common cultural traits, while the differences between them result from the fact that living abroad widens the mental horizons of Indian women. So, in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s fiction we have women who either live abroad or happen to be visiting India. These women are no doubt conditioned by the Indian upbringing but have risen above the traditional constraints. However in Shashi Deshpande’s works we have women who are professional, married most often outside their community, yet unable to break free from the traditional bonds during moments of choice and crises.

The heroines in the works of both the writers reflect the conflicts and tensions arising out of the attempt to negotiate between tradition and the desire to lead a new life that education has enabled them to imbibe. In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s
fiction the women characters are distanced from their homeland; they think more rationally, but they mentally retain some of the traditional beliefs. Shashi Deshpande’s women on the other hand defy all traditions, but subconsciously they too, remain tradition-bound. Leaving India and its orthodoxy behind seems to be a solution to some of these problems in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s fiction. In the case of Shashi Deshpande’s works perhaps the only way possible for the temporarily wandering wife is a return to her domestic fold. Although the works of both these writers portray how modern Indian women are torn between their historical past and progressive present, between traditional ethos and modern culture, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni demonstrates a bolder attitude while Shashi Deshpande does not allow her liberal thinking to overpower her traditional outlook.

The female characters in the fiction of both Shashi Deshpande and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are torn between old and new world values. They question the nature of their lives, and their roles as mothers, wives, daughters and professionals. This awareness leads them to rethink about their own lives as women, and instils in them the confidence and strength to forge ahead. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni focuses on the diasporic Indian women caught between two opposing worlds. They find themselves in an in-between state, struggling to carve out identities of their own. Whether it is Sudha and Anju in *Sister of My Heart* and *The Vine of Desire* respectively, Tilo in *Mistress of Spices* or Asha in the short story *Meeting Mrinal,* or any of the characters in her collections of short stories *Arranged Marriage* and *Unknown Errors of Our Lives,* they face a similar predicament. They are all trying to discover their own ‘selves’ amidst joy and heartbreak. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni excels at depicting the cultural dialectics of immigrant experience, like many other contemporary writers.
Shashi Deshpande’s characters also express their desires, frustrations, and ambitions but in their various ways; each looks for her own way of realizing her ambition as professional and each struggles to come to terms with her problems individually. For Indu in *Roots and Shadow*, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Mira in *The Binding Vine* and Savitri Bai in *Small Remedies* the past dovetails into the present and all three survive the past vows to enter a new life of greater liberation and humanism. Out of these negotiations arise in their fiction, the themes and issues of marriage, identity crisis, emotional isolation, and non communication, the experience of migrancy, diaspora and subalternity.

The present study will focus on the unique ways in which Divakaruni and Deshpande reflect upon notions of identity, gender, history and culture. It shall attempt to analyze and argue how Indian women at home and abroad confront the dilemmas of existence relatively in the same ways. The entire fictional and journalistic work of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Shashi Deshpande will be under critical focus to reflect upon the tensions and conflicts between tradition and modernity. However, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s novels which are constantly inviting critical attention show that Indian women living abroad respond to moments of crises in a manner that is different from that of the women living in India, who have not been able to completely extricate themselves from the Indian cultural compulsions, as we see in the novels of Shasi Deshpande.

Winner of the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for her novel, *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande is a well established writer. She is undoubtedly an outstanding Indian English novelist with four volumes of short stories, four children’s books, seven novels and a collection of critical articles *Writing from the Margin and*
Other Essays to her credit. Deshpande’s early novels were published just at the time when post – Midnight’s children generation of writers was becoming big news. Since she refuses to play by the global rules, she is not a part of this league but her special value lies in an uncompromising toughness and her-insistence on being read on her own terms. “I cherish my privacy, my freedom to be myself.” (Interview with Chandra Holm). Literature was a common fare at her home as her father Adya Rangacharya is an eminent playwright, author and a scholar of Sanskrit and Kannada languages belonging to a traditional Indian household. She was always given absolute intellectual freedom, there were no ideas imposed on her to shape her thinking and behaviour. She states that there are three things in her early life that have shaped her as a writer – the fact “that her father was a writer, that she was educated exclusively in English and that she was born a female.” (Deshpande, “Of Concerns of Anxieties”).

Shashi Deshpande began her writing career at the age of thirty. To begin with she wrote three articles and to her surprise these were accepted for publication. This encouraged her to try her career in journalism. Soon her works found place in women’s magazines – Femina and Eve’s Weekly but after some time a sense of dissatisfaction overtook her as she wanted to be recognized as a ‘serious’ writer and not to be known as one who writes for women’s magazines alone.

The short story Intrusion was a turning point of Deshpande’s career after which her novels followed, and particularly these made her well known as a ‘woman writer’. Deshpande’s novels and stories reveal that her writing is women – oriented and highly sensitive to the issues of women, but she is not comfortable with the ‘feminist’ tag. She denounces the use of any ‘isms’ while she very clearly admits:
Yes I did and I do write about women. Most of my writing comes out of 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 enjoined on me by society…. My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All this makes my writing clearly women’s writing.

(Deshpande, “Of Concerns of Anxieties”)

Deshpande has written a great deal about woman and womanhood in her interviews, articles, her essays and even her novels are women – centered. But her ideology and concept is very clearly brought out in her essay “Why I am a Feminist” included in the collection entitled Writing from the Margin and Other Essays. In this essay she particularly discusses the wrong notions of Feminism (that it’s a western concept, rejecting the family and home, hating men and waging a war against them) and thus it must be rejected. She admits herself that it took her years to call herself a ‘feminist’. Deshpande aptly states women (and men as well) should not be straight-jacketed into the roles that warp their personalities, but should have options available to them. (82-85)

Deshpande graduated in economics from Elphinstone College, Bombay and in law from Govt. College Bangalore. It was much later that she took a post graduate degree in English from the Mysore University. She married a Neuropathologist. Her earlier years were largely spent in bringing up her two sons. She had no intention of settling down as a writer, it was only when she went with her husband, a commonwealth scholar, to England where she penned down her experiences and her journey as a writer began. She wrote several short stories which were compiled in
four volumes. In between she tried her hand at detective stories and wrote three
detective serials two of them were subsequently expanded and published as novels.
*Roots and Shadows* was the first novel she wrote which was published after *The Dark
Holds No Terrors*. Chronology is important in tracing her career as a novelist because
as we see in her works with every novel her characters develop, there is development
of perspective and purpose from her earliest to the most recent novel. The basic setup
is the same, a modern independent woman who is trying to make her space in the
male – dominated; tradition bound society and the exploration of her protagonists’
independent self. *Roots and Shadows* shows the alienation of the heroine Indu from
her married life which is incidentally of her own choice. She realizes that her husband
is no better than an average Indian male. The shallowness of the Indian rituals and
customs which perpetuate the myth of male superiority are highlighted in this novel.
The novel focuses on protagonists’ refusal to abide by the rigid norms set up by
society which leads to utter disillusionment and her to attempt to break free from
emotional bond of marriage.

Deshpande’s second novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, portrays the
secondary position of the woman in her parental house as well as her husband’s home
where the male ego overpowers all other considerations in the relationship of
marriage. Saru the protagonist has greater economic and social status than her
husband Manohar. This leads to the victimization of Saru in the form of the sexual
harassment, inflicted upon her due to the inferiority complex that her husband is
suffering from. She decides to leave her children and husband and go back to her
parental house. Here unfolds the secret of her life, the guilt she bears for her brother
Dhruva’s death, the guilt of abandoning her parents to get married to Manohar. Added
to these is the knowledge of her mother’s death that she acquires accidentally and
decides to visit her father. Finally she resolves her problems and gains control over her life.

Deshpande won the Sahitya Academy Award for her third novel *That Long Silence* and thus came into the limelight. It was published by the British feminist publishing house, Virago. In this novel Shashi Deshpande not only deals with the disillusionment and discontentment of a woman, but also treats the man–woman relationship objectively. Through this novel she brings out the fact that both men and women imbibe the roles and positions given to them by society, it is the culture that forms them and it becomes difficult for them to deviate from the paths or roles allotted to them. The protagonist Jaya gives up her role as a serious writer to perform her role as a perfect mother, and a wife and in the process forgets herself, and this triggers the dissatisfaction in her mind and her questioning of her identity.

What is remarkable about Deshpande’s work is the way she makes us question our existence. Her work reflects the shift in moral values, the social transitions, changing attitudes, and the problems arising out of the generation gap and breakdown of the joint family system. *The Binding Vine* her fourth novel came after a long lapse of time. In this novel Deshpande brings out the helplessness of two women Mira and Kalpana, the two lives that intersect with Urmila’s. Mira is Urmia’s mother-in-law who has described her experience of being assaulted by her husband through her poems which the latter chances upon. Kalpana is victimized by her step father and is virtually on the threshold of death. Deshpande paints pictures of Indian women whose bodies have been violated but instead of protesting and publicizing the assault and injury they would rather keep it to themselves considering the social security they would lose when exposed.
A Matter of Time deals with three generations of women of a single family. Kalyani, her daughter Sumi who in turn has three daughters constitute the main characters of the novel. Unlike her other novels, in this, we have Gopal a male narrator who is also the husband of Sumi. Hitherto emphasis has always been laid on the female protagonists and their responses to life. This novel reveals Deshpande’s capacity to portray male character with dexterity and she focuses on him throughout. ‘The Bighouse’ where these women live is elaborately described and is as distinct as its occupants.

Deshpande’s works depict a see-saw of old and new values. Her novel Small Remedies describes a heroine who leaves the domains of her household and her marriage. Madhu the narrator who is trying to overcome the trauma of losing a teenage son begins to write the biography of Savitribai Indorekar whose passion for music has made everything else secondary in her life. Savitribai’s secretiveness and her concealing of certain truths further complicate the story. Leela is another important character who has led an unconventional life by marrying a Catholic widower with children. Other social realities such as the heterogeneous religious practices and inter caste marriages form an important part of the story.

In her latest novel Moving On, Deshpande like in all her other works uses body as a repetitive theme. This novel is a story of families and family faith. The narrator Manjari is a widowed woman who comes to live with her parents to tend to her ailing father. She discovers her father’s diary after her death and sets out to evaluate her life retrospectively – in view of Baba’s revelations that show past events in a new light. Her mother writes perfect romantic stories for popular magazines in contrast to her father’s stories and they form a great threesome. Her present is full of
uncertainties, grappling with choices about future, her marriage with Shyam and her single handed struggle to bring up her children.

In between writing her popular novels Shashi Deshpande has over the years published about a hundred stories in magazines, literary journals and newspapers. Deshpande’s short stories also reflect similar features and illustrate ordinary women’s and men’s lives in India and their relationships and situations. The Legacy collection of her short stories was even prescribed as a text book in Columbia University. It was published by Penguin in the edition entitled Collected Stories Vol I and II.

Like in her novels Deshpande makes gender central to her short stories, they portray complex and real relationships. The short story Intrusion which was a turning point in Deshpande’s career is a story of a newly married woman, whose insensitive husband intrudes her physical self. In An Antidote to Boredom the protagonist is dissatisfied with her married life as her husband is an indifferent man. She is having an extramarital affair but undergoes guilt pangs because of her son, as she is conditioned in such a way that she feels that she is merely seeking an antidote to boredom in her affair and isolates herself regretting it later. A Liberated Woman is the story, where Deshpande emphasizes on the wounded male ego as the heroine is a successful doctor as compared to her husband’s mediocre college lecturer life and this idea is further expanded in the form of her novel The Dark holds No Terrors.

Some of her short stories like Why a Robin, It was dark, My Beloved Charioteer, A Liberated Woman, The Awakening etc. depict poignantly the mother-daughter relationship from the perspective of both mother and daughter, the mother trying to reach her daughter’s level to understand her and to show her concern and the daughters efforts to reconcile with the past and the present.
Deshpande’s detective writing could not gain as much popularity, as she is best at portraying human relationships; she very acutely brings out the inequalities present in the society. Though both *Come up and be Dead* and *If I Die Today* were expanded into regular novels and published. And these works follow the same idea of women caught between the idea of freedom and a traditional concept of marriage as the ultimate choice, so they could not follow the tradition of real detective stories. (These would also not be included in the thesis due to their variance of the theme with the subject of the study.)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni settled in the U.S.A., is an award winning author and poet. Her works have been widely published in over 50 magazines including *Atlantic Monthly* and *New Yorker*. Her works have been translated into 11 languages including Dutch, Hebrew, Japanese and this has settled her in to a role as one of the premier Asian American writers of today. She grew up in New Alipore in Calcutta, a student of Loretto House and Presidency College, lived in Calcutta until she was 19. She left Calcutta and came to the US in 1976, when there were not many Indians and she was looked at with curiosity. She came to Dayton (Ohio) where she continued her education in the field of English by receiving a Masters Degree from Wright State University, and a Ph.D. from University of California at Berkeley. And she briefly lived in Chicago and Ohio before she settled in Sunnydale, California in 1979, which she says “definitely is the best part of the country and is most cosmopolitan and the most multicultural” (Divakaruni, Profile by Arthur J. Pais) And that’s when she realized that “there were hundreds of fellow expatriate women who were trapped in abusive marriages or relationships or who did not know how to cope with the more free – wheeling western society”. (Divakaruni, Profile by Arthur J. Pais).
Divakaruni taught English and multicultural literature at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills in California. And later shifted to Houston with her husband and two sons where she teaches at University of Houston. She became serious about writing, when she joined the writers group, the Berkeley Poets Co-op. Her memories of her childhood in India prompted her to join this group, because she thought she was forgetting how things were in India and how people thought. Here she got a chance to share her works with others and got a good feedback. And that’s when her experiences in the adopted land were shared and she wrote about “what it was like for me living here, being a woman of color here” (Divakaruni, "My Work with MAITRI")

Along with her teaching she became active in women issues and started working with Afghani women refugees and women from dysfunctional families. The work she did at MAITRI, which means friendship, which she founded in 1991 with the help of small group of friends, definitely influenced her writing. That was the beginning of her writing career and her first book was sold to the publisher with only three stories.

While doing her dissertation and studying at Berkeley “she felt very dissociated from life…. I needed to do something intellectually connected to my life as an immigrant woman in America” (Divakaruni, Profile by Arthur J. Pais). The support helpline MAITRI was started to teach women how to be self sufficient and guard their rights in a country like US, especially those who were victims of male dominance and abuse. The assistance is provided by volunteers, who personally deal with the problem by following up. The problems normally occur due to the ignorance of women towards the working of American society and secondly coming from South Asian countries these women avoid taking problems outside their homes. And this leads them to taking drastic steps like committing suicides, thinking that there is no aid available to them. MAITRI provides these women emotional support apart from
medical and legal help. There are educational workshops held by them to teach
women legal and financial independence and survival skills to combat their problems.
Divakaruni says, “It is their hidden stories that I try to tell in many of my talks….It is
their courage and humanity that I celebrate and honor”. (Divakaruni, "What Women
Share").

Much of Divakaruni’s work is partially autobiographical. Most of her stories
are set in the Bay Area of California, and she also excels at depicting the nuances of
immigrant experience, she writes to shatter stereotypes and myths. She breaks down
the barriers between people of different backgrounds, communities, ages, and
different worlds. She focuses on the bicultural lives of Indian women struggling with
cultural shackles to carve out an identity of their own. Divakaruni being born in a very
traditional household in India, was insulated from women’s rights and movements and
thus totally a part of the traditional culture of Bengal but only when she came to the
US she could compare the physical and the psychological landscapes of India and
America and look back on her culture objectively. She could draw the contrast
between the selflessness required of women in India and the freedom they got in their
adopted land.

Before she began her career in fiction writing Divakaruni was an acclaimed
poet. She writes poems encompassing a wide variety of themes. Her main area of
focus is once again immigrant experience as Divakaruni says,

Expatriates have powerful and poignant experiences when they live
away from their original culture – and this becomes home, and never
quite, and then you can’t really go back and be quite at home there
either (Divakaruni Profile by Arthur.J.Pais)
So you keep shuttling between two cultures in her works. Her poetry includes *Dark like the River* (1987), *The Reason of Nasturtiums* (1990), *Black Candle* (1991) and *Leaving Yuba City*, her latest collection was published in 1997. Everything she writes about is India, but the locale now is America, she moves in succession of poems towards the present day immigrant experience. *Leaving Yuba City* is a unique collection as it is based on and inspired by various art forms including paintings by Francesco Clemente, photographs by Raghubir Singh and specific Indian Films such as *Salaam Bombay*. With these poems Divakaruni once again shows how boundaries can be erased as she illustrates how different art forms are not independent, entities, but how they can in fact, influence each other. She has received a number of awards for this collection i.e. Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize, Puschart Prize, and Gerbode Foundation award. Magic and imaginary worlds are very important in her works. She is influenced by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabelle Allende and other mainstream magical realists. Magical realism a style of writing generally adopted by writers of Latin America has been used to great extent by expatriates. Her other collection of poems *Black Candle* has a reference to Indian films as she is intrigued by Indian film culture. The *Makers of Chilli-paste* poem in this collection is inspired by the movie ‘Spices’. In this collection Divakaruni portrays women whose lives have been restricted by society, but due to their spiritual powers they survive in the end, and there is always a hope, even though there is a lot of hardship; (*Two Women Outside a Circus*, Prose poem *Restroom, Bengal Night, Sudha’s Story* etc).

Her other collection of short stories *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* is based on similar lines. It depicts women’s struggle to adjust as best as possible in whatever situation or culture, and their fierce struggle to make a place for themselves. In one of the short stories in this collection *Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter* Divakaruni has
shown how the protagonist an old lady migrates to U.S. to stay with her only son and daughter-in-law, but realises the tension that arises between her son and daughter-in-law because of her. The changed attitude of her daughter-in-law after coming to U.S also makes her want to return home. Another short story *The Names of Stars in Bengali* is about an Indian village girl who is desperate to get-out of India due to the restrictions imposed on her being a woman and her experiences of spending a holiday in her village with her two sons.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s collection of short stories, *Arranged Marriage* reflects the vicissitudes of the diasporic South Asian women. The underlying theme of her short story collection *Arranged Marriage* is as the name suggests marital relationships as they are seen in South Asian communities where by and large the practice is that parents arrange marriages for their children. However, immigration has widened the mental horizons of the people from the east, and Divakaruni too questions this practice through these stories. After their exposure to the west in various ways e.g. working outside the home their increased independence, particularly in decision making – things they could not do back home in India, makes them respond differently to the marital situation as well. How difficult it is for Indian South Asian women to achieve a clean break from tradition and self consciousness even when they are trapped in unhappy arranged marriages is discussed in the short story *Bats. Clothes* on the other hand describes the relief felt by a young widow who knows that in America she will not have to lead the austere life that she would have been subjected to in a similar situation in India.

As the women of this text struggle to define themselves as South Asian and American, they are experiencing a conflict of consciousness. In the private realm, the traditional Indian culture requires specific duties of women, and strict norms of
morality are held in high esteem and are transgressed only by those considered daring and depraved. Sandra Ponzanesi in her essay “In My Mother’s House” states

As far as the condition of migration and diaspora is concerned, women are often called to preserve their nation through the restoration of a traditional home in the new country. The idea of home entails the preservation of traditions, heritage continuity; there is even an intense emotive politics of dress for some communities. (245)

In the public realm, as professionals, there is a freedom of self – expression on many levels, but at the same time the pressures from family and career often begin to clash, resulting in one of the increasingly common conflicts South Asian women experience in the process of cultural assimilation. And this leads to the fragmentation of their self. It is also a psychological coping mechanism created as a response to the cultural dissonance that surrounds them. The image of the subservient Indian woman stems from Indian mythology and the manner in which Indian females are represented in it. The image of ‘Sita’- has a profound effect on the Indian psyche. Her chastity and loyalty to her husband represents the ideal for an Indian wife. This inordinate amount of emphasis placed on Indian women to be like ‘Sita’ makes women freeze in the same practices and mores of ancient Indian Mythology and culture.

But this subservience of Sita contrasts greatly with the feminism of America and emphasis on women’s independence and equality. In Arranged Marriage Divakaruni describes this clash between culture and the conflict between family and career. Thus, when the South Asian characters in this book choose to pursue a career rather than raising a family, the battle between the domestic and the public realm is exacerbated. The entire financial structure changes when women leave the home and
begin to work, thereby changing the traditional power dynamics within the marriage. Indian women see their career as an extension of their roles at home, and not as an alternative. Their family generally takes precedence when there is a clash between career and family. Asian diasporics place emphasis on both career and family, desiring not to have to chose between the two, but granting both equal importance. Their contact with the outside world and their employment helps them interact with the new American Society. The interplay of gender roles manifested by the development of multiple consciousnesses is reflected in Divakaruni’s texts. In *A Perfect Life* the protagonist Meera first rejects the traditional roles of wife and mother in favor of her career and education. For her, it is not a question of choosing between career and family at the moment

> Because in Indian marriages becoming a wife was only the prelude to that all-important, all-consuming event-becoming a mother. That wasn’t why I’d fought so hard with my mother to leave India; with my professors to make it through graduate school; with my bosses to establish my career. (Divakaruni, *Arranged Marriage* 76)

Yet when Meera meets a six year old orphan boy, she begins to contemplate motherhood. Caught up in her new role as a mother Meera begins to function in both the professional and familial realm, and sees herself fulfilling two distinct roles. When there is a conflict between these self perceptions Meera responds by separating the two, which is a kind of reaction to the conflict of cultural tensions. Her consciousness allows the two contradictory self perceptions to exist simultaneously, compromising one role with the other. Some critics have perceived the behavior of Indian women as inconsistent and even schizophrenic by the Western standards. Indian woman may be
assertive at work with the American colleagues, if the situation demands, but totally unresisting against her husband and children.

In the story *Clothes* Sumita moves from Calcutta to California, into a small apartment that she shares with her husband and his parents. She describes the contrast between an Indian home and the American world outside and the contradictory feelings that emerge from the disconnection between two spheres;

That’s our dream (mine more than his, I suspect) moving out of this two-room apartment where it seems to me if we all breathed at once, there would be no air left. Where I must cover my head with the edge of my Japan nylon saree…and serve tea to the old women that come to visit mother Sen, where like a good Indian wife I must never address my husband by his name. Where even in our bed we kiss guiltily, uneasily, listening for the giveaway creak of springs. Sometimes I laugh to myself, thinking how ironic it is that after all my fears about America, my life has turned out to be no different from Deepali’s and Radha’s (her friends in India). But at other times I feel caught in a world where everything is frozen in place, like a scene inside a glass paperweight. It is a world so small that if I were to stretch out my arms, I would touch its cold unyielding edges. I stand inside this glass world, watching helplessly as America rushes by, wanting to scream.

Then I’m ashamed. Mita, I tell myself, you’re growing westernized.

*(Divakaruni, *Arranged Marriage* 25-26)*

Sumita describes her home as a “world where everything is frozen in place.”(26) As if she had never left the India and friends of her youth.
Sumita recognizes that she feels resentment towards these traditions and ‘Indianess’ of the home. She entertains thoughts of leaving her home, she sees herself as independent, confident and progressive and views herself to be working in her husband’s store wearing a skirt and assisting people who walk in. But Sumita is also aware of her conflicting desires and her liminal psychological position, thus she perceives herself as “in between” - the guilt ridden subservient wife, who is bound by her roots and yet confident of being successful in the outside world of America. As Sandra Ponzanesi aptly remarks: “There is an attempt to deconstruct this given notion of home and to rethink it outside norms of nation and narration. This does not only enable feminine discourses of mobility, but also opens up the possibility of rethinking the home and of articulating critiques of those sexist ideologies of free mobility in which the home is automatically dismissed as a place for growth and contact.” From this point of view she says “home is not a fixed essentialised place but a practice to articulate diversity and creativity.” (245)

While Meera of A Perfect Life sees herself as fulfilling two separate roles, Sumita comes to perceive herself multiply, with various self perceptions existing simultaneously. Although Sumita has not actually left her home, she has created a romantic vision of her husband’s store and with it, an entirely new self perception.

But I have another plan, a secret that I will divulge to him once we move. What I really want is to work in the store. I want to stand behind the counter in the cream-and-brown skirt set … and ring up purchases. The register will glide open. Confident, I will count out green dollars and silver quarters… (I have never visited the store-my in-laws don’t consider it proper for a wife-but of course I know exactly what it looks like)… I will charm the customers with my smile, so they will return
again and again just to hear me telling them to have a nice day. 

(Divakaruni, *Arranged Marriage* 27)

Jayanti in *Silver pavements, Golden Roofs* also provides focus on a similar dilemma of being an immigrant when she migrates from Calcutta to Chicago to live with her aunt Pratima and uncle Bikram. Their house is no different from the India that Jayanti left. Jayanti within the confines of home feels disoriented because it appears that time and space has not changed for her as she expected from her immigration. Rather, she is in the same world, where the Indian tradition remains the norm, and assimilation is but-a distant glance out a window. Jayanti appears totally isolated and “protected from American culture, but she soon realizes that the “little India” that has been created is merely an illusion of security.” (Divakaruni, *Arranged Marriage* 35-56)

As Jayanti and her Aunt walk around their neighborhood one afternoon, they are approached by a group of young boys who attack them with racist slurs. Jayanti does not understand how circumstances can shift so dramatically once she leaves her home. Her entire perception of her own race is thrown into question upon leaving the house. Jayanti who was proud to be an upper class Indian questions her relation to American race categorization. The harsh words of the young boys have affected her to the point where she cannot help but perceive herself differently. Jayanti has developed a multiplicity of consciousnesses in viewing herself. One consciousness with which she understands herself as a minority living in America, another with which she sees herself as the upper class Indian girl of her family, and third with she perceives herself as in between the two. To live in a state of multiplicity, with oppositional conditions exactly within a fragment self, is the essence of the diasporic experience.
Divakaruni’s novels *Mistress of Spices, Sister of my Heart, Vine of Desire* and *Queen of Dreams* also deal with similar themes and have been taken up in details in the various chapters of the thesis. One feels committed to the land where one is born and always in search of the opportunity to verbalise one’s feelings and memories of the homeland. George Lamming in his essay “The Occasion for Speaking” tries to analyse the circumstances that led to the migration of certain writers and their absence from the homeland drags them into a state of separation from their roots sometimes temporarily and sometimes permanently. The questions like “Why have they migrated? And what, if any, are the peculiar pleasures of exile? Is their journey a part of a hunger for recognition?” Do they see such recognition as a confirmation of the fact that they are writers?” (12)----keep haunting the critic and the reader alike. Perhaps the answer to all these questions can be found by understanding an artist’s inadequacy of functioning in a society whose past he cannot alter and whose future is beyond him. Therefore, accepting this as a condition, he signs a contract with this changed life thinking” [t]o be an exile is to be alive.” (Lamming12) The departure from the very landscape which is in fact, the raw material of his/her books, makes him/her hunger for nourishment from a soil which he/she cannot endure for the present and the paradox of the exile is that he belongs wherever he is.

On the other hand questions like “‘Who am I?’, ‘Where am I from?’, ‘What am I doing here?’, ‘What is home and my relation to it?’” (Ruth 35) gather force in the context of postcolonial emigration because of their ethnic and personal resonance. The writers cannot escape such self-questioning and find questioning through their protagonists the most suitable. Divakaruni’s writings raise themes of alienation and self-transformation at various levels and try to voice such questions by exploring their roots, allegiance, family, origin, community and identity through her works.
The nation provides the individuals with their fundamental space-time identities and they are located in the world system in terms of their identity as residents of a particular country. The natives experience a feeling of nationhood that is caused by a feeling of belonging and ‘belonging’ causes a feeling of protection. There is an understanding of the tacit codes of the people one lives with because these are the people who understand not only what is said but also what is meant.

‘Expatriates’ voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal and social reasons, as they are not forced to live in other countries. They may “share in the solitude an estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid prescriptions. (Said 181)

Her novel *The Mistress of Spices* also deals with the problem of expatriates, torn between the values of their own society and by those of the west. Tilo the protagonist in this novel owns a spice shop in Oakland and through her supernatural powers heals people of their problems. The conflict arises when this woman falls in love with non Indian and must make some difficult choices as to whether she should continue to serve her people or look for her own happiness.

Divakaruni’s latest novel *Queen of Dreams* combines the elements of Indian American experience and magical realism, which she is known for. The story deals with the search of identity – both individual and communal and a sense of emotional completion. It embodies a portrayal of a clash of cultures and it has been described as containing “Divakaruni’s signature fusion of the realistic and the cosmic.”

(Divakaruni, online) The intensity with which she deals with 9/11 incident and its repercussions of the Indian community in America makes it one of the most politically searing novels to date. Apparently it’s a simple story of a young
enterprising woman in America, but it delves deep into the questions raised by immigration which is so common in the age of globalization. Rakhi is a single mother and a struggling artist. She has always been vaguely aware of her own mother’s unusual ability to interpret dreams, about which she learns only after her death. She also runs a chai house with a friend, which is endangered by the Starbucks – super café ‘Java’ which moves in across the street. The effect of September 11, a vicious attack on her family and friends calls their notion of citizenship in to question and how her relationship with her husband and father changes after the attack has been vividly brought out.

This thesis attempts to describe the similarities and contrasts between two writers from India living in two hemispheres, in order to highlight how the pulls and pressures of the past lives of women continue to influence their present. To analyse the texts of Deshpande and Divakaruni feminist, post colonial and cultural theories will be referred to. There is constant interplay of nostalgia and reality in Deshpande’s and Divakaruni’s novels. At a deeper level they show a conflict between tradition and modernity. The trials and tribulations and the struggle to maintain the modern values and to carve out an identity of their own in the new and ostensibly stifling environment of her protagonists makes them a feminist. Their protagonists seek to synthesize traditions with the modern values which are the needs of the hour. They know how difficult it is to bring in new ideas in this patriarchal set up where the authority emanates from the eldest male in the family. To an extent they reconcile themselves to the rigidity of traditions but with reservations and carve out their own identity as ‘new women’ living within the ambit of tradition.

Particularly in the case of Deshpande’s protagonists, they neither shatter the ancestral dignity nor give up essentials of modernity. They keep some of them in
suspended animation and wait for the right time to bring about the change in the role of the women and are successful in relaxing the rigidity of some customs. They subtly change their immediate environment and the people concerned. They are both conformist and non-conformist. They conform to the modern values of education and marriage. But they appear non-conformist to the age long tradition. Shashi Deshpande’s success lies not just in conducting the voyage in the traditional way of life of her heroines but in harmonizing the two divergent trends.

It is very difficult to separate tradition from modernity for the mere reason that our society is heterogeneous. This is due to India’s peculiar geographical and cultural diversity, as well as the variety of religious communities. Tradition and modernity are seen as conflicting terms in India basically because of its history which comprises of various civilizations, foreign invasions, religious attitudes and social practices. India’s disturbed past has left its own impact, which can still be felt on certain spheres of life, thus intensifying the tussle between tradition and modernity. Being modern means accepting the world view on the basis of developing knowledge, and rational and secular thinking. As a result all the thinkers from the past have been in the process of bridging the gap between the traditional and the modern.

Every human being is equal at birth and should have the right to survive on his/her own terms. Whether or not the changing times and the world scenario are acceptable to us, women are definitely taking front ranking positions in every sphere of life. So even if feminism as an ideology is rejected by man wherever woman is being given more space and acceptance we are in a way practicing its ideals. Deshpande believes that feminism is really working for a better, a more meaningful and companionable relationship between men and women, instead of an uneasy relationship between tyrant and oppressed. She also opposes the people who attribute
wrong notions to feminism out of ignorance or lack of understanding and are condemning all the efforts that have been made to prevent the injustice done to women.

Feminism’ is an ideological position which emphasizes the equality of gender and advocates maximization of potential of women, so that institutionally and culturally created constraints do not hinder the process and pattern of development of women. Thus, to become a feminist means to be prepared for a profound personal transformation. (Tandon 28)

The writings of Indian women and their portrayal of women characters in their fiction depends or is tied up with a number of factors i.e. the situation of the female, within the historical and regional background, the degree of liberty given to a woman and the restraints imposed on her. How bound is she to her traditions and her family and does she want to bear the burden of these complex traditional values or break away from them? It would be wrong to say that women are deprived of opportunities today. But we cannot even deny the fact that all civilizations are predominantly patriarchal societies male – centered, controlled and organized and conducted in such a way that even till today women are subordinate to men in almost all cultural domains:- familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. The traditions are so deeply rooted that women in spite of their success in attaining professional and financial independence find that paths are still beset with peculiar difficulties of one kind or another … it certainly testifies to the strength and persistence of the traditional feeling that if a woman has a home her place is in it. In fact traditions and patriarchy have reconciled to woman’s subordinate position. Simone de Beauvoir hence rightly points out that ‘one is not born, but rather, becomes
a woman… It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature – which is described as feminine’. (295)

Although women have been central to the making of society and the building of civilizations, they have been pushed into the background. They have shared in the preservation of memory that shapes the cultural traditions; links generations and connects the past and the future. Though they have played only a marginal role in ‘history making’ in the sense of ordering and interpreting the past. In writing women’s history there are dangers of either ‘reading back’ that is judging women of the past by present sensibilities, or regarding the women of other periods as nothing but creatures of their times. Reading women’s lives or hearing their voices brings up another issue, the question of consent- whether women agree with the works written about them. This reminds us of John Stuart Mill’s observation:

We may safely assert that the knowledge that men can acquire of women, even as they have been and are, without reference to what they might be, is wretchedly imperfect and superficial and will always be so until women themselves have told all they have to tell.

Despite constituting a major chunk of the world’s population women have been relegated to a secondary status. Colonization and patriarchy have further reduced the position of women to that of subalterns. But even in countries of the colonizers, women have had to undertake a long struggle in order to attain a respectable status. To overcome this, subaltern history employs the principle of self representation as a means of recovering suppressed identities.

Virginia Woolf talks about the ‘New Colours and Shadows’ in women’s writing in her essay “Women and Fiction”. She points out the transformation in the
position of Women, who are now voters, wage earners and responsible citizens. Women have gained a position outside home with the help of education and even succeeded in providing material benefits to the family. But this is further complicated by the continuing expectation that they continue to perform their traditional domestic role along with the added responsibility of supplementing the income of an unemployed or underemployed husband and family. In her essay “Permeable Boundaries” Maithreyi Krishnaraj writes: “Education for women instead of promoting greater autonomy may become an additional attribute of marriageability; independent earnings merely end up as additional responsibility undertaken for the family.”(17)

Women in different socio-cultural and historical locations formulate their relation to feminism in different ways. Talking of the western feminist movements that started in 1960’s and went a long way, there were abundant feminist writings which played their role in obtaining a respectable place for women in patriarchal society. Western feminism has gained ground, over last few decades because of the impetus given to it by theorists such as Simone De Beauvoir, Kate Millet and Betty Friedan. Apart from them we cannot ignore the contribution of such outstanding female authors such as George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft, Rebecca West and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Feminism as a movement originated in the West, but with the deterioration in the status of women in India, there arose a need for feministic studies. Some of the issues evoked by the Western women were bound to be taken up by their Indian counterparts. As K.T Sunitha remarks in her essay “Cross Cultural Dilemmas of Indian Women in Bharti Mukherjee’s Novels”, “The Indian woman’s encounter with the West only strengthens her resolve to put an end to her subjugation.”(262) There is
a section of theorists who has lost its sense of balance while another aims at creating a woman of substance commanding respect as she executes her role with dignity, confidence and responsibility. Third World Feminists have added a new dimension to the feminist literature as well as Third World Women’s problems. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty women are an “imagined community of women with divergent histories and social locations woven together by the political threats of opposition to forms of domination (Sexist, racist and imperialist structures that are not only pervasive but also systematic.” (“Under Western Eyes” 4)

Western feminist theory ignores imperialism and even fails to incorporate other inequalities like class and race that is to be seen in the texts of South Asian feminist studies. In the west, focus on women began with literature and history, while in India and its neighbouring countries it sprang from a more direct concern with the low status of women in society and the social events prevalent in society. Women across classes and cultures cannot be characterized as a singular group rather it is affected by a number of factors i.e. the issue of class, caste, community and religion. Thanks to the works of feminist anthropologists we have now come to appreciate that female subordination is more complex than originally realized. The upper urban classes and middle class are different from the lower class. For upper class tradition and culture is an issue while for lower class it becomes a question of caste and identity. The demarcation between rich and poor, lower and upper caste, women and men, Hindu and Muslim, is a fact of everyday life and one has to negotiate with these differences at some point of time in life.

The intersection of Feminism with post-colonialism finds expression in the view that women in many societies, like colonized subjects, have been relegated to the position of the ‘other’ colonized by various forms of patriarchal domination. They
thus share with many races and cultures an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and marginality. It is not surprising, then, that the history and the concerns of the feminist theory have paralleled developments in post-colonial theory. Feminist and post-colonial both seek to reinstate the marginalized in the face of the dominant, hence early feminist theory, like early nationalist post-colonial criticism, was concerned with inverting the structures of domination, substituting or replacing a female tradition or tradition for male-oriented one in different spheres, right from biological, social, political, intuitive, to the philosophical, artistic and literary.

In this context the theories of Elaine Showalter, Julia Kristeva, Helen Cixous and critics such as Gayatri Spivak and Sara Suleri among others are well known. The real issue at stake, however, is the calling into question of the spurious author/native modes and forms on which such canonical constructions are formed. The last couple of decades have witnessed a surge in actual and potential intersections among the two fields, through which both approaches have interrogated issues that have led to new directions in understanding parallel preoccupations. For instance, the notion of ‘double colonization’, i.e., that women in the formerly colonized societies were ‘doubly’ colonized by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies became a catch-phrase of post-colonial and feminist discourses in the 1980’s.

However, in India, the issue and its polemics are somewhat different. The priorities here are not the same as in the west. As is imperative, the Indian writers (whether male or female) write out of a set of observed situations in a changing socio-cultural scene. They are not concentrating purely on the female ‘subject’. Secondly in the Indian context, women have increasingly found an outlet to express and engage themselves in varied professional spheres and this has provided a fresh impetus for the writers to write their new, if also more challenging roles that require both their
assertion and their preservation of identity as women, along with more crucial mental and emotional adjustments. However, the portrayal of Indian woman in fiction is urgently tied up with the compulsions of a regional cultural and sub-ethnic character. Such a portrayal demands a corresponding focusing of the situation of the female in that peculiar enclosure, with its historical and regional implications. This portrayal also depends upon the degree of emancipation or restraint imposed on human beings. One of the recent trends to emerge, after the pervasive and long focus on East-West encounter and psychological investigation of character, is the woman’s role as a bearer of tradition, and how she longs to belong to its complex layers in the present situation.

In the debate on nationalism and colonial history, gender and sexuality have been central to the conceptualization, expression and enactment of such relations across the colonial spectrum. The nation/state or its guiding principles have often been imagined literally as a ‘woman’, e.g., the figures of Britannica and Mother India have been continually circulated as symbols of different symbols of national temper. Further, as national emblems women are usually cast as mothers and wives, and are called upon to literally or figuratively reproduce the nation. Anticolonial or nationalist movements have used the image of the nation as mother. In the post-colonial sense the role of mothers becomes somewhat different, in the way they are granted limited agency. Arguments for women’s education in the metropolitan and modern context rely on the logic that educated women will make better wives and mothers, whereas in the nineteenth century Bengali discourses, for instance, the over-educated woman is represented as becoming a memsahib or English woman who neglects her home and responsibilities.
Critics have pointed out that even though the reformation of women’s position seems to be a major concern within nationalist discourses, women themselves in the real sense seem to disappear from these discussions about them. Lata Mani in a well known article on Sati in colonial India points out that the entire debate on Sati was concerned with redefining tradition and modernity, and was at stake was not woman but tradition. In other words Mani argues that women become the sites on which various versions of scripture, tradition and law are elaborated and contested. What is absent is the pain of the widow. (88-156) Similarly debates around widow immolation have come to occupy a permanent place within post-colonial theory. This is mainly due to Gayatri Spivak’s work, especially her oft-cited essay- “Can the Subaltern Speak” in which the complete absence of women’s voices in the immolation debate is read as a particularly apt emblem of intermixed violence of colonialism and patriarchy. The crux of the above approaches is how women are used in political exchanges and how they are marginalized by discourses about them.

Feminism as well as gender studies in different fields or disciplines have intersected between theoretical approaches such as Marxism, Post- Structuralism, Post-Modernism. But all this has not been easy and has problematized matters for negotiating women’s struggles in one’s own nation and cultural environment. An Indian theoretician, Gyan Prakash has suggested usefully that the subaltern studies/project derives its force as a post-colonial criticism from a catachrestic combination (derived from Gayatri Spivak who uses it to suggest transformation), of Marxism, Post-Structuralism, Gramscian and Foucauldian thought, the modern west and India, archival research and textual criticism.(40) What Prakash implies is when the subaltern historians combine these different perspectives; they also transform each of them, perhaps somewhat in the same way as Said’s Orientalism has been a brilliant
attempt to combine Foucauldian and Derridean methods and Gramscian dedication for a social change. These approaches centred in nationalism, history, sociology etc. are thus helpful in locating the female situation in a wide variety of social, cultural, political, anthropological and economic context in India.

An important argument advanced in the debate on the role of Western Feminist praxis is the way it seeks to homogenize all categories of women and their experience- Western and non-Western, as a referent and a norm. There is a sharp distinction between priority issues (and their construction) around which all women are expected to organize. The point is to recognize the ‘Third World Difference’ that underlines what oppresses most if not all women in these countries. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her essay “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” refers to the phrase ‘Women as category of analysis’ which she says assumes that women across classes and cultures are constituted as a homogeneous group as is done by much feminist discourse. She further points out that “discursively consensual homogeneity of women as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women”. (23).

Women are categorized as a group on the basis of secondary sociological and anthropological universals rather than biological. And if at all there is something common among women then it is “Political struggle against the class, race, gender and imperialist hierarchies”. (Mohanty 22) We cannot place all women on one platform; they are differently affected under different situations. For example, development as a process is not always synonymous to economic development. It could be equalizing the status of men with women. Women are positively or negatively affected by economic development but the impact of development on
urban and rural women cannot be same. Similarly, female subordination is a more complex issue than is realized.

We no longer think in terms of a universal female subordination for which there is some unitary causation but realize the historical processes occurred in different places at different times and in different ways; subordination was never uniform even within the same period across all groups nor even within the same group. Women enjoyed spheres of influence and power as well as been victims of subjugation. (Krishnaraj 5)

There are, however, grounds where women as a coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location and contradictions implies a notion of gender difference, or even patriarchy (as male dominance) which can be applied universally and cross-culturally. But the other yardstick, of an uncritical use of methodologies to cover all female identities, lacks validity. This leads to a misguided sense of homogeneity which for instance, produces the image of the ‘average third world woman’. This includes the Indian women in the majority sense, the third world women’s essentially truncated life based on her gender role; ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family oriented, victimized etc. This is against the educated, modern, westernized women having control over their bodies and freedom to make their decisions. Bell Hooks writes that “a broad and whole feminist theory will emerge only from those who have knowledge of both the margin and centre.” (42)

Coming to Indian women writers and women studies in India, they emerged as a distinct body in the mid-seventies. Though women in India have been writing for
over 2000 years but they are more noticeable today than they have ever been before. They have from time to time written about their situations, their struggle for education, and described the control imposed on them by culture family and community. They write about the obstacles they have to encounter in their married lives, fear of rebellion and almost practically about everything, they feel and experience. In India also the women’s movement has been critical in the promotion of women’s writing. Women are provoked from time to time to break their silence and pen down, what they cannot bring up and talk about in the patriarchal society. In the essay ‘The Uses of Silence’ Patti L. Duncan recognizes and acknowledges the many complex ways in which race and gender are structured in our culture, as well as different forms that racism and sexism enact at various societal levels, from interpersonal interactions to larger sociostructural relationships. Upon careful review, however, there seem to be multiple silences at work in relation to race, gender, sexuality, and national identity. (22).

In some parts of India Education is still not imparted to women and efforts are being continuously made to demand it. It is the efforts of the activists, teachers, critics who have been bold enough to join the women’s movement to have provided the feminist thinkers with whatever they could apply pressure upon society achieve some success. The feminist magazines, publications and periodicals have become a source of expression for such writings.

Literature being a powerful instrument of social change, has always been a threat to the established regime and social order, so a large number of writers have been exiled, imprisoned and banned during critical movements in history. Women
have faced such discrimination even more as they have been ostracized, reprimanded, rejected and dismissed from time to time in the patriarchal societies. It is also the inequality of the sexes in our culture which has discouraged women from writing and expressing themselves. The practice of literature has been purely male activity. Women have been featured and have been a part of male literacy activity and with time they too have started writing but not without the realization that writing is also gendered. Virginia Woolf is quite right when she says that a woman’s mind cannot become “incandescent” rather it is “harassed and distracted with hates and grievances” –as men do not allow them to express themselves in writing. But woman’s urge to talk about themselves through writing compels them to adopt different means of expression. This supports Tharu and Lalitha’s contention that “these are complexities in the cultural fabric that must be recognized if we are to approach the elusive peculiar tension between public and private realities that underwrite women’s writing” (XVII).

The poststructuralist feminists like Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva find woman’s specificity buried in the present psycho-socio cultural set-up where language can represent men only. Women’s specificity here, therefore, remains repressed. “In such a system they want to bring forth woman’s otherness in its irreducible subjectivity, based on a radical understanding of the power of the language” (Habib 669). In the words of Gamble, “Feminist theorists have posited the notion of an alienated female subjectivity as the female is determined socially, linguistically and biologically by patriarchy…” (Gamble 324) Though the meaning, scope and significance of ‘gender’ has enlarged over the years; Women studies in India have so far not indulged in these theoretical controversies for the mere reason that hierarchies of caste and class are so strong here, they do not escape anyone’s
notice and the western feminists ideas regarding gender do not seem so important to women writers in India. They are so busy grappling with the issues of religion, caste and class which constitute a major part of the writings.

“Indian theorizing on gender has moved away from the unitary formulation of the west. We have grappled more with the connection of gender to other structures in society such as the way, gender acts as signifier of caste and nation in India”. (Krishnaraj 17)

It is has not always been a matter of individuals choice, inclination, imagination or even talent to choose a form for what they want to write, rather it depends on what’s permissible and what’s publishable. The selection of themes by women writers is determined by factors which range from the mundanely physical to the intricately tangled and emotional; each of them arises from the overlapping pressures of family, community and society. The famous feminist Helen Cixous in her text *The Laugh of Medusa* states that

Woman must write herself, must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text-as into the world and into the history-by her own movement.

“Write yourself. Your body must be heard. It is time for woman to start scoring their feats in written and oral language.” (Cixous, *Newly Born Women*) But the fact remains that the writer who transgresses or she questions the existing order is not accepted. The gendering of literature thus affects the choice of subject in two ways:
It defines what is appropriate, and then places it on an inferior scale. It also decrees (implicitly) that the concerns of public realm – religion, politics, war, economics, and race are beyond the intellectual and creative capacity of women. (Joseph 20)

The dilemma that a writer confronts is that she feels impelled and does write about untouched and tangled issues of family, personal relationships that are a warp and woof of her life, but she finds it difficult to cope with the censorship and silence imposed on her. It becomes a challenge for a woman to carve out a space for her creativity. The term ‘women writer’ is also considered derogatory, and women are taken away of their artistic autonomy and identity and are categorized by gender. In a paper presented at a seminar, ‘The Dilemma of the Women Writers’, Shashi Deshpande protested:

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, caused her strong feelings, I don’t see why this has to be labeled feminist fiction. (18).

The boundaries set by the society hinder the progress of women, but with the help of radical movements like the Brahmo Samaj, the cause of women has been upheld and gender bias has been condemned. Even though discriminating practices have been criticized the situation remains much the same. Writers have always been among the forerunners of feminist movement in India.

Besides an externally imposed censorship, writers suffer an internally imposed censorship too. Their intimate world is fraught with the problem of balancing their
strong creative urge to write about their personal experience and an equally strong emotional need to preserve and protect personal relationships. And women know that crossing these barriers could lead to both emotional and physical torture.

There is always a disconnection ‘in what women say and what they write; between their spoken words and their silences. Between women as subject matter and women as subject and writers. Between language literature and social movements, and emergence of women voices. Between language and gender and gender and genre. (Joseph 9-10)

So it is clear they are confronted with the challenge of new situation bearing the responsibility of preserving the culture and tradition of the community in their different roles of mothers, daughters, wives and sisters. Ironically even in the progressive society, a woman who sings, dances, paints or cooks is acceptable but the woman who writes is given a separate gender identity. As Nabaneeta Dev Sen pertinently observes: “Writing is an act of intellecction and the area of the mind is allotted to men….. but the woman who writes….. has stepped out of her area of the senses and has appropriated a male gesture.” (298).

The topic Negotiating With The Past And Contemporary Life of Indian Woman: A Study Of The Works Of Shashi Deshpande And Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni intends to bring out similarities and differences in the reaction of their protagonists various situations, and to point out how environment affects the thinking and responses of people to life. Divakaruni’s protagonists are more adventurous and bold because they are influenced by the western liberal outlook on life. Deshpande’s women who are mostly career women are still unable to completely break off from their moorings and defy the world with a revolt against traditional beliefs and
practices. The way these two writers try to establish a kind of compromise between the pressures of the past and the pulls of the present shows their attempt to negotiate between the traditional and new life, in India as well as after immigration to a new world. Deshpande’s heroines carve out their identity as new women living within the ambit of tradition. They neither shatter the ancestral dignity nor give up essentials of modernity. They stick to their gun mutely but stubbornly even amidst chaos and confusion.
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