Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION
Shashi Deshpande is one of the most accomplished women novelists of contemporary Indo Anglian or Indian English Literature, which now occupies an important place in the international literary world. As the name itself suggests, Indian English Literature came into existence as a bye-product of Indian and British culture. It was born around the middle of the nineteenth century as a result of the colonization of India by the British and the subsequent introduction of English as an official language. After a humble beginning, this literature written by Indians in English language is universally acclaimed as a vibrant force in world literature.

Shashi Deshpande, who was born in 1938 at Dharwad, Karnataka has produced ten novels, eight collections of short stories, a collection of essays and four books for children. By her own admission she accidentally became a writer at the age of thirty, although she grew up in a literary environment – being the daughter of the famous Kannada dramatist, novelist and Sanskrit scholar, Adya Rangacharya (Sriranga). Inspite of her productive career, Shashi Deshpande has maintained a low profile. She has been quietly writing for more than three decades without fanfare weaving tales about the human predicament. She has presented the lives of ordinary people who we might encounter on the streets, bringing into sharp focus the meaning of life itself. Though she is one of the finest exponents of her craft today, there is no hype surrounding her. In short, she certainly has not got the recognition, she deserves. Although she was given the Sahitya Akademi award in 1990, it is only
recently that she has emerged as a significant voice, being decorated with Padma Sri in 2009. What really sets Shashi Deshpande apart is that her writings hold a universal appeal that clearly emanates from her rootedness in everyday India. Much of her writing is certainly women oriented, but she is not a feminist as she herself has reiterated time and again. She says;

"for me what is important is the reader And as far as readers are concerned, I would like them to read me as a novelist, not as a feminist novelist or woman writer or whatever ...................... 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." ¹

It is true that Shashi Deshpande has addressed various social issues of contemporary India, but her major concern is to depict the miserable plight of the women belonging to Indian middle class, who are brought up in a traditional environment and are struggling to liberate themselves in their quest for identity and independence. In her novels, Deshpande has revealed the women’s struggle to secure self respect and identity by overcoming multiple levels of oppression through emancipation and empowerment.

This search for identity and meaning of life, this liberation and empowerment has been the story of the Indian people as well. It was during this struggle that Indian English Literature was born and its growth and success reflects the coming of age of India as a nation. As it has been pointed out the roots of this
literature lie in the economic, historic and cultural links between India and England. The Englishmen had been eyeing the riches of India long before they established themselves as ruler of this land as we find Christopher Marlowe’s, Dr. Taustus uttering these lines:

“I’ll have them fly to India for gold
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl.”

The victories of Englishmen over the Spanish ‘Armada’ and against France in the Seven Year War made English East India Company a force to reckon with. Those, who had come to India as traders in the early years of seventeenth century, the English defeated Bengal in 1757 at Plassey. This was a turning point and the English became the rulers of Bengal and eventually they colonized the whole of India. In order to strengthen their machinery, Sir William Jones, a member of the English Supreme Court founded in 1784, The Royal society of Asian Studies. In 1792, Charles Grant, one of the directors of the East India Company pleaded for the English language to be used as a vehicle for imparting western ideas. This was soon supported by Indian patriots and social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and so English was introduced in schools and colleges. A number of colleges imparting English education were opened at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Another factor, which helped the growth of English education in India was the work of Christian missionaries. They started many English medium colleges and started many printing presses.
The western education brought about the birth and the growth of English journalism in India. Hicky’s ‘Bengal Gazette’, the first newspaper of modern India was founded at Calcutta in 1780 by James Hicky. The reading public demanded more and this provided a great scope for English educated Indians and Indian English writers. So, the English language and its literature, which was confined to Bengal in the beginning, now opened to the whole of India. This led to a large scale establishment of English medium educational institutions all over India. This brought about India’s political and cultural renaissance. The earliest form of English writing by Indians was confined to prose and the drafting of speeches or a pamphlet. Many Indians were attracted to write in English as it helped them to impress the British and gave them a wider international reading public. Moreover the multiplicity of languages in India made English a common language. The growing nationalism and distrust of the vernaculars inspired Indian writers to articulate the glories of India in the English language. Meanwhile in 1835, Lord Macaulay’s ‘minute’ paved the way for English being given prominence in Government service. Gradually more and more people came in contact of English language and literature. Thus Indian English literature was born. At first, a clear cut western influence was evident as these early writers imitated the writers of English literature. These early writers were either patriots or belonged to highly westernized families. Most of the early English creative writing by Indians was done in verse. Although Indians produced English literature in all four genres – poetry,
prose, drama and fiction. The poetry was the first to be written and most popular, drama has remained the poorest, but it has been the novel, which best suited the Indian English writers’ as well as the readers’ temperament. Prose was mostly written on impulse like political protest or social reform.

The novel gives artistic form to the relationship of man and society and is particularly concerned with time and space and their effects on man. The first Indian English novel was ‘Raj Mohan’s wife’, by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Few others were ‘Kamala’ by Krupabai Sathianathan, ‘The Prince of Destiny’ (1909) by Sarath Kumar Ghose, ‘Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest’(1909) by S.N.Mitra, ‘The Dive of Death: An Indian Romance’ (1911) by T.Ramakrishna, etc. In nineteen twenties a few talented writers emerged, who could lift the Indian English novel to international status and recognition. During this time social realism was ushered in creative writing by Munshi Premchand in Hindi and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee in Bengali. Among them the most prominent were – Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao, whom William Walsh called ‘The Big Three’ of Indian English fiction. These three novelists are really responsible for establishing and developing Indian English novel. The overall contribution of these novelists can be best expressed in the words of William Walsh, “it is these three writers who defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate. They established its assumption, they sketched its main themes ............... Their language has been freed of the foggy taste of Britain.”

There were other notable novelists
in that period, when India was struggling for independence like Purshottam Tricamdas, G.V. Desani, Khwaja A. Abbas, etc. It was Babhani Bhattacharya, B.Rajan, Manohar Malgaonkar, Khuswant Singh, Chaman Nahal, etc. who carried on the good work of 'The Big Three' after India became independent in 1947. These novelists along with Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao have produced brilliant novels in the nineteen fifties and sixties.

The progress and development of Indian English fiction has been divided into three phases by K.R.S. Iyenger:

1. **Novelists before 1920. This can again be divided into**
   (a) **1820-1870: The beginnings – The age of the great pioneers.**
   (b) **1870-1900: The renaissance in the spirit – The age of religious and literary awakening**
   (c) **1900-1920: The period of political awakening.**

2. **1920-1947: The Gandhian era.**

3. **1947 – onwards: Independence and after**

   Most of the novels of the first generation did not possess any literary merit. They mostly imitated the early Victorian novel of English literature. These novels were mostly social, historical, detective or romances. The social novels were mainly concerned with religion and social reforms full of philosophy and propaganda. The historical novels of that period had no vision and lacked the sense of historical perspective. The detective novels were not up to expectations and romances were a little interesting as Indians from even the early times have loved romances. The Indian English novels before 1920 have a large
number of characters and events grouped around the hero and they generally ended with a happy marriage. They had false sentiments, melodrama and wooden characters with little artistic beauty.

After the first World War, the national conscience of the Indians was awakened and as a result they craved for liberty. This gained further momentum with the emergence of the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. So after 1920 the Indian English novels were written under this influence. The older tendencies continued, but the realistic novels with a purpose appeared on the scene. They had a vision and were free from didacticism. Political events and the freedom movement is a strong presence in the novels of this period. Gandhiji turned many Indian writers from romanticism to realism. As Meenakshi Mukherji says:

“No discussion of Indo-Anglian fiction dealing with the independence movement would be complete without an assessment of the function of Mahatma Gandhi in these novels. The most potent force behind the whole movement, the Mahatma is recurring presence in these novels and he is used in different ways to suit the design of each writer.”

Rao’s ‘The Cow of the Barricades’ is also about the days of the struggle and Gandhiji is the main figure. Some other novels written even in the post independence period have the echo of the freedom struggle and partition like ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ by Manohar Malgaonkar, ‘Train to Pakistan’ by Khuswant Singh, ‘Sunlight on a Broken Column’ by Attia Husain, ‘Some Inner Fury’ by Kamala Markandeya, etc.

The Indian English Fiction really flowered with the achievement of independence by India. An important feature of the post independence fiction is the rising up of a large number of women novelists on the horizon of Indian English novel. They have made a significant contribution in this sphere and enriched it. The novelists such as Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Attia Hosain, Rama Mehta, Santha Rama Rau, Kusum Ansal, Namita Gokhale, Bharti Mukherji, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shobha De and Shashi Deshpande, by their themes, choice of characters and mode of writing have brought forth the creative release of feminine sensibility. The emergence of women writers brought with it a new era of emancipation for the Indian women, an era of increased opportunities and a powerful participation in the social and intellectual life of the country. In fact the earliest attempt by women at writing English novel was in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These earliest novelists were Toru Dutt, Raj Lakshmi Devi, Krupabi Sathianathan, Cornelia Sorabjee, Swarna Kumari Ghosal, Sita Chatterji. These were early experiments and it was only after independence that the
women novelists made solid contribution to the Indian English literature. The women novelists, by the inclusion of new themes created a new awareness of the female society and many have written about larger issues also.

The real surge of the Indian English novel came in the Nineteen seventies. This branch of literature evolved from a subaltern consciousness; as a reaction to break away from the colonial literature. Hence the post colonial literature in India witnessed a revolution against the idiom used by earlier writers. Gradually the new novelists like Arun Joshi, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Anita Desai, etc. and more recent writers like Upamanyu Chatterji, Amitava Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, etc. began employing the techniques of hybrid language, magic realism peppered by native themes. Thus from a post colonial era, Indian literature ushered into the modern and then post modern era. The saga of the Indian English novel therefore stands as the tale of changing tradition, the story of changing India.

The stories were already there in India steeped in folklores, myths, written in several languages. As pointed out earlier the Indian English novels gained status and a contemporary touch with the coming of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao. The novels like ‘The Village’, ‘Cooke’, ‘Untouchable’, ‘The Sword and the Sickle’, ‘Two Leaves and a Bud’, ‘Old Woman and the Cow’, etc. show Anand’s ardour for social revolution and his conviction in salvation through socialistic doctrine. R.K.Narain presents the
realities of Indian village life with objectivity and detachment in his novels like – ‘Swami and Friends’, ‘The Dark Rooms’, ‘The English Teacher’, ‘The Bachelor of Arts’, ‘Waiting for the Mahatma’, ‘The Guide’, ‘The Vendor of Sweets’, etc. Raja Rao in his remarkable novels ‘Kanthapura’, ‘The Cat and Shakespeare’, ‘The Serpent and the Rope’, ‘Comrade Kirillov’, etc. portrayed a whole new India. Now a picture of India through Indian eyes was available and with passing time the Indian English novels gained maturity. It is not just the daily lives, not just the social issues, the recent novelists have unveiled the grotesque mythical realities of India.

The Indian English fiction has gained much more respect and acclaim in the last two decades or the post modern period. The thematic range of these novelists has further broadened and the emphasis has shifted towards urban centric novels. As the world has become ‘a global village’, no culture or society is insular in the contemporary period. This is reflected in the situations and characters of these novels. Love, sex and marriage or its failure are some of the popular themes. Lack of faith in religion and declining moral standard and behaviour are some of the predominant themes of contemporary Indian English novels. The corruption in public as well as personal lives of individuals too appeals to our novelists. The new novelists of eighties and after have written good novels by employing national myths and epics like the ‘Mahabharat’ as Shashi Tharoor has done in his the ‘Great Indian Novel’. His other novels are ‘Show Busines’ and ‘Riot’. Vikram Seth created

Although many critics don't regard Salman Rushdie as an Indian English novelist as he has migrated to the west and is now a British national but one thing is certain that Rushdie fascinated the Indian intelligentsia with his remarkable understanding of Indian history as well as the unification of
Indian history with language. This Mumbai born novelist along with many others like Sir V.S.Naipaul, Ved Mehta, Nirad C.Chaudhari, Saros Cowasjee, Rohinton Mistry, Bharti Mukherji, Jhumpa Lahiri, etc. are known as writers of the Indian diaspora, which means that their origin is India, they have been dispersed to foreign lands and have settled there. Sir Salman Rushdie, who has been knighted in 2007 burst on the literary scene in the nineteen eighties. He achieved fame with his seconfed novel, “Midnight’s Children” (1981), which won the Booker Prize of that year. His style is often classified as ‘magical realism’ mixed with historical fiction. The dominant theme of his work is the story of the many connections, disruptions and migrations between the Eastern and the Western world. His fourth novel, ‘The Satanic Verses’ (1989) snowballed into a great controversy leading to violent protests all over the Muslim world. A death ‘fatwa’ was issued against him by Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of Iran at that time and Salman Rushdie remained underground for almost a decade. He has been awarded all over the world and in May 2008 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Apart from his books on non-fiction, his other novels include ‘Shame’ (1983), ‘The Moor’s Last Sigh’ (1995) and ‘Shalimar the Clown’ (2005). His latest novel is ‘The Enchantress of Florence’ (2008). The same year, Rushdie’s ‘Midnight’s Children’ was publicly voted as the Best of Booker- the best novel to win the Booker Prize in the award’s forty year history.
Some other Indian English novelists, who have made an impact in the last two decades are Kiran Nagarkar, whose historical novel ‘Cuckold’ won the Sahitya Akademi Award for 2000. The novelists such as Manoj Bhatia, Raj Gill, Allan Sealy, Raj Kamal Jha, Esther David, Sagarika Ghose, Manju Kapur, etc. are contemporary novelists with great promise and merit. Apart from these new writers, some older writers have also contributed during this period. R.K. Narayan has published four novels in the post-1980 period: ‘The Tiger for Malgudi’ (1983), ‘Talkative Man’ (1983), ‘The World of Nagaraj’ (1990) and ‘Grandmother’s Tales’ (1992). Mulk Raj Anand published three novels – ‘The Bubble’ (1984), ‘Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi’ (1991) and ‘Nine Moods of Bharata: Novel of a Pilgrimage’ (1998). One thing is certain that the earlier efforts of these great writers was much better. The famous poet, Shiv K. Kumar also made his mark as novelist and produced four novels – ‘The Bone’s Prayer’ (1979), ‘Nude Before God’ (1983), ‘A River With Three Banks’ (1998) and ‘Infatuation’ (2001). Kumar’s fictional art seems to be influenced by Joseph Conrad. Similarly Arun Joshi has impressed everybody with his novel, ‘The Last Labyrinth’, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award of 1982. Joshi’s swan song ‘The City and River’ was published in 1990. His novels were marked by his existential vision and a search for identity.

Indian English novel had remained a male bastion for a long time, as all the major novelists in the pre-independence period were men, although women like Toru Dutt and Cornelia
Sorabjee had written English novels towards the end of the nineteenth century. In the post independence period there appeared on the horizon of Indian English novel, a number of women writers, who made a significant contribution in the field and enriched it. One of the most radical changes that took place around 1950 was the liberation of Indian women from the tradition bound ethos. They exemplify the creative release of feminine sensibility. The best known women writers of this phase are Kamala Markandeya with novels such as ‘Nectar in a Sieve’ (1954), ‘A Silence of Desire’ (1961), ‘A Handful of Rice’ (1966), ‘The Coffer Dams’ (1969), ‘Two Virgins’ (1973), ‘The Pleasure City’ (1982), etc. Attia Hossain had written a remarkable novel, ‘Sunlight on a Broken Column’ (1961). The German born Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, who won the Booker Prize for her novel ‘Heat and Dust’. This novelist, who is married to an Indian wrote other novels like ‘To Whom She Will’ (1953), Backward Place’ (1965) and ‘Esmond in India’. Another talented woman novelist is Nayantara Sahgal, daughter of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and niece of Jawaharlal Nehru. Apart from raising women issues, she displays her sharp and acute awareness of the political and social issues of India in novels such as ‘Prison and Chocolate Cake’ (1954), ‘A Time to Be Happy’ (1958), ‘From Fear Set Free’ (1962), ‘This Time of Morning’ (1965), ‘Storm in Chandigarh’ (1969) and ‘The Day in Shadow’ (1971). The most famous of post-independence women poets, Kamala Das has also written beautiful and bold novels in her confessional mode – ‘My Story’ and ‘Alphabet of Lust’.
Another noteworthy novelist, who is still active is Anita Desai, who has delved deep into the psyche of her characters and revealed the inner working and hidden thoughts in her famous novels such as, ‘Cry the Peacock’ (1963), ‘Voices in the City’ (1965), ‘Where Shall We Go This Summer’ (1975), ‘The Village By the Sea’ (1982), ‘Baumgartners Bombay’, ‘Fasting Feasting’ (2001), etc.

The cobweb of romance, the strange mind of the women and the very ideal that women need something more than just food and shelter are ideally portrayed by the women writers, while making Indian English novel to take that final step towards maturity. In the post – 1980 period there are a number of women novelists, who are painting the fast changing face of India. The novelists like Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Namita Gokhale, Bharti Mukherji, Jhumpa Lahiri, Munju Kapur, Kiran Desai and Shashi Deshpande have heralded a new consciousness in the realm of traditional thinking. They are still active and are leaving an indelible imprint in the annals of Indian English fiction getting national and international awards. Shobha De sensationalized the literary world with ‘Socialite Evenings’ (1989), ‘Starry Nights’ (1991), ‘Sisters’ (1992), ‘Strange Obsession’ (1992), etc. Her novels and nonfiction books like ‘Surviving Men’ and ‘Spouse’ explore man-woman relationships and marriage. Within the framework of her novels Shobha De depicts life as it is and not as it should be, but in her non fiction works, she advocates that an understanding is imperative among the married couples. She too has a gift of probing the subdued
depth of women psychology. Her novels are highly erotic as she analyses the various aspects of sex, a great urge of human beings. Arundhati Roy won the Booker Prize with her first novel, ‘The God of Small Things’ in 1997. The earlier winners like V.S. Naipaul, Ruth Jhabvala and Salman Rushdie are of Indian origin, but settled abroad and Arundhati Roy on the other hand is the first entirely Indian novelist to win this award. She fashioned a new language for fiction. Her use of language reminds us of Eliot’s use of language in ‘Four Quartets’ and the novel upholds the right of women to live their lives in their own way. Bharti Mukherji, born in India, but settled in U.S.A. shot into prominence with her novel, ‘Jasmine’ (1990). Her other novels include ‘Wife’, ‘The Tiger’s Daughter’ and ‘Darkness’. Like her, Jhumpa Lahiri who was born in London is also settled abroad and in her novels has dissected the predicament of immigrants in novels like ‘Interpreter of Maladies’ (1999), which won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2000. Her novel, ‘The Namesake’ (2003) has been filmed under the same name, while ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ was published in 2008. Manju Kapur is an academician teaching at Miranda House of Delhi University. She came into the limelight with her novel ‘Difficult Daughters’ (1998). Her other novels are ‘A Married Woman’ (2003), ‘Home’ (2006) and ‘The Immigrant’, which has been published this year (2009). Other women novelists like Nikita Lalwani, Preethi Nair, Thrity Umrigar, Sagarika Ghose Sardesai, etc. are writing brilliant novels enriching Indian English novel.
These Indian English women novelists, apart from taking up other issues have tried their best to free the female mentality from the age long control of male domination. Whatever social, cultural political and individual awareness we see in the women of present generation is the result of these writers, who have stirred the consciousness of the society. Amidst these voices, Shashi Deshpande has been silently crusading for this cause enabling women to search their identity leading to their emancipation and empowerment. She has written ten gripping novels with her latest novel, ‘In the country of Deceit’ appearing last year (2008). Yet unlike some of our contemporary novelists, hype does not herald her new novels. One hears no whispers of hefty advance and her face does not stare us from newspapers, magazines and T.V. screens. Shashi Deshpandes major concern is to depict the anguish and conflict of the modern educated Indian women caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand and self expression, individuality and independence for the women on the other. Her fiction explores the search of the women to fulfill herself as a human being, independent of her traditional role as a daughter, wife and mother.

From time immemorial, women have been subjugated worldwide, not only in India because the society has been male dominated. The Bible says:

“Then the Lord God made the Man fall into deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the flesh. He
formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him." 

This reflects the germ of disparity between man and woman was present in the western world even at the very beginning of creation. The ancient Hindu law giver, Manu says:

"Day and night, women must be kept in subordination to the males of the family: in childhood to the father, in youth to the husband, in old age to her sons .......... Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be worshipped as god." 

The Vedas too are eloquent about the birth of a son over daughter, but — sometimes in the Hindu religion women were upgraded as the same Manu observed that the father is hundred times more venerable than the teacher and the mother is thousand times more than a father. The famous Greek philosopher, Plato too felt that men and women are different only in physical functions and there should be no discrimination between them. For centuries the Indian women idealized the mythic models from Ramayana and other Puranas. Indian women were asked to be inspired by women like Sita — the silent sufferer and the result is that even today a vast cross-section of Indian women, specially in the villages are passive. They are dependent upon their status and survival on men. However this gloomy picture did not exist in the pre-historic period, when there was no gender bias. Women had a pride of place in the
society and they were deified and glorified. Several women distinguished themselves in various fields – Lopamudra, Bhirwara, Gargi, Ghosha, Arundhati and Apala were learned scholars, while Vachaknave and Leelavati were great mathematicians and Khaana was a well known astronomer.

With the dwindling fortune of India as a nation, the status of women also suffered. During the medieval ages the country was dominated by a series of Muslim rulers and so the women were considered inferior. As Anees Jung writes in her book ‘Unveiling India’ that in the Koran a woman is “described as a ‘Fitna’ one who tempts man and brings trouble”. Inspite this attitude of the society we find that Rani Dugrawati in Central India and Razia Begum, the only woman to rule over Delhi could realize their potential, but on the whole the condition of women was miserable in that age. The poets and reformers of the Bhakti movement raised their voice for the improvement of woman’s lot, but the real change came during the British rule in the 19th and early 20th century due to the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jyotiba Phule. The social practices like ‘Sati’ were officially banned although we still find incidents of ‘sati’ – forty reported cases after independence and the notorious Roop Kanwar case even in 1980s. Although the law and constitution in India has given equal status to women, but in practice the women are still victims of domestic injustice within the family and in the society. There are a number of cases of female foeticide, eve teasing, rapes and different forms of discrimination within the family as well as outside.
In contemporary India, although we find many women achievers in all walks of life, but they have risen despite the system and their road has been rugged and frustrating at every step. Aided by the law and the awareness created by women writers, the women of India have begun to assert themselves, but the society steeped in the age old patriarchal mindset tries to discourage them. Since the inception of the ‘feminist’ movement in the 1960s in the west, much has been written on women, but much still has to be done to correct the injustices meted out to women and also to rid the male psyche of the prejudices and misconceptions regarding them. Alexander Dumas, the nineteenth century French writer was the first to use the term ‘feminism’ for the movement for women’s political rights. Later it spread all across the world. Ibsen the dramatist from Norway heralded the idea of woman’s emancipation with his character of Nora in ‘A Doll’s House’. The real impetus in this direction was provided by Simone de Beauvoir’s book ‘The Second Sex’, first published in French in 1949 and later translated into many languages. She successfully shattered the myth of femininity and shows how, deprived of their social, economic and political rights, the women remain relegated to the background. This movement became quite militant in 1960s with activists like Betty Friedan, Kate Millet and Germaine Greer. A few feminist writers also contributed to this movement like Sylvia Plath, Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch and Margaret Atwood, who have been internationally acclaimed as great feminist novelists. In India, this militant brand of feminism
could not cut much ice, although some novelists like Shobha De and Arundhati Roy have been quite militant. In this context the novels of Shashi Deshpande, who vehemently denies being a feminist have done a remarkable job. She believes there is no war between man and woman. As Indira Gandhi, a great statesperson and former Prime Minister of India says:

"Woman must be bridge and a synthesizer. She shouldn’t allow herself to be swept off her feet by superficial trends nor yet be chained to the familiar. She must ensure the continuity which strengthens roots and simultaneously engineer change and growth to keep society dynamic, abreast of knowledge, sensitive to fast moving events. The solution neither is in fighting for equal position nor denying it, neither in retreat into the home nor escape from it."  

Similarly Shashi Deshpande does not see man as the cause of all troubles. Her depiction of women’s world is authentic, realistic and credible. She is a unique novelist as unlike the western women writers, her perceptions of women’s issues are deeply entrenched in the Indian situation i.e. within the socio-cultural and economic spaces of the country.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novels we get the theme of poverty stricken, hardworking, sincere and silent women, who live like animals, embrace intolerable sufferings for survival and yet hope for a better future. Nothing happens in their life, but series of disappointments along with humiliation, torture and repeated
displacement. Besides the rural mass, there are middle class women in the innumerable towns and cities of India, who are often unable to enjoy the legal status conferred on them. Women are now treated on equal terms by law as far as inheritance of property and opportunities of jobs are concerned. Yet, on the social level the ground realities are different – these women, who have been struggling since ages to assert themselves are still being heckled and subjugated by their male counterparts and forced to remain silent. The voice of this newly emerged class of women, who have the same education as the men and are sometimes given the opportunity of supporting themselves financially is heard in the novels of Shashi Deshpande.

Shashi Deshpande is the second daughter of the famous Kannada dramatist, novelist and Sanskrit scholar Sriranga. She was born in 1938 at Dharwad in Karnataka and had a Marathi mother. So she grew up in an academic environment and imbibed many languages even in her early age. She was later educated in Mumbai and Bangalore doing honours in Economics and degree in Law. After marriage to a doctor, she remained a homemaker for some years looking after her children. When she accompanied her husband to London, she felt a vacuum within herself. She returned after an year and on the suggestion of her pathologist husband she did a course in journalism from Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan and started writing stories in 1970. Her stories were published in magazines like ‘Onlooker’, ‘Femina’, ‘Eves Weekly’ and ‘Illustrated Weekly’ and in 1980, her first novel ‘The Dark Holds No Terror’ was published. Later she did
her post graduation in English Literature. Since then she has produced nine more novels, eight collections of short stories, a collection of critical essays, 'Writing from the Margin' and four books for children. Her novels are – 'The Dark Holds No Terror' (1980), 'If I Die Today' (1982), 'Come up And Be Dead' (1983), 'Roots and Shadows' (1983), 'That Long Silence' (1988), 'The Binding Vine' (1993), 'A Matter of Time' (1996), 'Small Remedies' (2000), 'Moving on' (2004) and 'In the country of Deceit' (2008). In fact her first published work was the short story 'Legacy' in 1978 and then she turned a novelist in her forties, when she started writing her first novel 'Roots and Shadows', but it was published later in 1983, while 'The Dark Holds No Terror', which was started later was her first published novel in 1980.

'The Dark Holds No Terror' brilliantly deals with the changing relationship between a wife and a husband. The protagonist Saru is a doctor and her husband Manu, whom she had married out of love and in order to assert herself, becomes jealous of her. He treats her roughly by inflicting sexual sadism on her. In order to save her marriage, Saru comes on a visit to her paternal home in a small town. This home has not changed much since her childhood. Away from the professional milieu, she becomes an ordinary housewife temporarily. Here she reviews her relations with different people in the family and finally decided to go back to her husband's home, but continues her professional life. The novels, "If I Die Today" and 'Come Up and Be Dead' are not representative Shashi Deshpande
novels. They are suspense and crime thrillers and so they have not been taken up in the present study.

'Roots and Shadows' expose the trauma and agony faced by women in the society that is mainly dominated by males. Indu too like Saru marries Jayant in opposition to her family. Yet she finds herself a submissive wife and realizes that her confidence and selfhood had been destroyed. Indu goes back to her paternal home and has an extra marital affair with her cousin, Naren. Her old uncle tells her that everything is interdependent in this universe. So Indu decides to go back to her husband Jayant, but maintain her individuality and asserts her position in the society. Shashi Deshpande's next novel, 'That Long Silence' shows that both man and woman find it difficult to outgrow the images and the roles that are allotted to them by the society. In this novel Jaya, an educated and modern woman seems to be happily married to Mohan, but in reality she is frustrated and lonely as her husband could not understand her feelings. She has two children, but her husband goes away to clear himself of a corruption charge. Her past haunts her and the novel ends with Jaya trying to come to terms with herself by breaking a long silence. Her son Rahul returns and she has the promise that her husband will return. Jaya realizes the truth that 'Life has always to be made possible.'

'The Binding Vine' highlights the extent of forced sexual relationship. Urmila, the narrator of the story goes to see Kalpna, who has been hospitalized after a violent attack and rape. The mother of the girl does not want to disclose the
incident, but Urmila thinks that she should write about it because it will bring disgrace to the criminals and not to the girl. It is the time, when Urmila came to know the story of her own mother-in-law, Mira, who was trapped in the net of a loveless marriage and was raped by her husband everyday. Mira’s diary reveals that she was looking for love, but instead got the lust of her husband. Deshpande’s next novel, ‘A Matter of Time’ is a novel with mature women characters. Sumi a forty year woman is suddenly and inexplicably deserted by her husband, Gopal. She returns to her parents’ home with her three teenaged daughters, Aru, Charu and Seema. The novelist shows us the plight of women of three generations- Sumi, her mother Kalyani, who had no communication with her husband for thirty five years and Sumi’s daughter, Aru, who refuses the support of her father Gopal after the untimely death of Sumi. In the novel, Shashi Deshpande challenges the idealistic, beautiful but docile and weak images of women, often used by men. The novel raises many questions by providing the reader with an insight into the problems of different roles that a woman in society has to play.

Deshpande’s ‘Small Remedies’ is a complex emotional novel divided into four different texts – (1) Savitribai’s text (2) Leela’s text (3) Meenakshi’s text (4) Madhu’s text. The narrator of the novel, Madhu goes to Bhavanipur to write the biography of Savitri Bai Indorkar of the Gwalior Gharana of music. She is impressed by the life and character of Savitri Bai, who was an epitome of strength and courage, challenging even the ‘Manu Smriti’. Her love for music even after marriage to a Brahmin
makes her fall in love with Ghulamsaab, a Muslim table player with whom she ultimately elopes. The novelist contrasts the situation of Savitri with that of her father-in-law, who also has a mistress. Nobody objects to her father-in-law's extramarital relationship, while hers becomes a scandal. She has to sacrifice her married life, her only daughter Munni and finally her relationship with Ghulamsaab in her last days of life, but she had created her own space. When Madhu had come to Bhavanipur, she had lost her son Aditya and had estranged her relationship with her husband Som, who doubted her chastity. One day she receives a letter from Som, who wants her back. Madhu accepts the life with Som after a lot of pain. The destiny of an average Indian woman is the destiny of Madhu, while Savitri Bai is an exception—one in a million.

Shashi Deshpande's next novel 'Moving On' is the story of Manjari (Jiji), who is the narrator of the novel. She is a widowed woman, who moves in to care for her ailing father. On discovering her father's diary after his death, she sets out to evaluate her life retrospectively, that shows past events in a new light. She searches for clues in the childhood spent with her anatomist father who shares his fascination for the human body with Jiji and with Mai, the mother. While Jiji's past was perfect, but her present is uncertain as she grapples with choices about her future. Her latest novel, In the Country of Deceit' was published last year (2008) after the present study was taken up. This novel is a love story, which compassionately examines the nature of love, loyalty and deception. Devyani is a young
unmarried woman living alone in a small town, Rajnur in Karnataka. She is just recovering from the loss of her mother and starting a new life. She changes her conservative outlook as Rani, a former actress and Ashok Chinnappa, a police officer enter her life. Devyani has a brush with filmdom and has a wild relationship with Ashok, who is much older than her. She knows that the relationship has no future, but inspite of the opposition of family and friends, she carries on and this is the pivot of the story. The novel was released by the famous dramatist Girish Karnad and the novelist, Shashi Deshpande herself said at the launch that she never follows any trends and writes what she wants, what she sees around her, in the society.

Shashi Deshpande’s major concerns emerge from our immediate world, from our own environment, holding up mirrors to our own lives. Whatever, the critics might say, she has steadfastly refused to compromise in order to suit the trends or the global market. She usually describes Indian women in her novels and thus the condition of women in our families. There is also a voice of protest against the marginalized condition of women. Instead of meek and submissive heroines of earlier novelists, we find bold heroines having moral courage in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. In her novels, we can find a variety of characters taken from all the sections of life. They are medical practitioners, writers, educated housewives, teachers, uneducated women and maidservants. Besides poverty, bereavement and other such common adversities, there are some causes of suffering exclusively for the women. Deshpande
renders with sympathetic understanding the variety of suffering a woman has to undergo. Sometimes the suffering is attached to the social taboos and sometimes the women are silenced in the name of family honour and are compelled to digest torture. The novelist’s sincere attempt to break the silence of the women has been widely acclaimed in India as well as abroad. Deshpande does not reconcile herself to the silent, submissive acceptance of suffering as it is an act of distress and pain. Her novels may be described as alternative narratives of women’s experience. The mode of resistance in her fiction takes the form of redefinition of women’s culture and identity in the Indian context. In her novels she has presented modern Indian women’s search for these definitions about the self and society and the relationship that are central to women.

Shashi Deshpande has delineated the undulations of the female self under the pressure of critical human predicaments and emotional affinities. In fact crisis in human life has intensified in the present time as Edmund Fuller describes it as “The age of anxiety .............. an age of schism in the soul” leading to not only the disintegration of society, but of the individual creature. Quest is an archetypal motif in literature of all ages. When self is hampered in its fulfillment through various roles, it generates an identity crisis, which is a state of emotional and intellectual chaos and confusion regarding personal life and the world around. So an individual takes up a quest to understand his/her internal and external world to win recognition for the self. Our Indian society is full of paradoxes
and contradictions. Traditionally, women have always been treated as marginalized figures as Ruth Sherry aptly comments:

"being regarded as marginal is a source of psychological stress often leading to a feeling of powerlessness and lack of a secure sense of identity"\textsuperscript{11}

In many respects women’s lives, experiences and values have been treated as marginal as compared to the men. Here a female is considered a peripheral member of the family, both in her parents’ house as well as her husband’s. Throughout her lifetime she is unable to decide her roots and this leads to her insecurity. Male writing has not taken into account the difference that exist between men’s perspective and those of the other half of the human race. Women have always been defined in terms of marriage, procreation and kinship. Virginia Woolf while defining women’s place in the globally prevalent patriarchal setup voices the sentiments of millions of her sisters. She bemoans the unenviable position of women in these words:

"Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant, she pervades poetry from cover to cover, she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction: infact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell and was the property of her husband."\textsuperscript{12}” Shashi
Deshpande has delved into the problem of every woman in this hypocritical society. She has portrayed the inner turmoil of such women fighting within themselves, between their own knowledge and that thrust on them by their surroundings. Apart from her belief in the equality of the gender and in right of both the genders to live their lives the way they want, Shashi Deshpande also believes that for the happiness of the human race, the women should overcome the handicaps – both external and internal - imposed by the society.
Notes and References


