CHAPTER - I

Introduction

“The Female Imagination: can we argue that it exists as a separate entity, that the mind learns its sex? Is there something about a great novel (whether by Jane Austen or Doris Lessing) that tells us it could only have been written by a woman? What-if any-are the elements that such a novel shares with many other forms of writing by women? And what, above all, can this tell us about women in general?” (Patricia Meyer Spacks. The Female Imagination Front Cover)

The term “Female Imagination” expresses ways of female feelings resulting from loneliness, oppression, depression, inner turmoil and alienation that women generally feel all over the world (Patricia Meyer Spacks). Over the ages women have tolerated immense pain subjugation and tyranny controlled by patriarchy. It is the woman’s inner conflict, restlessness to voice her pain and suffering inflicted over the years that has led her desire to break away from her predicament. Woman’s awareness of her predicament and sharing of female predicament have led to a better understanding of women’s lives. Such an understanding has also led to channelizing experiments into writings such as autobiographical memoirs, short stories and novels. These writings have proved that female imagination is unique, since women’s experiences are unique to their sex and gender.

Female Imagination represents women’s power that pervades through their writings. There is indeed, splendor and glory as well as anguish and grievance in the women’s writings through time. Hence, time has not really changed the real concerns of “the female imagination.” Whether women writers from classic ages or
modern ages, female imagination is unique to women’s works. Indian women poets from classical ages like Mira Bai, Andal, Akka Mahadevi to modern Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy remain truthful to their experiences as women and the real concerns of their writings remain faithful to their female imagination. The above argument is true also of western writers like Dorothy Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Margaret Atwood, Mary Shelley, and Toni Morrison. Hence modern writers, particularly women writers write about sexual abuse, cruelty and violence and at times even infanticide and serial killing, all these denoting negative female experiences; it is indeed interesting to learn about how their women characters rise to the crisis or harm themselves through acts of self-destruction or depression.

In reading women’s texts, today’s critical practices point to certain crucial issues: reading of the woman’s self, understanding the discursive voices, situating the female narrator in three positions such as place, voice and silence, the inter discursive methods that go into the creation of women’s texts and the psychoanalytical concept used to explore the text. Though these modern readings of the women’s texts have traversed a long path, the beginnings of such readings were made in concepts like Patricia Meyer Spacks’ female imagination’ and Elaine Showalter’s gynocriticism and internalized consciousness of women, and also Sandra Gilbert’s concepts of ‘anxiety of influence’ and “schizophrenia of authorship.”

Patricia Meyer Spacks observes how women have exploited the hidden opportunities of an oppressive situation, turning the disadvantages of expected feminine behavior to advantage, using passivity as means to power, taking care of others as a vehicle for control and mastery, a limited existence as a testing ground.
for emotional growth. In *The Female Imagination* (1975), Spacks examines the female literary tradition of the British and American women writers, to find out how great women writers across the ages have felt, perceived themselves and have imagined reality. Spacks examines the female literary tradition of western women writers like Jane Austen, Louisa May Alcott, Ellen Glasgow, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf and so on. Similarly Showalter’s efforts to create a female critical framework within which to study women’s works based on female experience, gave a foundation for a female literary tradition. Such efforts by western critics helped create a canon of western women’s writing that focuses on women’s unique imagination. From the above arguments on Spacks’ idea of female imagination the researcher tries to understand, explore and conceptualize the idea of female imagination, which is relevant to any text of woman’s writing.

These women writers are conscious of the difficulty their works face or they themselves face while writing. Sometimes they undergo an experience of privation. Very often the novel or fiction has been women’s deliberate choice for literary writings. Writers like Jane Austen and George Eliot and others were realizing these precise modes of feminine expression while Spacks observed the dreariness of social frustration.

The research begins with an attempt to explore the following issues surrounding ‘Female Imagination’, with the intention to develop and relate the term to women writers in general and the author meant for study. Spacks’ critique asks the following questions on women’s texts: Is female imagination an expression of female feelings? Does female imagination indicate that it is written by women? What are the elements of female imagination—understanding woman’s self, discursive voices within her, female narrator, discursive method of creation of
woman’s text, woman’s sub-text (power in passivity etc)? How have women perceived themselves, their realities and their imagined realities? What is the connection between female imagination and female literary tradition or female expression of language and that of time or feminism and female imagination?

All these questions and much more will be explored to understand whether this concept of female imagination could help to understand not only women’s writings but also Indian women’s writing. It is in this sense that the exploration goes beyond Spacks’ terminology and tries to interpret through the following interrogations: Is there a possibility of establishing a female literary tradition of Indian women writers based on the textual reading of Indian female imagination?

Although attempts to create a female literary tradition is still at its infant stage in India, the Indian women writers do reveal signs of “ways of female feeling” (Spacks 3) that are typically Indian. Anita Desai’s women who are neurotics and rebels or Kamala Markandaya’s women, who are hypersensitive characters almost bordering on the abnormal could be cited as examples. Santha Rama Rau’s Remember for the House,’ (1956), Ruth Prawar Jhabvala’s first novel 'To whom she will', (1955) and her later novel 'Heat and Dust’ (1975), Kamala Markandaya’s 'Two Virgins' (1994), Rama Mehta's 'Inside the Haveli’ (1977), and Geetha Hariharan The Thousand Faces of Night (1992) are some of the leading women writers writing in English. They write about the oppressed lives of women and the psychological sufferings of frustrated homemakers. These women’s choice to write about women distinctly echoes what Patricia Meyer Spacks says in relation to women as a subject to women’s writing: “What is a woman to do, setting out to write about women? She can imitate men in her writing, or strive for impersonality beyond sex, but finally she writes as a woman: what other way is there? Examining the problems women
reveal in imaginative writing, she will necessarily uncover her own” (*The Female Imagination* 35).

Women’s suffering is aired out in her fiction, she writes about her predicament and her lot in her works and her characters portray the universal suffering that women go through. Her inner turmoil, agony, pain is reflected in her female character. She writes about the struggles and challenges that women face by portraying them in her characters. If an older writer like Anita Desai brings out women’s alienation in the society, a younger writer like Kiran Desai extends this disaffection of women suffering in an alienated social, political and cultural space.

There is a common woman’s experience that women writers express that Patricia Meyer Spacks explores, which is also observed in the Indian women writer’s works as well. Spacks examines the commonality of women’s experience. It is the way woman views herself, the way she expresses her desires and her deep hidden resentments. Writing for woman is a means for freedom. It is an escape and a letting out from her suppression. Her imagination creates possibilities, which may or may not be accepted. Spacks quotes the experience of writing by a woman writer Carolina Maria De Jesus whose words are quoted in *The Female Imagination*: “When I write I think I live in a golden castle that shines in the sunlight” (315).

Akin to Spacks’ use of both literary and psychological analysis to explore certain patterns that recur every time in women’s works, in Indian women’s text’s particularly fictional texts of writers like Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shashi Deshpande, etc., lend themselves to literary and psychological insights in their reading of women’s lives.
Although the Indian novel exhibits some semblance of serious research into female representation, the Indian short story in relation to women’s depiction remains critically unexplored even today, even though short story is one of the oldest forms of literature. An examination of the Panchatantra displays various topics ranging from human relationships, psychology, philosophy, and teaches the art of overcoming difficulties by wisdom and that of survival even in the midst of deceit, hypocrisy and evils of life. It was composed in India around 3rd century B.C and believed to be the oldest collection of fables in India but on a sub textual reading, women characters are observed to be speechless, dumb, ignorant, conspiratory and seductive; woman is seen to be a sacrificial being and her womanly role model with the need of familial love to be proven through her readiness to face trials.

Another classical tale is the Jataka tales, which are popular stories of former lives of the Buddha. Many of these stories have their parallels in Mahabharata, the Panchatantra, the Puranas, Aesop’s Fables, etc. However, women’s position in these tales seems problematic and ambiguous, with women being temptress, defiled and unholy. Even the stories written in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century are a retelling of the folktales, legends and parables; and they tend to be anecdotal, sentimental and didactic in nature.

In comparison, the ancient Indian classics have proved to be a source of inspiration for the Indian short story writers. But the short stories also show a considerable influence of the western writers. After 1920s, the Indian short story in English reached its maturity. Three outstanding writers of short story, namely Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K Narayan uphold the Indian tradition and assert the Indian ethos. Post- independence, there came a change in the vision and perception
of the writers towards female depiction. Their chief concern was to build a new India while dreams and promises for a better India are portrayed in their stories; the short story writers also reveal concern for women’s and feminist issues.

Women short story writers have many similarities and dissimilarities in themes, characters, and style though they respond to the same time, place and circumstance. They have two types of writing which is experimental and traditional. But in both kinds of writing the female imagination is visible. Looking at the writing scene and particularly short story writing back home in India, Cornelia Sorabji was the first Indian short story writer with impressive work to her credit; in addition to her work as social reformer and legal activist, she wrote several books, articles and short stories. One of her short stories is *Love and Life behind the Purdah* 1902, concerning life in the zenana, viz women’s domestic quarters, as well as other aspects of life in India under colonial rule. Female Imagination is depicted in her works in the form of the woman’s self-awareness and struggle for independence rather than for virtue. Her works portray certain patterns of self-depiction that survive change.

Similarly, Suniti Devi Sen who was the Maharani of Princely state of Koch Bihar, also a women’s rights activist at heart, is an important short story writer in the early part of the twentieth century. Her writing also establishes a female literary tradition, as she was influential in women’s reform movements during both her husband and son’s reign. Her women characters seem to be inspired by true events of her time and they are virtuous as girls are portrayed as kali-ma. The women here seem to be struggling to find something, whether to retain the love of their lord or to retain their place, lest it be filled by a new wife. They are under self-willed domesticity.
In the post-independent era, a new class of women writers emerged, their writing expressing a new urge to explore new sexual mores, fresh possibilities in human relations, marriage and motherhood. These qualities were not experienced in male writers of short fiction because male writers depict circumstances and situations from a male perspective; the male narrator’s grand and moral vision is distantly alienated from the individualistic female vision that many writers expressed.

Particularly in short fictional writing, there are prominent women writers who have made the short story in English an effective tool for promotion of a secularized democratic culture quite at odds with the traditional pieties expressed on older ones. Some of these women writers are R.P Jabvala, Shashi Deshpande, Gauri Deshpande, Tara Deshpande, Anjana Appachana, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shalan Savur, Prema Ramakrishnan, Manju Kak, Gita Hariharan and Arundhati Roy.

As already discussed Indian women writers in their writings characterize a unique female imagination that constitutes their narratives, either in the form of their expression of women’s feelings, narration of their personal lives, women’s self-perception, or women’s yearning for her voice, or how woman views her oppression, or woman’s struggle and several other dimensions. For example, Shashi Deshpande or Anita Desai depicts a woman centered approach in their writings; their women are also suffering women, though endowed with a feminine sensibility that emerges into a feminist consciousness. Hence there emerges in her works a female vision of life.

Kamala Markandaya on the other hand in her novel *The Coffer Dams* (1969) displays a clash between the scientific views of the west and the human values of
India. She depicts through her novel that if the woman is to empower and liberate herself she will have to oppose cultural practices that suppress her to male domination.

Mahasweta Devi’s portrayal of women is unique since she addresses various oppressions like class, caste and gender that women especially minority women are subjected to. She is more an activist writer that Arundhati Roy also became after her; her works express the history of woman’s oppression, and also inhere a narrative for women empowerment through demand for proper law, minimum wages to govern their basic rights for wages, food/nutrition and education. Hence there is an activist feminist consciousness that is distilled from her writings.

Writing from the feminist consciousness, Arundhati Roy says:

Writers imagine that they cull stories from the world. I’m beginning to believe that vanity makes them think so. That it’s actually the other way around. Stories cull writers from the world. Stories reveal themselves to us. The public narrative, the private narrative—they colonize us. They commission us. They insist on being told. Fiction and nonfiction are only different techniques of storytelling. For reasons that I don’t fully understand, fiction dances out of me, and nonfiction is wrenched out by the aching, broken world I wake up to every morning (The God of Small Things.)

Jhumpa Lahiri writes largely on Indian immigrants to America, their dislocation, disorientation, isolation, their cultural shocks followed by adjustments they must face. Yet she scrutinizes the struggles, chaos, and anxiety of their
behavior and then zeros down on the individual especially her women characters, who work through her female imagination. The challenges and desperation they go through leads them to a realization of their self, leading them to a yearning for their voice to be heard.

Lahiri’s short story “Mrs. Sen” discusses a woman’s desire for her family, her longing for the things she is familiar with, which are language, rituals, food, friends all these making up her cultural self. Her short story “The Third and Final Continent” is autobiographical; it portrays her parents whom she recreates in the form of a man and his wife from Kolkata. The man moves to London and later to Boston; afterwards the wife arrives but the irony being that they scarcely knew each other since their marriage was an arranged Indian marriage; they gradually started moving to places together getting to know each other as they co-inhabited. Other than the above writers, there is Manju Kapur who writes on inter-religious marriage, family bonds, man-woman relationship and about co-existence of past and present. Her women are often portrayed as victims of gender and domestic violence.

The question to explore about the Indian women writers mentioned above is, whether female imagination as seen in these writers, has been critically explored or even exhausted. While women’s novels or poems under research explorations have proved that such an exploration has been done in relation to fiction and poetry, it is not so in women’s short fiction. Hence the concern of the study is how female imagination has been depicted in short fiction. The researcher aims to explore whether there is the possibility of examining the female imagination in Indian women’s short fiction, with special reference to the short fictional works of Shashi Deshpande to understand female literary trends and traditions.
We can observe that these texts by Indian women writers give in to female imagination and to a special female self-awareness; further, their writings depict a struggle for independence rather than for any ethics or virtue. Their writings look out for evidence of sharing, seek for persistent ways of feeling and there are certain patterns of self-depiction that survive change.

In this respect, Shashi Deshpande’s characters show similar likeness to other women writers in her short stories. It is Shashi Deshpande whose literary imagination centers on woman, her life, her thoughts about her life, her ideas, visions and hopes about herself / people around her, woman’s hallucinations and so on. Shashi Deshpande’s short story collections deal with the family, society, and women from all walks of life- from grandmothers, granddaughters, mothers, daughters, wives, to women in general. These works deal with ordinary women and their everyday lives; they are middle class and educated women, usually from Hindu religion. These women, many of whom are housewives, suffer utter rejection, failure, loneliness, isolation and sometimes guilt and jealousy. There is an undercurrent of female social reality bordering on the feminist, which she admits only recently.

In writers like Shashi Deshpande, ‘female imagination’ discovers a unique space for the Indian woman in a middle or upper-class milieu. According to the researcher, woman’s depiction of oppression becomes the site for the female literary expression. Her female characters yearn for self-assertion and through protest begin their quest for empowerment. Their protest subsumes the protest of the entire female race against centuries of subjugation and suppression. Deshpande says it is the
women themselves who must transcend and come out of the quagmire of patriarchal oppression, to emerge as individuals and as human beings.

Shashi Deshpande writes about woman’s dilemma in a middle class or upper-class milieu. Writing novels and short stories in a simple, realistic, transparent language, she authenticates herself in the mantle of a vigilant cultural custodian, particularly in her creative reinterpretation of myth. Akin to the writers discussed earlier, but much before these writers started writing, Deshpande has revealed the female imagination in different ways through many female protagonists. Some of her protagonists like Amba, are seen as rebels, strongly conscious of a personal sense of dignity. Keen on getting married to a partner of her own privilege and choice, and unwilling to enter a loveless marriage, Amba feels crestfallen when she experiences deception in love. She is transformed into a new woman and emerges as a woman capable of thinking and questioning. She realizes her intellectual capacity, potential and her moral strength. Deshpande adheres to the qualities identified in a woman with the various ways passing from feminine to female. Other protagonists give up their careers as seen in “A Wall Is Safer,” where the title is used both literally and metaphorically. It is a physical truth and a symbol of women’s confinement. The protagonist emotionally seeks freedom and self-expression but physically she is incapable of the struggle, being comparatively weaker than the leading female character in “It Was the Nightingale” and “The Stone Women.” From the above examples, it becomes obvious that Shashi Deshpande’s women characterize a female imagination akin to Spacks’ contention discussed earlier.

Deshpande began her career as a short story writer, which is clearly her forte. She is one of the Indian women authors who have made bold attempts at giving a
voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist. Deshpande says “Yes, I do feel that women in this country are frustrated in many ways, and that is why my characters turn out that way too. It is not intentional” (The Legacy-Some Feminist Perspectives 5). Her following descriptions - the narrator’s sense of victimization and isolation, the body-soul dichotomy, the outside world and her inner self, the humiliation she feels at being treated like an object of gratification and her experience of emptiness, uselessness and fear - take us into realms of the female psyche which not many women writers of the previous generation had dared put into words candidly.

Woman is the prime concern of Shashi Deshpande’s short stories. Her women characters are born out of a typically Indian situation. They are caught between tradition and modernity, between family and profession, between culture and nature, between freedom and loneliness. The problems and conflicts faced by women in her stories are existential in nature. She depicts woman’s struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being. Saikat Majumdar writes,

“For Deshpande, the privileged unit of the private sphere is the Indian extended family, usually middle and upper middle class that belongs to a larger tradition of Indian-Hindu-social culture”(3). Her thematic concerns centre on exploration of guilt, failure, and loneliness. She is very realistic and unromantic in her evaluation of the institution of marriage reflected in her short stories.

Shashi Deshpande is a voice of the Indian middle class women with problems of alienation, sacrifice, rejection, isolation and suffering. Shashi Deshpande’s major concern is to depict the anguish and conflict of the modern
educated Indian woman, who is a daughter, wife, mother, sister. She does not try to expose the different ideological elements that shape a woman. These include religions and cultural elements (such as myths, legends, rituals and ceremonies) and social and psychological factors such as women’s sub-ordinate position in the family, and her restricted sexuality. There is also an undercurrent of discontented sex for various reasons, like the one-sided decision of celibacy, uneven pitch of passion, untimely urge, physical fatigue and others.

Apart from writing about the repressive situations faced by middle class women, Deshpande has also written on how women look at their predicaments, for example, widowhood, childbearing, motherhood, woman’s loneliness, homosexuality, female relationships, etc. stories like “Rain” and “A Man and a Woman” are about passionate young widows who remarry. “The Alien” tells the story of a woman who prefers to socialize. “A Wall is Safer” relates the story of a woman who longs for isolation. “The Duel” projects the picture of a woman who indulges in sensuality soon after the death of her husband and that of her children in a car accident from which she alone has escaped. In “The Window” Shashi Deshpande has written about homosexuals.

While the writer’s novels have received much attention in terms of critical output and scholarship, her short stories have hardly been critically examined, except by critics like Chandra Holm, Jasbir Jain and so on. The doctoral thesis “Contextualising the ‘Female Imagination’: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s Short Fiction” aims to explore the writer’s expression of female imagination in Indian short fiction with special attention to the complete short story collections of Shashi Deshpande. The thesis will attempt to understand and interpret her short fiction, guided by interdisciplinary approaches like gynocriticism and psychology that will
enable the scholar to observe the female consciousness and imagination free from their masculine or traditional definitions. Primary and secondary sources including books, articles, journals, reviews, interviews, related to Shashi Deshpande will be examined for this purpose.

Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938, in Dharwar, a small town in the state of North Karnataka, in Southern India. She is the second daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist and scholar, Shriranga, who taught Sanskrit in a college. She moved to Mumbai at the age of fifteen and later graduated in Economics, before moving to Bangalore, where she earned a law degree.

After getting married, she shifted to Mumbai. During her stay in Mumbai, she decided to pursue a course in journalism. So, she got herself enrolled in Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Thereafter, she took up a job, as journalist in the magazine, “Onlooker.” She worked there for a couple of months, and as she was working in the magazine she began writing, her first short story got published. According to Shashi Deshpande herself, she did not make a conscious decision to be a writer but stumbled into one out of ennui. She has written many short stories, several novels, four children’s books, besides several perceptive essays.

Though her novels are not within the purview of this research subject, it is interesting to understand the idea of female imagination in them. Shashi Deshpande’s first novel, The Dark Holds No Terror (1980) is narrated by the protagonist narrator, Saru a successful physician, who suffers as a victim of sexual violence in the hands of her husband, who is unable to accept that his wife is professionally more successful than him. The novel deals with woman’s confrontation of her sexual dilemma and her coming to terms with it. Deshpande’s
female imagination in this novel is unique, since it represents sexual/domestic harassment in a shockingly female point of view and asserts the importance of female experience of domestic violence to be seen from the woman’s point of view of interior monologue, flashback, etc. Another interesting novel noted for its female imagination is *Roots and Shadows* (1983), where, Indu, the narrator-protagonist, a successful journalist, returns to visit her maternal home where she had once felt alienated and distanced herself from, due to her non-acceptance in the family resulting from her inter-caste marriage. Her visit following her rich tyrant aunt’s death leaves her taking the role of the matriarch and getting involved with the problems of the family and her confrontation with the ghosts of her past. The novel’s presentation of extramarital as well as marital relations from the female narrators view once again proves that Shashi Deshpande’s literary imagination goes off the trodden path of presentation.

*That Long Silence* (1989), which won the 1990’s Sahitya Akademi Award and Nanjangud Thirumalamba award, takes off from the family crisis of Jaya’s husband losing his job, leaving them to escape and take refuge in their old familial home. In a familiar environment, there begins the woman’s journey down the memory lane and her altercation with her past; *A Matter of Time* (1999) also has a failed marriage as its narrative crux. Sumi, is the dumped wife left with three daughters and Gopal the husband, a university professor who walks out of their twenty-year-old marriage, leaving his job and almost everything behind. *The Binding Vine* (2002) reflects the rape of Kalpana, a teenage girl from the Bombay slums, with Urmia, the protagonist getting emotionally involved in Kalpana’s problems. More significantly, the politically motivated media hype following the incident of rape, indicates larger patterns of not only class and gender oppression but
also an examination of the political capital of such patterns as exploited by different
groups in society, government and the mass media.

Most of the novels discussed above express an imagination or situation
unique to female experience of life and create a narrative that speaks volumes of the
female aesthetic experience. Even the other novels like If I Die today (1982), Come
Up And Be Dead (1983), Small Remedies (2000), Narayanpur Incident (2003),
Play (2013), Strangers to Ourselves (2015), are mostly woman-centered works that
help understanding Indian woman’s sensibility to Indian life, her familial
surroundings, family members, and experiences that form the basis of Shashi
Deshpande’s aesthetic approach to woman’s life.

Over the years and in between her novels, Deshpande has written several
volumes of short stories which run a parallel course to her longer works of fiction.
Of the novelists writing in English in India, she is one writer who has kept a
constant flow of short stories growing, stories that serve as a ground for
experimentation of themes, ideas, attitudes and narrative approaches. Five of these
volumes have been published by Writers Workshop, Calcutta. Of these, The Legacy
(1978) also happens to be her first published book. It is now prescribed for the
graduate students in Columbia University, USA. Three volumes, It Was Dark, It
Was the Nightingale and The Miracle appeared in 1986 clearly indicating that the
writing of the stories spreads over several years. The fifth volume brought out by the
Writers Workshop is The Stone Women and Other Stories, which came out in 2000.
Her nonfiction work comprises Writing from the Margin and Other Essays. She has
also done some translations of her illustrious father Sriranga’s works into English
like, *Opening scenes: Early Memoirs of a Dramatist and a Play* (translated from Kannada) and also *Nirgathi* by Gauri Deshpande (translated from Marathi).

Shashi Deshpande’s works, particularly short stories, which centre woman in their narratives, will be examined for their female imagination. For this purpose, the scholar will examine Deshpande’s texts for their female vision of life, family, relationships and view the female narrative art and the philosophy that emerges out of the short fictional narration. Since the study is based on the scholar’s assumption that the female imagination influences Deshpande’s work, the uniqueness of such a female imagination will be explored and analyzed through a study of her woman-centered texts.

Stories like “The First Lady” present the portrait of an old woman whose personality is at variance with her public image. “The Sweet Antidote” portrays a sophisticated woman who decides to share her husband with her maid-servant in the interest of domestic harmony and smooth running of her home, almost like Ibsen’s heroine in his play *Ghosts*. The story “Madhu” centers on the prejudiced attitude of a mother towards her outlandish but affectionate daughter, and her friendship with an old family friend. In “The Valley in Shadow”, the heroine, being physically handicapped, experiences an acute inferiority complex. While on a holiday with her family at a resort, she feels it more as she watches her husband and child enjoying together. “Death of a Child” takes a revolutionary stand, against the conventional norms of child-bearing and motherhood. “Why a Robin?” is the story of a mother, who feels emotionally distant from her daughter, eventually reaches out and bonds with her at the time when the daughter attains puberty. The stories summed up above bring out a wide variety of themes that Shashi Deshpande’s stories attempt. Secondly her truthful projection of facts directs the reader to contemplate on the
unusual perspective that issues forth from the female centered imagination that pervades her fictional works.

The thesis will be chaptered in the following manner:

Chapter I – Introduction.

Chapter II- Female Vision of Life.

Chapter III – Female Narrator and Narrative Management.

Chapter IV – Representation of Family and Relationships.

Chapter V – Woman as Philosopher.

Chapter VI- Conclusion.

Chapter I “Introduction” This Chapter discusses the relevance of ‘female imagination’ in woman’s works in general and contemporary Indian women’s writing in particular and relates it to Deshpande’s short fiction, then moving on to an introduction of Shashi Deshpande’s life and woman-centered works.

Chapter II “Female Vision of Life” in Deshpande’s Short Stories will discuss Shashi Deshpande’s woman as voicing her thoughts in a family circumstance, also discussing the following issues: how passivity is used as a means of power in Deshpande’s works, her female point of view and female perspective of the Indian middle class life, her woman centered fictional world and her recreation Indian epics and myths in relation to female characters.

Chapter III “Female Narrator and Narrative Management” focuses on Shashi Deshpande’s stories narrated by female narrators in monologues or interior
monologues or third person narration which brings out a female point of view to the subjects discussed in the short stories.

Chapter IV “Representation of Family and Relationships” will discuss woman’s view of family and relationships with the aim to understanding how feminine patterns of self-depiction and depiction of relationships in familial and non-familial circumstances work. It seeks further to engage in the issue of how authorial preoccupation with relationships and self-depiction in her short fiction affects or enhances her fictional imagination.

Chapter V “Woman as Philosopher” discusses Deshpande’s narrator protagonist as a philosopher narrating the middle class Indian life, and interpreting, projecting and theorizing serious issues related to middle class women.

Chapter VI “Conclusion” sums up the contents of the chapters discussed so far, attempting to make certain critical observations and conclusion of the research, along with an attempt to wind up the research through a proper finale in the form of the following points – future possibilities of research on Shashi Deshpande and her contribution to the Indian short fiction genre.