Female Narrator and Narrative Management

Narrative in general is defined in the following way: “Narrative is the expression of actual human experience, in the form of personal stories” (Emily Thaden). Though there are different definitions of narratives, the study here makes use of narrative only in the above sense. Incidentally stories are communications that charm our intellect. They are constructed from history, culture, character and all forms of human communication. Stories as a narrative of human life is the most humane and lively form of communication. Hence the importance of narratives: “We dream in narratives, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative” (Hardy 5) A major portion of human activity is carried on by narrative statements of cases and experiences. Since each human is bound to have accumulated knowledge of the living and can relate indirectly to the tales heard from others, or personal stories witnessed or read in literary works or films, these stories or the writers’ own experiences become the foundation for their writings.

Though the above definition of the narrative is only the basic one, there are also other ways of viewing these narratives. It is said that narratives express or articulate the diversity and quality of what we humans experience and therefore question the truth of simple evaluation of various subjects. For example, Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* encompasses a story told by four different narrators, thereby enabling the narrative to be told from four different points of view, the novel ending with a complex idea of truth. Narratives are used in music, theatre, cinema and literature as well. In literature particularly short stories, novels, poetry, fables,
folktales, drama, etc. endow various perspective to their narratives, where the tone, rhythm, the visual picture imagination, etc create a medley effect to the narrative. Hence the importance of narrative analysis in relation to narrative techniques and other literary devices.

The diverse literary devices found in general in narratives are style/structure, theme, setting, plot and character. Several narrative techniques such as back-story are used when the author feels it important that the reader should learn something which has already happened before the real events explained in the narrative. The readers do not experience this event in the story line. Rather, the narrator lends us this back story prior to the actual initial event that we do experience.

Thus, in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1998) his second novel which is a memory novel made up of the characters’ memory, imagination becomes the guide of the narrator. Further the flashback technique is also used here, when the anonymous narrator recalls in flashback the places and people Tridib has told him about twenty years ago. This is looking back using memory and the difference of time and space clouds as recollection changes past events into a feeling of what was lost. The narrator pressurises friends and relatives to remember the past incidents and the main narrative comes out at regular intervals interrupted by other narratives, the only fixed narrative belonging to the main narrative voice through which other narratives filter out. The narrative is written in the first-person point of view but we never come to know the name of the narrator. The narrator says, “I knew that a part of my life as a human being had ceased: that I no longer existed, but as a chronicle” (*The Shadow Lines* 112). The story also has a nonlinear mode; it also moves back and forth in time.
Similarly, some of Shashi Deshpande’s short stories use this backward storytelling in stories like “And What Has Been Decided?” “Lost Springs,” “The Legacy” etc. where, with the use of a flashback technique, the storyline goes backward to display something that happened prior to the important events of the story which has relevance to the present story. Besides the above, narrative analysis is an essential component to understand Deshpande’s narrative, where the writer narrativizes his/her narrator. To understand narrative analysis better, one could view the arguments below:

When you are reading a scene in a book and when you are writing a scene, you follow the character almost like a camera on the character’s shoulder or in the character’s head. You are looking at the character performing a specific set of actions or important actions in vivid detail (Jenna Blum Tracks 14-5).

The above quotation goes one step further by looking at how the writer mirrors his art of narrativization “Narrative analysis involves examining the discourse that allows us to organize, account for, legitimize and give meaning to our lives.” (Griffiths)

Interesting enough is the recent study of narrative undertaken by management researchers according to whom narrative comprises the reasoning and learning process that allocates meaning by recognizing narratives as parts of a plot. The narrative thus built up is used to create different types of accounts; for example, autobiographical or biographical accounts of people, the accounts or histories of nations and fictional or imaginative stories in the form of novels and fairy tales.

Coming to the historicizing of narratives, the last three decades indicate that narratives especially the stories that humans tend to narrate about their own selves
and experiences have now become the prime point of the developing interdisciplinary field of narrative study. People build personal and individual narratives which bridge several incidents and experiences of their lives into stories. They make stories about the self. Such narratives are the bases of the narrator’s immanent identity and self-realization. These narratives answer queries to the narrator’s interrogation to his own self about his question of being. These narrative parallels or ideas of selves connect with varieties of stories with synonymous narrative build; they alter, but in the partial quality of their plots and in the inward quality of the events available for permission in the story. The self is understood more because of the part-whole narrative construction. Only using narrative construction, it is possible to create a significant totality of our distinct lives.

When the self is considered a story, not a mere substance or thing, the impermanent and spectacular part of human existence is strained. The role of narrative “employment” (Ricoeur) can make the many events and actions of one’s life into a purposeful total. Self-identity is caused by adaptation of one’s plots from one’s cultural store of myths and stories. Stories that render immanent identity differ from literary production since they are produced by an autobiography that surfaces itself and mixes the basic events and casual consequences of behavior. A self-narrative may die, bringing sadness, anxiety and worthlessness. The self is also a major construct in psychological theory, holding relevant importance in psychoanalytic (e.g., Kohut, 1977) and humanist (e.g., Rogers, 1959) theories. In a traditional manner, the self has the character of conceptual construct utilized to understand the point. Story structure or narrative, has been the most important and significant point of increased interest. (Polkinghorne, Sarbin) and it offers another mode to conceptualize the self.
Narratives are not new to Indian writing and they exist in the form of various genres of Indian literature. Particularly the short story existed in various Indian languages and narrative styles and was known as katha, akhyan, afsana, dastana and upakhyan. This displays diversity in form, perception and variance in narration:

The short story distinct from anecdotes, tales, sketches, reportage and novellas came at the last stage of the evolution of the narratives. As a form, it shares some features of these four but it developed its own distinctiveness identified by the presence of a conscious narrative, foregrounding a particular incident, or a situation or a moment of emotional intensity (Das 302).

Shashi Deshpande’s commentary on the narrative provides an interesting perception. “When I write narrative, I think in English: when I write dialogue, I think in Kannada or Marathi which are my languages” (Radha 159). However, she intermingles narrative and dialogue. Though Shashi Deshpande seems to separate narrative from dialogue she uses both in her fiction, thereby creating a new narrative. First, the thematic links between her short stories and novels seen in the recurrence of female sexual abuse or domestic violence in both indicate recurring narrative structures. Similarly, the tussle between surrender and hostility is a theme that indicates recurring narrative structures. Such narrative structures help Shashi Deshpande create a fine world of female discourse during a patriarchal social environment. Sometimes her narrative structure is considered as “the patchwork quilt” module created by metaphors and myths, recollection, flashbacks of women’s lives, thereby setting up a strong case against the rational and traditional linear story-telling.
In general Deshpande abstains from the straightforward narration and she rather employs flashback narration. In most stories, Deshpande’s narrator is the heroine, engaged in stream-of-consciousness monologue. A crisis in the heroine’s life comprises the root of the narrative in most of her fictional work whether novel or short fiction. The narrator explains the situation in hindsight as the narrative goes back and forth in time.

Deshpande’s fiction centers on woman. Most of the stories present a first-person narration, which brings the reader closer to the story. There is also an omniscient narrator, in most of the stories. Some of the stories contain monologues or interior monologues, where the protagonist speaks to herself or sometimes to himself, while others present dialogues and third person narration. Several stories have a narrative hook, while others follow the flashback technique, yet other stories are told in media res or (in the middle of things) and yet some others have a story within a story. “The Legacy” uses flashback techniques, and backward storytelling; also, a story like “And What Has Been Decided?” is a monologue that divulges Draupadi’s innermost thoughts. Like “The Legacy”, “Lost Springs” also uses flashback technique, where the tone of narration shifts suddenly from the past to the present and vice-versa.

Deshpande’s style of writing that is very simple makes the reader very comfortable, giving it a feeling of a conversation, as seen in the story of the Mahabharata “Hear me, Sanjaya…” Kunti says “But why am I talking of those poor, long-dead women? Oh yes, Vows, that’s right, I was speaking of vows” (Col V.II 81) “A Day Like Any Other” employs a third person narration with the two women busy in a personal dialogue. “The Cruelty Game” has a narrative hook because right at the beginning, it begins with “IT’S BAD NEWS” or “How Does a writer write
“The Duel” at the outset of the story arouses curiosity in the reader, and so he becomes hooked to read on:

HOW DOES A writer write about himself? Specially when he knows he cuts a poor figure? He fantasizes, I suppose, and makes himself out to be tragic, weak, wicked, evil...anything but foolish. But I can’t do this. Something tells me that the fabric of my story can stand nothing but the truth. And didn’t she say, ‘You will write about me, won’t you?’ So here you are... (“The Duel” Col V.I 103)

Almost all the short stories start in medias res, where the story begins in the middle of a sequence of events, and “The Story” is a story within a story, or a frame story, where one tale is told within another one. Almost all the stories end abruptly or suddenly and offer no solutions to the given situation or story and thereby leaving them open-ended:

DO YOU KNOW what it is I’m going to tell you? Hasn’t your mother spoken to you about it? No? She’s a strange woman; yes, even if she is my own daughter I have to say that. No, don’t smile that way, I’m not criticizing her. I’m just saying how it is, how she is. Now just look at this- it is she who should be telling you this story. That’s how it has always been done-the story handed down by mother to daughter. But my daughter has to be different-different from me, anyway... But I always believed in the story. I remember how impatient I was to hear it, I waited for the day when my mother would tell it to me. When the red mark of womanhood shows itself on your body, that will be the time for you to hear the story (“The Story” Col V.II 159)
Most short stories of Shashi Deshpande have a non-linear narrative or disrupted narrative structure, where events are portrayed out of chronological order, by using the method of recall of human memory. Others are in linear narrative structures, where the narrative runs smoothly in a straight line, and it is not broken up, it is an ordering of events into a meaningful pattern.

Stories like “The Duel” are interesting, as it follows a backward storytelling, where the denouncement is shown first and explained through the plot and the ending comes as a shock:

All the answers. Even the one I had come to find. Why had she come to me? And now I knew.

My first reaction was anger. I remembered her own words.

*The only thing that occurs to me is that I’ve been cheated.*

Cheated! And the anger was so savage that if she had been there, I’d have squeezed her throat. Then there was bewilderment. And distaste. Bitterness…

No, I never want to look into that abyss again.

But, there’s one thing I don’t understand. How could she, a woman like that, lay the ghost of my dead mother... All that I can do is, as I’ve said before, to write it down as it happened (“The Duel” *Col V.I* 112-3)

In “Lost Springs” also Deshpande uses a backward story telling technique.

But for me it was as if I had come back into a different world. I got up and walked with rapid steps back into a different world…My mother died when I was seven. She was drowned. No, she drowned herself—the thought flashed into my mind, taking me by surprise… We lost the habit of intimacy
when we were separated after our mother’s death. They lived with Father and came to our grandparents’ house for holidays; visits that became rarer with the years. But I never went to my father’s house, no, not once. With my mother’s death, I became a stranger there (“Lost Springs” Col V.II 72-3).

“The Day of the Golden Deer” speaks of Sita’s inner feeling of sorrow and rejection from her husband Ram (from Ramayana). It starts with the words,

WHY DOES HE not speak?  He stands silent and withdrawn, gaze turned inwards…

No, don’t call me queen, I am no queen if the king casts me off. I am nothing. No,’ I correct myself, ‘I go back to being what I was. The daughter of King Janaka. No, not even that. I am just Sita.’

I can see that my anger astonishes him. What had he expected? Tears? Reproaches? Entreaties? Yes, they are all there, waiting inside me, clamouring for release. Wanting me to cry out-not to this man, only a messenger, but to the man who has sent the message (Col V.II 135)

Similarly, “The Cruelty Game” starts with the denouncement first or backward story telling. ‘IT’S  BAD NEWS,’ my mother said when Father rushed out of the house in his crumpled clothes, a small bag in his hands. ‘Your Kumar uncle is dead.’ (“The Cruelty Game” Col V.II 215)

These are some of the narratives used in these short stories in comparison to yet other types of narratives like dream sequence, repetition, different characters’ point of view, and multiple plot-lines converging at the end, flash forwards, pre-figuring of events that have not yet taken place, brief narration, long narration, serial narration, and partial narration. Some of the narratives used by Deshpande in the short stories are flashbacks, different time frames, circular plotting where we are led back to the beginning and backward story telling.

Most of Shashi Deshpande’s short stories also follow the conventional narrative structure, as stated by Tzvetan Todorov, which has five stages, which may be explained in three stages; a beginning (state of equilibrium) middle (disruption of equilibrium) and end (re-instate the equilibrium); or what may also be called Linear narratives.

Deshpande narrates mostly in the first person and because of this she enables legitimacy to the experience narrated, therefore, allowing the evolution of a willing suspension of disbelief. Her short stories, and even her novels, can begin with any theme but eventually depict women, who in Luce Irigaray’s definition are an “absence, negativity, the dark continent or at best a lesser man” (62). Her stories and story-telling are usually instructive and hardly prescriptive; they basically end with the proposition of woman’s self-renewal. The cognizance of the undignified ways and the continuous mental struggle experienced by women is a proceeding towards actual life. What demand’s silence in the women characters is how they express their feelings and their method of refusing the code of behavior.

Shashi Deshpande says “…. I think that in the short stories I hit on most of the themes that I later wanted to work out in my novels. They are all actually there” (7). She talks of isolations, alienation, cruelty, oppression, rejection, submission,
confusion, and suffering and pain. There are other feelings and themes like that of guilt, violence, freedom, hope, ambition etc, which occur in a few stories. Overall, the stories are brought out of every day, ordinary mundane life in Indian society, but Deshpande’s narration is sometimes complex because it is not very easy for the reader to understand what she is trying to convey within the shifting narration.

Women are used as pawns in many stories and there is a title by this name “Pawn”; also in stories like “The Legacy” woman is a pawn for the sake of her husband’s family and heritage. In “The Stone Women” too women are reduced to mere objects of man’s desires and the newly married wife knows that she will have to mold herself to her husband’s wishes and desires. “The Inner Rooms” depicts an extreme form of the female being used as a pawn, and an extreme form of male domination, which ultimately leads Amba to take her own life. This narrative thus reflects women in these different stories, used as pawns. “A Wall Is Safer” thus narrates the story of the wife who gives up her career for her family and husband and prefers to build a wall around her and her family. She gives up her ambitions, career, and her self-pride. In “The Awakening” the daughter of the house is used as a pawn for the survival of the family and she must give up her dreams, ambitions, and career for her poor family:

THINK IT OVER.

I opened my mouth to…what? Yell? Protest? Cry? Nothing seemed appropriate so I closed it again, while he went on unnoticing.

You don’t have to, you know. You can always refuse. But think it over first. You know all the facts, anyway.

Yes, I do. A father who brought into this world more children than he can support on a small salary. A daughter to be married, a son
stricken by polio, another daughter yet in school. And I, who will soon be passing my SSC. The conclusion is inescapable. (“The Awakening” Col V.I 114-5)

Similarly, “The Pawn” as the title clearly suggests, narrates the girl who is used for friendship only and if Ramaswami wants and then conveniently he dumps her and her thoughts, as soon as he realizes that he does not even need her thoughts or memories anymore.

Dammit, I didn’t even know her language nor did she know mine. It would never work.

Suddenly I remembered the day I had seen the three of them in the hotel lobby. Of how I had walked across the black-and-white tiled floor to them. A pawn, I had thought her. Maybe it’s I…?

Then I pushed the thought away. I’m a sensible young man. Not a damm fool. And I tore up the paper, picked up the bits and threw them into the waste-paper basket. (“The Pawn” Col V.II 38)

The narrator in these stories points to various important questions on domestic issues as an insider’s view. Stories like “Why a Robin?” narrates the mother’s alienation even from her own daughter and their ultimate reunion, when she tries to convince her daughter to choose a Robin, rather than any other bird. This sense of alienation is highly depicted in “Ghosts” as the wife must come to terms with the loneliness, alienation, not only from her husband’s relatives but also from her own relatives, as she leaves her country, for her husband’s job, with her status expressed in the powerful words “listening to silence.” In “And Then…?” the same theme runs, as the mother is alienated from the children as they grow up.
Likewise, short fictions such as “An Antidote to Boredom” and “The Shadow” focus on the wife’s infidelity because of which the girl child suffers. “A Day Like Any Other” also portrays infidelity, though this time it is the cheating husband who is caught by the wife, but the wife decides to forgive him for her family and children’s sake.

Deshpande’s stories project lives of married women (“A Liberated Woman”), mothers (“Why a Robin”), housewives (“A Day like any other”), single women (“And Then…?”) widows (“A Man and a Woman”), and husband and wife relationships (“It Was the Nightingale”). These stories revolve around women’s lives, challenges, relationships and situations. The narrative moves along with the women’s emotional, psychological, intellectual problems and their needs and conflicts, as the women emerge from their roles within a traditionalist and orthodox society (“The Legacy”).

The movement of the narration is with the protagonist, and what the protagonist contemplates. What the main character reflects leads our interest towards what the modern Indian woman endures in her life, such as her various attempts to build herself up as well as her society, the selfsame society in the process of framing rules and roles for women. The protagonist’s point of view is almost always the narrator’s too: very often, stories show conflicts within a framed society and the women try to break down the walls of language and create a world that carries meaning and displays experiences that create an awareness of a woman’s inner self (“The Inner Rooms”). This point of view reflects her world, her condition, the way she perceives and experiences things and discovers herself in the process; this point of view narrates the various ways a female feel.
Deshpande’s narrator focuses on family life as an insider. Very often the narrator seems to reflect the author’s perception too. Deshpande herself says, she sees herself as a writer whose 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, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and something different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of a consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman (Of concerns, Of anxieties 4)

Though Shashi Deshpande adopts various narrative styles, the authorial narrative style lends a unique touch. Shashi Deshpande may not be exemplarily different; she does not initiate something new in her projection of women. But she is aware of the importance of the short story and the relevance of the significant message it carries. Which is why her characters and circumstances may not be very great characters but she writes about normal people from our mundane daily lives. There is authenticity in her writings since she makes use of the first-person narration. She does not experiment with language and her English is natural, simple and easy. Also, the style is clear and direct, real and impulsive, sufficient and relevant.

A unique sense of camera eye-view narration is felt in many stories because they are told in first person narration; this lends authenticity to her narration. The first-person narrator explains the woman’s challenges as an insider. Many familial happenings are observed as the narration is taken over by the first person omniscient
or omnipresent narrator whose observant eye notices everything. In “Why a Robin?”
the protagonist, who is also the narrator confides: “I am full of guilt these days. I am
a failure….as a wife, as a companion, as a mother. Between my husband and me
there is blankness. We never quarrel. And with my daughter I am helpless” (Col V.I
48) Further, her narration expresses a female who longs to divulge her inner life and
its sexual vacuity:

I am an interloper. We belong to different species. I do not
belong. I move away from them resolutely. I dawdle over my work
deliberately, so that I am late going to bed. Two single beds. Two
islands that nothing can bridge. Not the child. Not even the bridge of
passion. (Col V.I 49)

In this story, the writer through the narrator maps woman’s inner familial
world that includes her indifferent husband and daughter. The narrator desires a
close relationship with her husband and daughter but she is aware “that bridges have
to be built. They do not come out of nothing, they have to be created” (14). The
narrator’s inner thoughts seem to map their past. In the years gone by when the
daughter was still a baby the loving father would get up and feed the crying baby.
Though the woman is not bold or cannot talk to her family members, she is aware of
all their activities.

All these, change suddenly when the daughter reaches puberty. That day,
before going off to sleep, the narrator could hear a soft covered sound which was
coming out of her daughter’s room. Wishing that her husband would hear the sound
attend to the daughter’s needs does nothing, since the husband does not get up. So,
the narrator, after a lot of struggle finally rises and eventually on reaching her
daughter’s room, the narrator mother understands that the girl on the verge of
womanhood wants help and comfort from her mother. When the narrator is about to leave the room, surprisingly, the daughter holds her mother’s arm and urges her to disclose if she had been scared too at the time of puberty. Blissfully, the mother narrates that she had held the daughter’s grandmother’s hand in the same manner as she was now holding hers; a bond is therefore created here. The narrator further tells her daughter that the grandmother was very beautiful just like her. Therefore, conversations and bonds open for the narrator to get closer to her daughter, and now she openly narrates her experiences as a child; the mother is now very happy since this is what she had always wanted; further she is able to convince her daughter to write on a robin and not a peacock or any other bird.

Such a narration of the transition of the mother-daughter relationship from separation to bonding follows the following feminine path: a mapping of the woman’s feelings of experiencing familial indifference, her gradual cross over to happiness, all done through a woman’s point of view. Such a narrative management by the woman writer presenting an insider’s point of view opens an alternative examination of topical issues like domestic violence, rape, marital problems and so on. Also, the constant insult, dominion hurled on women by men, is a constant insult. Like Patricia Spacks says “The vanity of men, a constant insult to women” (13). Such a transition is also possible because of the awakened sense and awareness in the woman. Deshpandian female narrator’s attitude to the woman’s predicament characterizes an awakened woman’s voice in her works.

Sometimes the authorial voice and the narrative voice seem to merge particularly, when it voices issues like marital rape. Hence Shashi Deshpande accepts that in “The Intrusion” the female voice merges into one author/narrator/character:
It was with a short story ‘The Intrusion’ that I broke out of this wall I had built round myself as a woman and wrote in what I recognized only much later was not only a woman’s voice, but my own authentic voice. My novels The Dark Holds No Terrors and That Long Silence made this voice both clear and loud. That Long Silence, more than anything else that I had written until then, was about the world of women, almost claustrophobically so. In fact, after I’d written it, I was almost despairingly certain that no one would want to publish this monologue. But this novel was important for me, for, in a way, I had, to use Naipaul’s words, ‘defined myself through my work’ in it. I could no longer conceal my writer’s identity from myself. I had also, in a sense, sealed my identity as a woman writer, as one who wrote almost always about women (Writing from the Margin and Other Essays 147-8).

Thus, the unique imagination expressed by the female narrator with a discursive voice plays an important role in the short story’s narrative management.

Other than female narrations, in some stories Shashi Deshpande employs male narrators also, once again creating a distinct male narrative voice. Her location of home is dreamlike, filled with characters, and narrative voices. These voices move between female, male and various experiences that focalize interestingly. A multi-voiced text displayed as Deshpande’s text is narrated in the form of dialogues that portray the different dimensions of the story. Moreover, they are dialogic because the stories are not yet narrated and they move about in the world of characters. Each member’s narrative in the house is intimately and significantly joined into the stories of other members. Therefore, the family as a Bakhtinian chronoscope collects the
different narrative threads and it is finally united. Talking about the focalization of these narrative voices, these threads are also disposed to gender differences. *In a Matter of Time*, the male narrator focalizes and can keep away from home and from family and thus an imagined independence is acquired. The single view of the male narrator around all characters is contrasted to the narrative of the main female figure. The voice is a part of the domestic world and so narrates these stories in a combined narrative. The daughter’s perspective directs light over the real issue of the family, despite the entire story of the grandmother who stays inside the domestic environ. Such a narration by several voices creates the shifting narrative circumstance, conducive to a multi-dimensional narration.

Deshpande’s use of shifting narrative circumstances, also a multi perspective mode of narration is best represented in her use of a combination of both first person and third person narration. The shift from one mode of narration to another usually takes place in one paragraph, as seen below:

Her two nieces are on the floor and they are breathing softly, she listens to them while she is herself lying on the bed, *Premi* thinks how they were usually on the same parallel of the blurry lines that vividly mark bonds and divisions in the family. This thought brings a feeling of loss to her. “*Sumi and I*, we were never like this (17).

Another narrative style adopted by Shashi Deshpande is the deliberate denial and defying of the male point of view. The story “The Stone Women” relies on the fact that women have been shown and portrayed from a male point of view in literature, and in most art forms. What brings together the women of the past and the present is the title of the story “The Stone Women”. The female protagonists of these stories
are defiant characters, who draw a very strong will for self-assertion and portray vast ability to bear things:

The protagonist narrator of “The Stone Woman” narrates the history of female artistic depiction by the male. Women are displayed as voluptuous creatures directing our regard to the male perception of women. Obviously, the female narrator of this particular story experiences immense anger at “the joyous, playful, narcissistic existence of these women” (11).

Further, the narrator combines the past and the present in this story when she historicizes the male perception of woman in the sculpture of women. While the past gazed at women from a male imagination looking at her only as an item of voyeuristic pleasure, the present too views woman as a much inferior being. The repeated words of the husband, “you’ve lost” and “you’ll never win” travels around the plot of the story as a constant reminder of the superiority of men. The female narration here comes with a stringent warning that women must be watchful and cognizant to assert their individual existence and to avoid sexual and gender stereotyping. If the wife who is the narrator can get rid of “silly Jingles” of Hindi film songs (similar to Jaya’s habit in That Long Silence) only then can she retain her position, dignity and space of being a wife. Or else she might go down to becoming one of the stone women, “a woman frozen for all time into a pose she has been willed into by her creator” (Col V. I 15) The above point of view in the woman’s narration on the stereotyping of female sculptures is feminist in spirit.

The female narrator also becomes the spokesperson against violence on women, narrating through different stories the plight of rape victims, including marital rape as in “It Was Dark” and “The Intrusion.” In “A Liberated Woman” the
jealous husband rapes his wife every night because she earns more than him and because she is professionally more successful than him. Feminist narrative style significantly narrates the female violations in the form of violence/physical oppression. In the story “The Day Bapu Died” the female narrator describes the panic of violence that grips a woman in the wake of Gandhiji’s assassination:

I ran home as I’d never run before, a breathless, chest-hurting, guts-twisting race all the way back. The blood pounded in my ears as I ran, blocking out all thought, until I found myself at our gate. I stood there a moment, taking deep, painful breaths (“The Day Bapu Died” Col V.I 139)

The above narratorial eye witness account delves on the story of a victim of communal violence in the aftermath of Gandhiji’s death, and about the young Christian girl Amanda, forced to prostitution:

Amanda disappeared, but a few months later she was seen, looking pale and ill and haunting the mango grove, they said. You know how rumours fly about in a small town. Which is why, when I heard the story that she had become the old judge’s mistress, I thought it was just one more of these rumours. But a couple of years later, when she was found in the mango grove, hanging from the branch of a mango tree, it was the judge who claimed the body and dealt with everything, including her funeral. Her family stayed away, not one of them showed up, no, not even her mother (“The Day Bapu Died” Col V.I 139-40)
Stories like “The Homecoming,” “A Man and a Woman,” and “The Cruelty Game” expose theme of female oppression in Hindu societies. In fact, “The Homecoming” is an extreme form representation of this theme, where the husband resorts to violence on his wife with the girl’s family not intervening, as wife beating is not uncommon in their society. For example, in “The Homecoming” the omnipresent narrator describes -

Now she could see the man holding Anju with one hand, while with the other he was hitting her, anywhere, everywhere, banging her head against the wall at the same time... She felt blows on her body, blows she ignored, until she felt a hand—or was it a foot?—smash into her chest… The sounds were louder now. She looked back and saw that he had brought Anju out and was dragging her along the path she had walked on so proudly, while Suresh and Ai followed him, trying to stop him, Suresh holding on to him like a limpet (Col V I 159)

The above narrations delve on the female victim of violence through the sympathetic female narratorial stance on violence, thereby rendering a feminist point of view to the whole issue of violence.

Other than Shashi Deshpande’s narrative style, narrator’s trait and narrative point of view, what characterizes Shashi Deshpande’s narrative management is the narrative attention given to certain women’s issues crucial to feminist understanding of them, like woman’s identity, her suffering, confusion and guilt etc. Pain, suffering and confusion are depicted in stories like “Mirrors” and “The Duel.” In the story “The Duel” the wife’s loss of her husband and children and the subsequent pain makes her give herself to another man. “Independence Day” “The Boy” “Waste
The narrative attention in a story like “Retrospective” dwells on woman’s jealousy on another woman.

The narrative attention divulges the narrator’s jealousy on her own daughter:

But Madhu is with us and now she is the focus of his entire attention.

I begin to feel as if it is I, and not she, who is the intruder here. He tells her she is like a Ravi Varma painting- one specific painting, of a Maharashtrian woman, the print of which he has in his room at home.

‘Have you seen it? He asks me. ‘I’ll send you a copy and you’ll know what I mean. I cut it out of a calendar long back and got it framed. It used to help me whenever I felt homesick- made me feel good, actually (“Retrospective” Col V.II 8)

But now I wish there was someone to go back with him. It saddens me to think of him going back to the empty flat alone. With the pillow having the impress of my head still upon it. The bathroom smelling of talcum. And my teacup, unwashed, on the dining table.

But, perhaps, these little things don’t mean so much to a man. But I am glad I am going to a place where there is nothing of him. I will be starting on a blank sheet, a clean page (“It Was the Nightingale” Col V.I 68)

The narrative focus on the woman’s feeling of sadness on separation from her husband only further reveals how much Shashi Deshpande focuses on woman’s psyche. The narration expresses the woman’s understanding of the woman’s point of

Lands” “The Valley in Shadow” “The Last Enemy” “Hear me, Sanjaya…” “The Day of the Golden Deer” “And What Has Been Decided” are some stories rooted in the story of Mahabharata. Some of these stories depict Draupadi’s internal agony.
view of the whole issue. This is seen in the same story: “In a way, this too is true. At this moment, I feel nothing, only a desperate desire to blot out this fact before it blots me out. I feel it is impossibility for me to go through the whole process again, for a third time” (65). The narrative focus on the woman’s choice to exercise her free will to abort reveals the feminist spirit of the text. Such a choice of what to narrate or how to narrate very often tells upon the writer’s feminist style of narrative management.

“Lost Springs” talks of the daughter who feels that she is the cause of her mother's death. Certain stories narrate intrinsic social/psychic/spiritual reality lurking in the woman’s world. “Lucid Moments” is an example of the gender reality of masking the female nomenclature. The dying grandmother wants to know her mother’s name, “I want…” and talks of the girl’s want of recognition, so that her wishes may be heard but all in vain. The final narrative resolution to repeat, recast and sustain the female nomenclature tells upon the feminist attention to female names as important to female individual identity.

The feminist style of narration invariably allows the rhetorical style of narration too. The narrator in Deshpande’s short stories, asks several questions pertaining to the following subjects: marriage without the woman’s consent and the man trying to have a complete right over her body; the wife not being prepared for a physical union after marriage (in the story “The Intrusion”); the decision to carry and deliver a child which should consist of the permission of the woman (“Death of a Child”); the important decision to work at home or work out should be her own more than her husband’s, in-law’s, friends or society’s (in “A Wall Is Safer”); the topic of second marriage (in “The Cruelty Game”); and the topic of guilt and divorce (in “And Then...?”)
Such a rhetorical style of narration is seen in “The Intrusion” where the narrator on a honeymoon remembers the history of her marriage in a quirky manner with a sense of humour.

“We are looking for a girl, simple but sophisticated,” his mother had said. “My son is working in a foreign company. His wife must be able to entertain and mix with foreigners.” She had made the word foreigners sound like ‘martians.’ Simple and sophisticated- was I that, I wondered? It had seemed I was, for my mother had joyfully told me that they had agreed to our proposal. No one had asked me if I had agreed; it had been taken for granted. I had taken it for granted myself, when suddenly, a few days before wedding, I had gone to my father, stricken by my doubts. “Why?” he had asked me again, again and again. And, “what will you do then?” In a panic I had asked myself, but none to the question “what’s wrong with him?” I had nothing to say either, when my father said quietly, “I have two more daughters to be married.” (Col V.I 203)

Here the female narrator asks certain questions to express her fresh experiences that she goes through. At first, she keeps her response as questions. “Was I simple and sophisticated?” “What will I do?” However, the woman’s passage from the rhetorical to the silent narration is significant. Later she is silent and able to answer neither her father’s nor her own questions.

Deshpande’s narration very often employs female protagonists as narrative voices. In the story “Death of a Child” the narrator is told by the doctor that she is pregnant. Before this visitation, the pregnancy of the narrator was not confirmed but deep down she knew she was pregnant. But now it is confirmed by the doctor. The
narrator confidently says, “I know” she picks up her voice when the doctor asks her why she does not want to continue: “I don’t want it, I blurt it out.” Her anger raises against whoever doubts her termination or those who want to ask her to keep her baby; perhaps even the doctor was alarmed to witness an expectant mother so ready to abort the pregnancy. The query of the doctor is if the husband also agrees to abort the pregnancy. Being assured that the husband has no problems, she goes on to test the pregnancy stage and says that the woman is “lucky” that she has arrived at an “early” stage and so it is not yet difficult to stop her pregnancy. The narrator is thus also in a certain way adhering to the small family happy family rule, in fact she should be applauded for her brave act of boldness.

In the story “A Wall Is Safer,” the protagonist, Hema who is a lawyer by profession wants and deliberately chooses to lead her life as a mere housewife. The husband Vasant who works in an Agricultural Research Station, has now been told to shift and work in Bombay. He has made up his mind to move while Hema is hesitant to go with him and still work as a schoolteacher. Sushma, a friend of both Vasant and Hema, comes over “to stay for an evening and a night” (Col V.I 116) Maybe Hema is not willing to work as her husband being a working person has to be away, most of the time from his family. In one of their conversations Sushma and Vasant do try to show her reason and influence her to take work. While she is not at all interested to work, thus the argument:

Now, after listening to Sushma, Vasant suddenly turns to me and says, “Look Hema, why don’t you get involved with this thing of Sushma’s?...” You don’t have to feel guilty, I want to say to Vasant. It’s my doing, this coming here. Nobody
pushed me into it…Sorry Vasant, it won’t work…Oh, I’m all right as I am. After all, I’m good housewife now (Col V.I 119)

Very often the narrator protagonists prefer to take the reign of their lives themselves. No amount of pressure or convincing can bring Hema to agree to work professionally, not even a job like that of Sushma who is a social worker. She works for the cause of women so that they understand their legal rights. Surprisingly, Hema is herself a lawyer aware of her legal rights. Though a social worker is basically different from a lawyer. Yet, Hema defending her case as the homemaker expresses her “voice” towards her friend Sushma and her husband. Hema declares that she is “all right” as she is. Moreover, she defends herself as having “been a good housewife.” Most importantly the truth is that it is her own decision and she does not like to be advised.

Likewise, another protagonist, Pramila, raises her voice through the story “The Cruelty Game,” where, after the death of Kumar, her husband, she dreams of a second marriage. Kumar’s family is a traditional one yet Pramila decides to marry none other than Jagdish, her late husband’s friend. So, she strongly believes in widow remarriage. She therefore raises her “voice” up against the traditional Indian system towards widows.

The narrative attention on various interesting female narrator characters only reveals Shashi Deshpande’s narrative management that brings out a female imagination into foreplay in her works. Imagination happens when there is interplay of narrative query and storytelling within narrative methodologies. According to narrative query, storytelling tries to comprehend why things happen and what are the reasons behind human actions. Deshpande says of Imagination,
It is through my imagination that I enter another world. And my desire to enter that world begins with a very strong emotion. A strong emotion and an ignited imagination—these are the two things that open the door into other worlds. Once inside, I can move about and get to know the terrain by using the torch of knowledge. (Writing from the Margin and Other Essays: In First Person 8)

Deshpande depicts the short story “The Stone Women” with such an imagination. This story is about the extremely popular and artistic, Channakeshava temple, which was said to be built by the Hoysala dynasty of Karnataka, Hoyasala meant “strike sala” (head of this kingdom) to kill the tiger. As narrated by Deshpande, this temple is poetry carved in stone images. The shrines were not cubical as usual but star shaped. King Vishnuvardhana defeated the Chalukyas and then built this temple as he converted to Vaishnavism from Jainism. This temple was not only a place of praise, worship, art, music, dance, imparting education and a house of treasure but it was also a court of justice.

Shashi Deshpande dwells on the magnificent beauties which are sculptured—the prime highlight of the temple’s architectural beauty was the goddesses “Madanikas”. There are 42 of these, placed in the walls outside are 38 of them, remaining 4 are sculpted on the ceiling which is decorated, inside. These were created because they were inspired by the beauty of the queen Shantaladevi; these sculptures display different activities and poses. Some of these sculptures are: The beauty with a mirror—“Darpana Sundari” “The Lady with the Parrot,” “The Hunters” “Bhasma-Mohini” these are unique work of architecture while every Shilabalika talks of a certain style and they also subtly display sexual romance.
Furthermore, this story of a newly married couple visiting this temple for the very first time is narrated using the narrative style of flashback and reminiscence - “I retreat into the world of the two of us together. The time before this seems so distant, I can scarcely connect myself to it, or to the girl I was then” (4). The narrator of the story is not only enchanted, scintillated but also puzzled when she sees the statues of women carved so faultlessly and thus the title “The Stone Women”

They are women, lush-bodied, high-breasted women carved on rectangular stone panels, leaning provocatively out of them, towards us, it seems women in all kinds of poses-looking into the mirror, doing their hair, playing on musical instruments, dancing, hunting. I walk along, looking at them as if mesmerized while the man goes on describing each carving in meticulous detail”. The narrative point of view is distinctively female or feminist here. “The stone women look unrealistic, the men who sculpted the women in stone, as they shaped them from their imaginations. As if I have evoked the sound, I even hear the ‘tap’ ‘tap’ of the hammer of the men chipping away at the stone, working out their fantasies in it, creating women with unreal bodies, women who played and sang and danced all day (Col V.I 15).

Concerning beauty, the male’s point of view with eroticism explains their definition of ‘woman’ and feminine beauty. Even in western literature, many new feminist myth critics do not adhere to the Greco-Roman tradition as hegemony and look at pre-Greek myths such as Isis and much lesser known cultural myths in different areas of the world, even like the ones mentioning the Native American legend. In the book The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature,
acknowledged feminist myth critics like Annis Pratt and Adrienne Rich describes myth as the key crucial age for women. Such women lead our focus to the wrong and narrow explanation of myths by these men and they mention that there is a problem with male myth critics of the 1950’s and 1960’s like Northrop Frye for ignoring gender in their scientific classification of myths and the original. The Feminist mythology appeared as an uprising against such gender prejudice which was further depicted on architecture which again was highly influenced by mythology. Truus Schroder-Schrader and Eileen Gray are feminist architects who spoke of an architecture that stood on the way against the male traditional architects who imagined about women in a certain way. Therefore, Shashi Deshpande’s reference to the sculptures of these women the “Shilabalike” in this Channakeshava temple in Belur signifies “Unreal bodies.”

The unreality of the sculpture in the narrator’s point of view reveals the invisible woman’s assertion. “Ladies? God, no! They’re women, lush-bodied, high-breasted women carved on rectangular stone panels, leaning provocatively out of them, towards us, it seems. Women in all kinds of poses-looking into the mirror, doing their hair, playing on musical instruments, dancing, hunting” (“The Stone Women” 71-2). The narrator further reveals that Shashi Deshpande’s works express a dissent against sex stereotyping. “Ladies are always the same, he adds and the two men exchange smiles. Must I smile, I wonder? But the men are not looking at me and we move on” (Col V.I 72)

To comment on Shashi Deshpande’s narrative management, one has to follow her words “I’d slowly made my own discoveries about how and where to begin a story, how to move smoothly on, how to end. I’d got the main point about a short story- that it is not just brief, but concentrated. Just one moment of time
brilliantly illuminated. And, that, anything which is there- even a nail on the wall, as Chekhov said- has to have some role in the story. But this story ‘The Intrusion,’ was entirely my own. I’d wanted to say something, the urge was very powerful and I was able to say it with control over both my subject and the technique. This was why the story had both strength and intensity. With this story I think I found my voice, a very important development for a writer.” (Writing from the Margin: In First Person. 7)

As Patricia Meyer Spacks says “…an examination of the ways the life of the imagination emerges in the work of women writing prose directly as women. “Imagination” is a slippery term, designating a power that penetrates the inner meaning of reality but also a power that creates substitutes for reality; I am interested in both meanings. In one way or another, imagination has been for many women the seed of grace, and often the subject as well as the impetus of their writing (The Female Imagination 6)

In the short stories of Shashi Deshpande therefore, the narrator makes an observation and looks at situations from the female perspective. Hence, the female narrator conveys ways of female feeling. As Patricia Meyer Spacks says in her book The Female Imagination.

What are the ways of female feeling, the modes of responding, that persist despite social change?

Do any characteristic patterns of self-perception shape the creative expression of women?

Changing social conditions increase or diminish the opportunities for women’s action and expression, but a special female self-awareness emerges through literature in every period (3).
Therefore, the uniqueness of the female imagination is expressed by the female narrator whose discursive voice plays an important role in the short story’s narrative management. Most of Shashi Deshpande’s novels and short stories are narrated by female narrators. Such female centered narratives retelling stories in monologues or interior monologues or third person narration bring out a female point of view to the issue discussed in the short stories, since the narrator is female and rarely male.

Thus, women narrators in Deshpande’s work bring out a female imagination into foreplay, the ways of female feeling are common in the stories, their suffering, their resolutions, their way of handling their problems and their search for solutions except for a few stories. Women cannot be understood as weak, may be in the case of newly married, and craving for total rights over their own bodies; maybe the decision of terminating the third pregnancy, pointing to the fact that a woman has full right to decide if she will go on with her pregnancy or not; maybe as a professional lawyer who ignores her profession and learning for the benefit of her family and children and so is adamant to remain a housewife and gratify her motherhood; maybe it is rebelling against age old customs of widowhood and propagating widow remarriage; maybe a Hindu Indian married woman who decides and actually leaves her husband for his “skunk” attitude. These various women have dared to raise “voices” in their respective circumstances that too through the narrator almost every time. Therefore, the uniqueness of the female imagination is expressed by the female narrator whose discursive voice plays an important role in the short story’s narrative management.

Thus, in Shashi Deshpande one could recognize the woman’s voice from the narrative, as expressing a distinct concern for Indian womanhood and distilling out of her thought patterns a solution acceptable only to the woman:
It is the voice of a solitary woman in the family situation, who thinks differently, who observes and responds to the people around her and tries to improve the situation around her not with a reformatory, but through a process of allowing the experiences itself to seep in and allow memories to interlace and flash back and forth, and finally render a solution, which may be acceptable only to her. (Renganathan. ‘To Keep My Light Burning’108).

Hence it is indispensable to examine family and relationships in detail, to understand the woman and family dynamics, the subject of which will be discussed in the next chapter.