CHAPTER-1
INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande (b: 1938), a prolific writer, has written ten novels, four books for children and many short stories, published in *Femina* and *Eve’s Weekly*. Deshpande’s fiction has generated great interest and has received tremendous response from critics. A survey of critical works available on her fiction shows that her themes, concerns, style and technique have been subjected to a variety of critical interpretations. Critical scholarship on Deshpande is available mainly in the form of a few full-length studies and a number of articles.

Most of the articles written on her works are limited to the study of one or the other novel. Moreover, the focus of critical attention has primarily been on her earlier novels. One of the three novels, namely, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983) and *That Long Silence* (1988), is the subject of interpretation in every second article. This presents a partial and fragmented view of her art. As a result, the whole canvas of her fictional world does not get explored.

Full-length studies available in the form of books also fail to provide a consistent and comprehensive view of her art. This is because the focus in these books is also limited mainly to her earlier novels. For example, Sarabjeet K. Sandhu in her book, *The Image of Woman in the Novel of Shashi Deshpande*, deals with *The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence*. All the three novels are her earlier works. Similarly, P.G. Joshi also focuses mainly on the earlier novels of Deshpande in his book titled *Shashi Deshpande’s Fiction: A Study in Women Employment and Postcolonial Discourse*. Moreover, these studies appear to be repetitive, as their primary area of concern is feministic attitude in Deshpande’s novels and the novels taken up for analysis are more or less the same. In this way, they provide a limited critical perspective on Deshpande’s art. The critical spectrum available on Deshpande is, thus, lopsided and her concerns and development as a writer have not been fully revealed.

This becomes clearly evident once works on her novels are analysed in some detail. One finds that a broad pattern can be observed in the criticism written on her novels. It can broadly be categorized into certain broad areas of interest such as
feminism in her novels, female protagonists, marriage as an institution as presented by Deshpande, existential concerns in her works and her style and technique.

The study of feministic aspect in her fiction, it seems, has been one of the favourite areas of critical analysis. Subordination of woman by man and crucial aspects of woman’s life such as her sexuality and her body are the chief concerns of these critics. Siddharth Sharma in his book, *Shashi Deshpande’s Novels: A Feminist Study*, seeks to examine Deshpande’s novels from the point of view of feminism. Sharma appreciates Deshpande for voicing the concerns of woman, who is victim of gross gender discrimination present in the society. According to him, Deshpande’s novel “contain much that is feminist.”

Sharma feels that Deshpande’s delineation of female characters leaves no doubt in the readers mind that her real concerns are feminist in nature. But his critical examination is not without certain imbalances. Sharma’s complete focus is on women characters and their saga of anguish, agony and conflict. The reasons and consequences of their agony and frustration are not fully explored and hence he fails to present a comprehensive view of even feministic aspects present in Deshpande’s novels.

The drama of tension and conflict between the individual’s mind and will on one hand and forces of economic and cultural determinism on the other also, it appears, eluded his perceptive mind. Though Sharma has devoted a chapter on art and style of Deshpande and even examines Shashi Deshpande’s works vis-à-vis two other women writers, namely Anita Desai and Bharti Mukherjee, yet everywhere his attention is directed towards the feministic elements in the novels of the above mentioned novelists and thereby making this comparison a clichéd one.

Another full-length study available on Shashi Deshpande is Mrinalini Sebastian’s *The Enterprise of Reading Differently: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande in Postcolonial Argument* where Sebastian probes postcolonial aspects in the novels of Deshpande. Talking about woman as ‘subaltern’ and ‘the other’, Mrinalini’s focus is also on women in Deshpande’s novels. Dividing her book into five chapters, she tries to examine Deshpande’s novels in the light of Saids’ idea of ‘contrapunctal analysis,’ Bhabha’s concept of ‘hybrid’ and ‘ambivalent cultures’ and Spivak’s concept of the ‘gendered-subaltern’. But Sebastian has also easily bypassed certain important aspects of Deshpande’s novels. She has conveniently ignored male
characters and their perspectives which makes it an imbalanced analysis. Moreover, her focus only on women in Deshpande’s works makes her critical analysis appear more as a study of feministic philosophy than postcolonial aspects.

One also notices that most of her book is devoted to arriving at different meanings of the term ‘postcolonial’ and analyzing various postcolonial critics and their theories. Only one character tries to interpret Deshpande’s novels in the context of postcolonial argument. This miniature analysis, concluded in only one chapter, tends to cover mainly four of Deshpande’s novels, namely The Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence, Roots and Shadows and The Binding Vine, (1993) leaving aside the rest of her novels. Thus, Mrinalini Sebastian’s critical endeavour is unable to provide a holistic interpretation of Shashi Deshpande’s fiction.

S.P. Swain, in his “Feminism in Shashi Deshpande’s Novels,” again interprets her novels from perspective of feminism only. According to him, women in her novel try to assert and redefine themselves. Deshpande’s novels present a woman’s search for identity. He finds Saru, in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Jaya, in That Long Silence and Indu, in Roots and Shadows following the same pattern of redefining themselves, but Urmi in The Binding Vine is different from the previous protagonists of Deshpande. She is in extreme mental pain due to the untimely death of her little daughter. But still she copes with the situation and also goes out to help other women in distress. Swain feels that it is through the character of Urmi that Deshpande moves a step ahead in expressing her feministic concerns. A similar trend is noticeable in Anita Singh’s article, “A Voice After The Long Silence: Shashi Deshpande’s Roots and Shadows and That Long Silence.” Anita Singh examines the reintegration and discovery of self of Indu in Roots and Shadows and Jaya in That Long Silence. She traces the path to self-realisation of Indu and Jaya and asserts that “they have realized their immense potentialities for action and self-actualisation.” But this tendency to read Deshpande’s novels only from feministic perspective presents a limited view of Deshpande’s abilities as a writer of human experience. Sidelying male point of view gives lopsided and restricted view of her works. Even when dealing with feminism in her novels, these critics provide only passing glimpses into depths and different dimensions of conflicts in the life of a
woman character. And the cause as well as the effect of these conflicts in the life of a woman too have been dealt with rather casually.

The critical studies exploring Deshpande’s feminist concerns are unable to view her works objectively because of their exclusive preoccupation with the concept of feminism. The critics proceed with preconceived notions and this sometimes has led them to arrive at some imbalanced and even misleading conclusions. For example, most of the critics have analysed Jaya and Saru and have pointed out that towards the end of the novels they reconcile with their husbands. But this is a misleading opinion as Deshpande herself never intended these characters to do so. In an interview to Lakshmi Holmstorm, she says, “there was no doubt at all in my mind that Sarita is not going back. I am perpetually surprised that people haven’t understood that.”\(^7\) In Jaya’s case as well, the writer says that it doesn’t matter whether she goes back to her husband or not. The matter of concern is the change in the character of Jaya. In the light of these remarks made by the writers, which are also borne out by a close analysis of the novels, Sandhu’s conclusion that Indu, Saru and Jaya “try their best to conform to their roles”\(^8\) and Siddharth Sharma’s assertion that Saru doesn’t want separation from her husband do not appear to be well grounded. Infact, the women-centered approach has resulted in their failure to appreciate the wide range and complexity of Deshpande’s concerns as a novelist and her vision of life.

Criticism on Deshpande’s novels, besides being heavily preoccupied with feminist thought, is also focused on the female protagonists in her novels further narrowing down thereby the scope of their critical studies. Sarabjeet Sandhu analyses the female protagonists, Indu in Roots and Shadows, Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors and Jaya in That Long Silence, who are caught between tradition and modernity, conventional and unconventional attitudes. These three women find their personal life smothering and want to rebel against their circumstances, but after a period of self-introspection, all the three reconcile to their situation. Sandhu admires Deshpande for dealing “very minutely and delicately with the problems of middle-class educated women.”\(^9\) Working on the same line Sumitra Kukrite has raided thought provoking questions regarding the portrayal of women protagonists in Deshpande’s novels. She feels that Jaya and Saru are “desirous to revolt against
the straight-jacketed role” assigned to women. Both these women pass through a tumultuous phase in their lives and after a process of self-realisation, they come out victorious. A.G. Khan’s article, “Shashi Deshpande’s Heroines: Prisoners by choice?” adds another dimension to the study of female characters in Deshpande’s novels by elucidating the facts that protagonists in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *The Binding Vine* are self-made victims. Their solitary battle against everyone around and probably against their own selves is because of their “overblown ego”. Khan presents a different perspective altogether. Some of the other studies present women protagonists in Deshpande’s novels as victims of circumstances in life or the society, but Khan believes that they are their own victims.

An analysis of this critical approach, focusing exclusively on novelists’ protagonists, shows that it is marred by certain serious limitations. These studies, focusing on female protagonists, invariably tend to drift towards feminism only. While feminism is still a broad category, which has different facets and various dimensions, focus on the characters and that too female characters only further narrows down their area of study and fails to provide an adequately inclusive view of the art and vision of the novelist. Moreover, they appear to be very reductive because of their exclusive preoccupation with exploring the major female characters only thus ignoring the minor characters as well as the male figures. In this way, they not only fail to provide a holistic view of range of characters and the art of characterisation in her novels but also overlook the powerful battle between individual’s urge for an authentic life of her own free will and the restrictive and imprisoning factors, internal as well as external, seeking to enslave them.

Further narrowing and limiting the critical perspective, the third area of critical interest on Deshpande has been the institution of marriage. The central character in most of her novels is a woman suffering marital disharmony. Saru, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, finds her marriage unbearable due to her schizophrenic husband, Manu. Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, thinks that she has lost her identity after marriage. Thus, her novels provide enough opportunity to study the institution of marriage from various angles. But most of the critics tend to take a rather restricted and simplistic view of Deshpande’s treatment of this human relationship, ignoring
the complex interplay of a number of factors – social, cultural, biological and psychological – operative in one’s life. For example, Y.S. Sharadha in her article “The Problems of Marriage and Affirmation of Self in Shashi Deshpande’s Roots and Shadows,”¹² has studied the problems in marital life of Indu and marriage as an ultimate goal in Mini’s life. By confining her attempt to probe into the marital problems only through the characters of Indu and Mini and thus ignoring the married lives of other important characters like Akka and Mira, Y.S. Sharadha gives at best an incomplete view of the treatment of this theme by Deshpande. Pashupati Jha and Nagendra Kumar in their article “Looking Back in Anger: Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence” examine the frustrations of Jaya in her marital relationship. Jaya, feels these two writers, “seeks the answer of her marital problems within the same limitations by modifying her anger through introspection and analysis.”¹³ But here, the study remains confined to the protagonist Jaya's married life, neglecting the experience in marriage of other women like Vanitamani, Jaya's mother and also her mother-in-law. A study of the issue of marriage in That Long Silence cannot be rewarding if one ignores these important characters and their married lives along with the variety of factors impinging on this vital area of their relationship. These critical studies taking up marriage as the subject of analysis deal primarily with emotions and attitudes towards marriage of female characters only. It has been observed by a number of critics that the females feel suffocated in a marital relationship, both physically and mentally, but surprisingly enough, non of the critics has bothered to explore the male's situation or role in a marriage. Both, husband and wife are involved in the institution of marriage. Excluding the husband from any analysis on marriage, therefore, cannot provide a balanced and incisive view of the complexities inherent in this relationship.

Studying marital life of Saru and Manu alone without putting it in juxtaposition with the marriage of Nalu and Smita as well as that of Saru’s parents and even her college friend Bhaskar limits the scope of Awasthi’s endeavour making it a bit imbalanced and incomplete. The fact that he doesn’t examine this relationship by placing it fully and clearly in the context of vital individual and societal factors further restricts his focus.
Besides these attempts to study feminism, female protagonists and matrimony in Shashi Deshpande’s novels, some attempts have also been made to probe the existential issues dealt with in her novels. Search for identity, experiences of alienation and affirmation are some of the existentialist elements constituting the lives of men and women in Deshpande’s fictional world. Critics have studied these questions in the form of many scholarly articles.

A.K. Awasthi in his article, “The Quest for Identity in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande,” asserts that “the chief concern in Shashi Deshpande's novels is evidently self-assessment.”\(^{14}\) Herein according to the critic, she comes closer to the existential view of life. Talking of the two novels – If I Die Today and The Dark Holds No Terrors – taken up by Awasthi, he concludes that Deshpande “is in search of meaning and purpose of life in relation to the individual existence.”\(^{15}\) While studying If I Die Today, he concentrates on Guru, Meera, Manju and Vidya – different characters put in different situations in life and with different perspectives. The analysis of this novel from this perspective is certainly interesting and useful, but the study is too brief and limited to present a sufficiently comprehensive view of the novel. Also, the treatment of the novel The Dark Holds No Terrors is rather lopsided as Awasthi takes up only Saru’s existential dilemma, thereby neglecting another important character – Manu, facing an acute identity crisis. This analysis of The Dark Holds No Terror thus appears to be repetitive as like other critics Awasthi has also taken up only the female protagonist to present an interpretation of the theme taken up by him.

Another critic writing in the same vein is P. Ramamoorthi. In his article “‘My life is my own’: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s Women”\(^{10}\) he takes up the arduous journey of Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors and Indu in Roots and Shadows towards attaining fulfillment of self. In dealing with the female protagonists' search for roots of their existence, his study comes very close to the traditional approach. Ramamoorthi also dwells on the issues like marriage and motherhood, all this while evading the important existential concerns like the experiences of alienation caused by certain forces acting beyond one’s control such as economic conditions and biological compulsions. Dr. Ruby Milhoutra, in “Shashi Deshpande’s A Matter of Time: A Search for Identity and Culture,” tries to unravel
the protagonist’s “process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationship within their given social world.”\(^{17}\) Her primary interest is “Gopal’s transformation from existentialist point of view.”\(^ {18}\) She tries to interpret his fear, emptiness and alienation mentioned in the novel. Dr. Milhoutra breaks the trend of studying only female protagonists in Deshpande’s novels by analyzing Gopal’s character in its different dimensions and thereby presenting a complete picture of his mental self. But because of her almost exclusive preoccupation with his psyche she overlooks the perspectives of Aru, Charu and Kalyani towards him. She does take into account Sumi’s point of view about Gopal and his action of working out on his family, she ignores the perspectives of other men and women in his life such as his daughters and his mother-in-law.

Working on the same lines, K.V. Raghupati in his “Self-assertion of Women: Shashi Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows*” takes up loneliness, an important concern of existentialists, as it has been presented in the novel. Indu is the central figure of this novel, who feels “stifled and thwarted”\(^ {19}\) in her parental home. In order to attain freedom and completeness, she marries Jayant. K.V. Raghupati rightly asserts that “Indu thinks that marriage has given her freedom, but ironically enough, soon she realizes the futility of her decision.”\(^ {20}\) She feels incomplete and discontented even after marrying a man of her own choice. K.V. Raghupati goes beyond the limits of feminism and deals with the existentialist dilemma of a typical, modern, educated, middle-class, independent woman. But in presenting the dilemma he could have easily incorporated characters like Akka, Naren and Sunanda to widen the scope of his study and thereby touching upon the very question of predicament of human existence. That’s why Raghupati in his article is unable to present a comprehensive evaluation of the element of loneliness in *Roots and Shadows*.

In addition to these critical attempts, some efforts have also been made to analyse Shashi Deshpande’s style and technique as a novelist. Vimala Rama Rao, for example, endeavours to study “unselfconscious use of literary allusions, myths and folklore”\(^ {21}\) in the works of Deshpande. In her novels, asserts Rao, myths and folklore are not used for decorative purposes but they serve the purpose of exposing the psyche of her protagonists. In India, we grow up with these myths and legends. They thus get deeply ingrained in our psyche. So, Indian psyche can be presented
succinctly by using these myths and legends. Vimala Rama Rao says that Deshpande’s novels are replete with references to *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. There is a reference to *The Bhagavadgita* in *That Long Silence* and the Sita-myth is also used in the same novel. Then, there is a description of the tulsi-cult and the folklore of sparrow and crow in the novel. The legend of prince Dhruva in skillfully used in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Vimala Rama Rao’s effort is certainly interesting as it serves to give some insights into the context of Indian cultural milieu in her fiction. However, she stops short of highlighting fully with their help the vertical depths and the archetypal dimensions of Deshpande’s thematic scheme. The way her characters, particularly the protagonists, critique these myths and legends also hasn’t received her critical attention. That’s why the conflict between the role of these myths as tools of socio-psychological determinism and the assertion of human will for freedom, giving to her novels universal human significance, has not been duly appreciated in her study.

Like Rama Rao, A.N. Dwivedi also explores the stylistic aspects of Deshpande’s fiction in his article, “Recurring Metaphors in Shashi Deshpande’s Fiction.” He takes up metaphors of ‘the dark and the light’, ‘death and life’ silence and ‘the binding vine’ which recur in her novels. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the metaphor of light and dark runs throughout the novel. ‘Darkness’ represents the mental trauma of Saru and she desperately yearns for ‘light,’ i.e. for love and compassion on the part of her husband. The metaphor of ‘silence’ according to Dwivedi is used in *That Long Silence*. There is a deep chasm of silence between Jaya and her husband, Mohan. Silence, according to him, signifies love, compassion and understanding. This metaphor recurs insistently in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *The Binding Vine* as well. The metaphor of death is dominant, feels Dwivedi, in *If I Die Today* and *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983). The very titles of these two novels focus on the idea of death.

The metaphor of “binding vine” is also emphatically used in the novel with the same name. Dwivedi also examines the metaphor of ‘binding vine’ which refers to relationships that bind people with one another. In the novel, for Urmi, the binding vine is her son and her mother, while for Shakutai it is her children.
Dwivedi has done some commendable work while bringing out these metaphors used in Deshpande’s novels. But at the same time, Dwivedi has missed out a very important metaphor, which recurs in almost every novel of Deshpande, i.e. the metaphor of home, used suggestively and evocatively by her. It is this metaphor through which she reveals the otherwise inexpressible and complex inner dilemma of her protagonists and the development of her plots could also have been better analysed with the help of this metaphor. By ignoring this metaphor, Dwivedi hasn’t been able to study the cyclic growth of her plots and Deshpande’s craftsmanship. He is unable to underline the fact that Deshpande’s metaphors are integral to her characters, themes and her structures. If they provide a structural unity to her novels, they also indicate the pattern of development in her characters. For example, if the metaphor of ‘silence’ stands for the submission of her will by Jaya to the controlling authority of her patriarchal social cultural milieu, her resolution towards the end of the novel not to remain silent any longer speaks of the re-awakening of her free will and the resolution to assert it in her life.

Almost a similar pattern of limitations is discernible in the imagery of death, decay and loneliness in Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence. In the first part of the article, the writer asserts that Jaya has a divided self. Her one self is steeped in tradition whereas the other self wants to break free from all kinds of restrictions. He arrives at an enlightening understanding of Jaya’s “chaotic psyche”23 Jaya is unsure of herself and has a morbid fascination for death and decay. That is why, according to S. Sengupta, an imagery “of death, decay and desolation”24 dominates the novel throughout. Jaya has a feeling of decay and rotting in her Dadar flat. Also, there are some gruesome scenes of death and hallucinations of death in the novel. Furthermore, Jaya finds desolation all around her. There is “emptiness and silence”25 in the environment around and within her. Though S. Sengupta has made a commendable effort to study terrible self-isolation of Jaya through the use of imagery in the novel, but by focusing only on ugliness and frustration in Jaya’s life, he limits the range and scope of his study. Jaya is a complex personality, who undergoes transformation throughout the novel. S. Sengupta, through these images, is unable to bring out Jaya as a real living human being who cannot be understood by studying only one aspect of her life. As a result, Sengupta also has not been able to explore through imagery the full thematic complexity of the novel.
One finds that all the critical efforts made towards studying her style and technique are mainly in the form of articles covering one or two of her novels. A.N. Dwivedi has done some path breaking work in his article “Recurring Metaphors in Shashi Deshpande.” But as it is also in article form, it is not comprehensive and is unable to analyse her novels as a body. Vimala Rama Rao’s study is also marred by a similar limitation. She takes up only two of her novels for study.

It is evident from this brief critical analysis of works available on Deshpande’s fiction that they are characterised by certain serious limitations and imbalances. For example, none of her critics, it seems, has dealt with various dimensions of conflict in a consistent and comprehensive manner between individuals and the invisible controlling hand of what may be termed as fate, chance or gods. Even the struggle her men and women are locked in against powerful social, cultural and economic forces operative in their milieu has not received due cognizance from her readers. Tensions between various biological and psychological drives, pressures and compulsions on one hand and one’s rational and moral consciousness on the other too have been treated rather cursorily. The obvious result of this negligence is that the full range and complexity of her themes and concerns have so far remained rather unappreciated even by her admirers. It has also tended to obscure the inclusive nature of life she has rendered through the plots centered on a limited number of characters, mainly women, in her novels. These gaps and imbalances in the analysis and assessment of Deshpande’s art and her fictional world, therefore, make it necessary to revisit her novels with a focus on some of those of her themes and concerns which have remained hitherto unexplored and a study of which may enable one to arrive at a fairer and more comprehensive understanding of her works. This, it is hoped, can be achieved by a detailed and in-depth examination of her treatment of the theme of determinism and free will, dealt with by her penetratively and on a considerable scale in her fictional constructs.

Determinism and Free Will are two antagonistic concepts which have received the attention of greatest thinkers. The knotty problem of free will and determinism has troubled religious thinkers, philosophers and jurists for centuries.

Determinism holds that all events including human choices and decisions are determined by motives, which are regarded as forces acting on one’s will. Roots of
determinism lie in a very common philosophical idea: everything can, in principle, be explained or that everything that is, has a sufficient reason for being and for being as it is, and not otherwise. Determinism is a modern name for Democritus’s ancient law that causal laws control the motion of atoms and that everything—including human minds—consists merely of atoms in a void. As Democritus’s mentor and fellow materialist, Leucippus, puts it, “Nothing occurs at random, but everything for a reason and by necessity.”

Pierre Simon, Marquis de Laplace,27 in the eighteenth century framed the classical formulation of this thesis. For him, the present state of universe is the effect of its previous state and it is also the cause of the state that will follow. In the same way, there is a cause behind every human action and that human action is not independent in itself. They argued that if there is a mind that knows, to the minute detail, everything about every particle in the universe at any given point, it would thereby know the future and the past of every entity, large or small. Determinism, believes a philosopher Gary Watson, is a thesis “according to which the state of the world at any given time is fixed in all of its details by prior states and by laws of nature.”28 Philosophers and theorists have listed quite a few varieties of determinism. Different varieties of determinism can be grouped broadly under two categories—External forces of determinism, which exist and operate from outside our physical self; and internal forces, which exist and operate from within our human self. Both these kinds of forces are believed to be beyond our control and certainly not a result of our own making. For instance, whether one drinks tea or coffee for breakfast is determined by causal influences acting on an individual. The causal influences may be external or internal. On the external side, one may want to follow one’s best friend’s example and that is what decides if one would have tea or coffee. On the internal side, the specific genetic structure of one’s body may determine what taste one would favour.

Among external forces, the first and foremost is the society and the nation, which play a vital role in casting the individual into fixed moulds can be formulated as social determinism. Society and social institutions like family, class, caste and matrimony control and influence a person to a great extent. The notion of ‘tabula rasa’ or blank slate supports this theory of social determinism. It believes that
individuals are born without built-in mental content and that their knowledge comes from experience and perception. The proponents of tabula rasa thesis favour the nurture side of nature versus nurture debate. Another external agency of determinism is the economic structure of a society. Economic determinism is a thesis which believes that economic factors underlie all of society’s decisions. It is a theory which gives prominence to economic structure in the development of human history. The very nature of man is materialistic and therefore the structure of society, its institutions, laws and practices are determined by the prevalent modes of production. Evolution of human society has been determined by the struggle for control over economic means. It is further asserted that the consciousness of an individual doesn’t determine his/her life, but it is the economic and social life which determines his being.

Besides this, there is another form of determinism called environmental determinism, also known as climatic or geographical determinism. It is the view that the physical environment, rather than social conditions, determines culture, and humans are strictly defined by stimulus response and cannot deviate from them. The fundamental argument of the environmental determinists is that aspects of physical geography, particularly that of climate, influence the behaviour and culture of a society. For example, tropical climate is said to cause laziness, relaxed attitudes and promiscuity, while the frequent variability in the weather of the middle latitudes lead to more determined and work driven ethics. Most of the long and short distance runners, who win Olympic medals, are black, because their body gets accustomed to take the physical strain as a result of the extreme climatic conditions they live in. Similarly, sportspersons from very cold countries like Russia are very good in gymnastics and floor events. Because of harsh winters, they indulge in indoor sports more than outdoor sports.

Yet, another kind of external determinant can be termed as technological determinism. Technological Determinism is a reductionist theory which suggests that society’s technology drives the development of its social structure and cultural values. Advancement in technology is seen as the central causal element in the process of social change. The theory holds that technology is the force which shapes the society and its inhabitants. According to the thesis, technological determinism is
the belief in technology as a key governing force in society. Technological Determinism sees technology as a basis of all human activity rather than considering technology as a part of human activities. Social problems can be solved by technological advances and this is the way society moves forward.

Another important variant of external determinism is theological determinism. According to this thesis there is an all powerful, omnipresent God who controls and determines all human thoughts and actions. Believers may call this as God or fate, destiny or any supernatural power, but it is undoubtedly believed to be one of the most significant external forces of determinism. All the people experience this power at some point in their lives. Followers of this belief argue that there is a God who determines all that humans will do, either by knowing their actions in advance via some form of omniscience or by decreeing their actions in advance and thus leaving no space for free will.

Besides the external agencies, there are internal agencies of determinism as well. There are basically two main internal forces of determinism-namely, one’s psyche and one’s body.

Psychological Determinism holds that one’s mind determines the life of an individual. It asserts that one’s desires are central to an explanation of one’s behaviour because one acts according to one’s strongest desires. When these desires are not fulfilled, they get stored up in some portion of the mind, and that’s why, psychological determinism stresses that events in one’s childhood control one’s actions and mental states.

One’s body and bodily functions also go a long way in deciding the course of one’s life. Human behaviour and character is mediated by biological factors like genetic makeup, hormonal secretions and normal body functions like respiration, digestion, excretion etc. All these functions of the body determine our day to day life, e.g. in case of women the monthly cycle is a body process which governs her life. Any minor dysfunction in any of the body systems also becomes a great determinant in one’s life. If the body dysfunctions, it results in a disease and then the disease becomes the controller of one’s life. Comedy of Humours, a type of comedy which the Elizabethan playwright Ben Jonson wrote, is based on the physiological theory of the four humours. Humours were held to be the four primary fluids- blood,
phlegm, choler and melancholy whose mixture in the body decided the physical state as well as character type of a person. Thus, the ancient theory of four humours supports the present theory of biological determinism.

Besides the term determinism, free will is another important term which needs some explanation here. It is a concept of traditional philosophy used to refer to the belief that human behaviour is not determined by any cause, but is the result of choices made by an act of will. It is asserted that humans have a capacity or power to choose among alternatives or to act independently of natural or divine restraints. The will is seen as a faculty of the soul or mind, which stands outside the physical world and its governing laws. Advocates of free will believe that while everything else in this universe may be the inevitable consequence of external or internal forces, human behaviour is unique and is not determined by God or the stars or the laws of nature. It is a philosophical term for “a particular sort of capacity of rational agents to choose a course of action from among various alternatives.” In the words of Kant, humans are to be treated as “ends in themselves.” Philosopher Robert Kane asserts that free will “is the power of agents to be the ultimate sustainers of their own ends or purposes.” The working of free will can also manifest itself in decision-making without the influence of determinants, even if the decision is not materialised into action. When a person uses his reason to analyse his situation and questions the determining forces working over him, it is an expression of free will working in his life. Resistance, both in active and passive forms, is another form of its expression. If one doesn’t yield in front of determining forces at the level of consciousness or at the level of spirit, it implies the triumph of one’s free will.

The concepts of determinism and free will appear to be as old as the human ability and capacity to think as to how and why things happen as they do, and the relationship between his life and the world. Their origin can be traced to theological beliefs and writings. In Christian tradition, the nearest approaches to determinism are to be found in the doctrines of St. Augustine, the theologian of the Western church. According to him, after Adam’s fall, he lost his freedom of choice and by his act he plunged man into a situation where no true free will can exist. Everyman bears the brunt of the original sin committed by Adam, and is incapable of doing anything good. Man is doomed to do nothing but evil and to suffer the full
consequences of his deeds. Augustine called the fate of man as predestined. By the grace of God, some are purged of original sin and are left free to live a good life. But this grace is a free gift, no man can ask for it or even earn it by his actions.

John Calvin, another theologian, holds similar views. Fundamental to Calvin’s ideas on this issue is his famous doctrine of eternal decree of God. According to Calvin, from the very beginning, God has determined what he wants man to become. Some individuals have been booked for eternal damnation and some have been booked for eternal salvation. Those who have been blessed by God’s grace are able to achieve salvation, but others are incapable of willing anything but evil. Thus, the fate of man has been decreed eternally.

On the contrary, theologians like Jacob Arminius propounded their own concept of arminianism which rejects the calvinistic theory and predestination. To the Arminian, man is born with a capacity for righteousness as well as evil. He can by his own effort cast away the guilt incurred by Adam and achieve redemption. Arminianism allows much space to man’s effort and struggle and allows for a much wider scope of freedom of will.

Deism, another ideology that rejected the calvinistic theory, asserts that man has considerable control over his destiny. By use of reason and goodwill, mankind can achieve happiness and a state of bliss on this very earth. The proponents of free will believe in an afterlife, in which an individual is rewarded or punished depending on his actions during his life on this earth.

Since the seventeenth century, there has been a general decline in the acceptance of those Christian theological doctrines that imply determinism. Arminianism won many adherents. Adherence to the traditional theological doctrines implying determinism has been limited to relatively small groups of Churchmen who have remained faithful to a really strict theological system like calvinism.

The twentieth century, however, witnessed some recrudescence of these doctrines. This is particularly true of that variety of twentieth-century theology, labelled neo-orthodox, and dominated by the thinking of Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth. In the systems of neo-orthodoxy, one finds a significant place for the doctrine
of original sin, which had fallen out of favour among nineteenth century theological liberals. It believes that man remains in need of help from some exterior and transcendental source, if he is to avoid evil. Furthermore, man cannot seek this external help and appropriate it to himself. It must be freely offered by God without any initiative from man. Thus, the modern systems of neo-orthodoxy, like those of its predecessors, adhere to the philosophy of determinism.

In other religions also, there are approaches which resemble the doctrine of determinism. Also, there are doctrines which oppose determinism. The theology of Islam provides a particularly important place to determinism. Muslims have the concept of ‘kadar’ or divine decree, which is closely analogous to the Christian concept of Predestination. They believe that God has ordered every human being to perform the task assigned to him on this earth. But this makes man an automaton, but this was too extreme for most Muslims. They defended human free will, basically for ethical reasons. They argue that Allah cannot be just if man does not own moral responsibility for his actions. Allah’s punishments or rewards can only be justified if a human being is free to act according to his own will, not otherwise.

The theology of Judaism provides less room for approaches to determinism than Christianity or Islam. But a significant approach to determinism can be found in the widely held doctrine of providence. Since the time of the Old Testament many Jews have believed that God controls the universe in ways which benefit his chosen people. They believe in Jehovah who is omnipotent and omniscient and who rules the world through his providence. But Jews also have a concept of evil. Evil is often explained by Jewish thinkers as a punishment administered to man by God for his wicked behaviour. This concept places full responsibility on man and thus advocates free will.

The Hindu philosophy appears to offer more scope to free will than determinism. Theistic versions of Hinduism such as Shavism and Vaishnavism have emphasised the importance of free will. The doctrine of ‘Karma’ in Hinduism says that we pay for our actions in the past and that our actions in present be enough to allow us to deserve the future reward or punishment that we will receive for our present actions. *The Gita* gives prominence to man’s efforts and struggle in this life. Lord Krishna advises man to keep on performing his duty without thinking of
possible rewards. All these ideas reinforce the concept of free will. On the other hand, Hinduism also lays emphasis on the fact that God is all pervasive and all-powerful. This world is His creation and not even a leaf can move without His permission.

This debate between determinism and free will is not restricted to the field of religion. It is an important area of concern for sociologists, scientists and philosophers also.

With advancement in the field of social science, many sociologists have paid due attention to the deterministic philosophy. Sociologists believe that society has an undeniable impact on human mind and behaviour. Family, class, social status, upbringing, education – all have great influence on an individual, and it is through these agents created by society itself that society acts as a determining factor in an individual’s life.

Thomas Malthus, an eighteenth century sociologist, asserts man’s inability to change his lot. He examines the effect of climatic conditions on humans. He finds that inhabitants of genial climatic conditions are less alert and less resourceful than those of harsher climes. Thus, in a way Malthus advocates the supremacy of environment on the individual.

Another determinist, stauncher than even Malthus, is Karl Marx. He emphasises that social laws work with “iron necessity towards inevitable results.” Marx presents a closed system in which individual choices and actions are all mechanical. For him class struggle and revolutions are a part of natural process and hence they are inevitable.

Many nineteenth century theories advocate deterministic outlook. Most important of them all is Naturalism. On literary level, it is aimed at giving an accurate and real picture of life through a work of art. But in a general sense, Naturalism is a philosophy which considers a human being as “merely a higher order animal whose character and behaviour are entirely determined by two kinds of forces, heredity and environment.” It also believes that a person “inherits compulsive instincts and is then subject to the social and economic forces in the family, the class and the milieu into which that person is born.” Naturalism
emphasises the limited ability of humans to impose their will upon their own destiny.

Many eminent scientists have also accepted the concept of determinism at work. Charles Darwin believes that mankind, as well as other forms of life, are subject to a “grand sequence of events.” All events in this universe have been ordained for a special purpose. Man’s destiny is also a part of this “grand sequence”. Darwin’s theory of “natural selection” also closely approaches the concept of determinism. According to the theory, nature itself selects the individuals best adapted to the demands of environment. Only these selected individuals survive whereas other species get extinct with time.

Sigmund Freud, one of the seminal figures in scientific determinism, says that the belief in “psychic freedom and choice” is “quite unscientific.” According to him, whatever we choose or will is a result of the “laws of causality.” Our conscious will is determined by unconscious desires over which we have no control. Freud would attribute inadvertencies like slips of tongue to the unconscious will rather than call it a mere accident. When we think we are acting freely, we are actually responding to some unsuspected forces of our psyche.

On the one hand, if there are philosophies that tend to play down the element of free will in human activity, the humanistic philosophies, on the other hand, emphasise its importance. Humanism gives dignity and central position to the human beings in the universe. To humanists, man’s place is distinct and he has his own set of laws, which he can obey or disobey at will. Man’s reason and will are factors not found else where in nature. It suggests that they are not under the control of laws of nature, and thus they set him apart. This brand of humanism is sometimes called scientific humanism.

The theory of existentialism which is centered upon the analysis of existence and of the way humans find themselves existing in the world also seems to believe in free will of humans. It is a philosophy which is concerned with finding self and the meaning of life through freedom of thought, choice and personal responsibility. The theory doesn’t support that social values and structures control the individual entirely. It rather emphasises that an individual is responsible for his choice even in the face of traditions, laws or other ethnic rules.
The concept of subjective reality – i.e. reality and all the things, concepts and truths in the universe are determined by the subjective perceptions of the individuals – also seems to encourage the concept of free will. Different perspectives and interpretations of different events and philosophies are only possible if humans have a freedom to think and choose on their own.

Another philosophy in opposition to the deterministic thought is pragmatism. William James, the psychologist and the philosopher, is the chief voice of pragmatism. Most of the psychologists deny freedom to will, but James is impressed by man’s freedom of consciousness. James calls it “the sense of the amount of effort that we can put forth.” This effort is will power, and it emanates from within ourselves. Effort, for him, is equivalent to will, how far it is not free, is difficult to assess; but James assumes that to most of us it is totally so. James, the philosopher, believes that there are wrong ways and right ways, and one has freedom of choice as to which to follow. James readily admits the element of chance in the universe, but for him it simply means that things may or may not happen in certain ways; the whole order of events from the beginning to the end of the world is not pre-arranged according to some fixed plan. This is a thought quite different from the naturalistic philosophy, which believes that all human effort is silly and futile. It is also opposed to Marxist view that one must work within the inevitable laws of history, and can in no way modify them. According to pragmatism “there is not one fixed groove that human events must follow,” instead, there are many alternatives and man’s will plays its part in determining future.

Ideas of democracy, freedom and tolerance – the keywords of the modern society – are not in accordance with the eternal laws of universe, but are in accordance with the will of man. Sociologists opine that social structure and social institutions determine a person, but, it is also argued, these are a creation of man himself. Man creates social laws and regulations and can change them as and when required. They are not a fixity, they are not static, absolute or eternal, and thus man’s will is more important and powerful than these rules of society. Also, there is a constant struggle between deterministic agents of society and individual will. Man is not a passive victim or a sufferer. In his very struggle lies the assertion of his free will.
The legal system in the world is an example of acceptance of human free will by the society. If a person is not responsible for what he does, he cannot be punished or rewarded on the basis of his actions. But a criminal is lawfully punished in our society. Also the system of giving honour, awards and medals of proficiency are meant to reward a person for his good deeds. The system of reward and punishment recognises the importance of free will.

Early scientific thought often portrayed the universe as deterministic. Newton predicted that the basic particles of the universe operate in the same fashion as the rolling balls on a billiard table, moving and striking each other in predictable ways to produce predictable results. Modern science, on the other hand, puts emphasis on free will. Quantum mechanics, predicts events only in terms of probabilities, casting doubt on whether the universe is deterministic at all.

Philosophies both of determinism and free will have also found expression in literature. Literature has always dramatised the conflict caused by human soul struggling to assert itself against the determining forces. Epics and mythologies have depicted man’s free will contending with gods. Milton in his Paradise Lost (1665) depicts the will of Satan resolved to make heaven out of hell. The Myth of Sisyphus is a classic example of human will struggling to express itself against the decree of God. Thomas Hardy’s novels present a valuable study of determining forces at work. In his novels man proves feeble before fate or destiny that so often comes to vitiate man’s plans and schemes. Hardy suggests men and women are mere puppets in the hands of a mocking fate. He presents with firm conviction the working of a sinister intelligence in the affairs of human beings, and reiterates with a firm force what in Shakespeare’s King Lear, Gloucester had stated: “As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods/They kill us for their sport.”

In Tess of the D’Urbervilles (1891), Hardy presents Tess as a victim of fate. Part of the novel presenting Tess and Angel at Stonehenge is symbolic of Hardy’s philosophy. According to Hardy the whole universe is a large impersonal mechanism directed by some automatic principle of life unknown, pursuing its mysterious end, utterly indifferent to the feelings of mortals. Man is working to one end, Destiny to another. Henchard, in The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), dies struggling against decrees of fate throughout his life. Fate or chance plays an
important part in fulfilment of Henchard’s tragic destiny. After his initial act of sin of selling his wife and child, Henchard settles in the city of Casterbridge. By virtue of his untiring energy and perseverance he goes on to become the most prosperous man in the town. But fate would not like it to be so. Soon minor events like estrangement with Farfrae, denial of his love by Lucetta, sudden appearance of furmity woman and coming of Susan change his life. The sudden change of weather, which ruins Henchard’s business, is but a bitter chance happening. Everywhere in his novels human beings appear to be crushed by this power which is indifferent and hostile to man. But at the same time, in their struggle against fate, the characters do show their free will. Circumstances may be cruel, but if a man decides to struggle his way out, then he can certainly be described as a man of will. Novels of social realism portray the social forces of determinism acting on an individual who struggles against them. Psychological novels probe man’s freedom of will and reason in conflict with his own inner drives.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels provide staple material for study of these factors and forces at work in various forms. In the wide panorama of fictional world of Deshpande we find various forces of determinism acting on individuals and thus controlling and guiding their thinking and actions. Forces of determinism, e.g., social, cultural, cosmic, one’s body and bodily functions, which will be studied elaborately as a part of the present study, are found working on a plenty of characters in Deshpande’s novels.

In A Matter of Time, Kalyani talks of fate as the supreme determinant in her life. In this novel, through the character of Kalyani, Deshpande speaks about fate as a determining agent. Kalyani remarks, “what can even the gods do against our destinies?” She attributes all her and her daughters’ misfortunes to their fate. In the case of Jaya, in That Long Silence, society and its age-old customs and traditions act as determining force. In Binding Vine Vandana is also greatly influenced by the patriarchal definition of herself as a woman and submits her whole self to her husband.

Also one’s body and bodily functions act as great determining agents in the life of her characters. Jaya in That Long Silence hates her monthly curse and she finds it limiting her freedom. She tries to be free, and take control of the
reproductive system of her body by taking certain pills, but it proves to be of no use. Saru in _The Dark Holds No Terrors_ finds her process of growing up agonising. For Saru all this is torturous and shameful. In addition to one’s body, there are psychical factors which control one’s actions and behaviour. Saru in _The Dark Holds No Terrors_ carries the guilt of killing her brother. This guilty conscience turns her hostile and rebellious towards her parents.

Deterministic forces in the novels of Deshpande pose a challenging situation to individual’s free will. Different people have different ways of coping with the challenging situations in which they are placed. Some people get submerged in the milieu and have no urge of free will trying to assert itself. Vandana, in _The Binding Vine_, is one such person. She abdicates her free will in the face of social customs and traditions. Another set of people are those who find it too much and want to revolt against the determining situations. But though they want to overthrow the forces of determinism and choose their own destiny, they lack the knowledge and strength to do so. Shakutai in _The Binding Vine_ has a realisation that her daughter is wronged, but she has got no resources or inner ability to get justice for her daughter. Then, there are numerous instances found in Deshpande’s novels wherein a person has enough ability and strength to assert his free will. Deshpande has shown the working of free will in her fictional world which shows her belief in human dignity and reason. Savitribai and Leela in _The Small Remedies_ are two of several characters who show the potential of human will to overcome the deterministic conditions in life. That free will is a reality and not an illusion is also proved by the characters of Sumi and Aru in the novel, _A Matter of Time_. These two persons emerge out of a crisis in their personal lives on the strength of their free will and resolve not to yield in front of determinants working over them. The foregoing discussion indicates that a study of the novels of Shashi Deshpande in the light of these two concepts can prove to be interesting and illuminating. The study of the concept of determinism and free will, through the analysis of various characters and their lives, can help understand better Deshpande’s vision of life. The study doesn’t endeavour to solve the knotty problem of determinism and free will, but it aims to have a better understanding of the author’s mind and thoughts about human life as such.
Besides achieving a better understanding of the author’s mind, the study can also provide useful insights into her art of characterisation. She succeeds in creating characters with complex mind and behaviour. The study attempts to reveal the psychic conflict in the minds of her characters. It may also help us detect a substratum of dramatic structure beneath the seemingly lyrical structure of her novels. The study will be useful in understanding her characters better and thus help us get a holistic view of Deshpande as a novelist.

In view of these rewarding possibilities, an attempt will be made here to study this aspect of her novels in detail. The study has five chapters, besides this first chapter of introduction. The second chapter deals with social and cosmic forces—the two most important external forces of determinism in Deshpande’s novels. Then, in the third chapter, attempt to understand the working of mind and body—the two internal forces of determinism—controlling one’s life, as they appear in Deshpande’s fiction, will be made. In the fourth chapter an effort is made to explore the concept of free will at work in her novels. A study of aesthetic part of Deshpande’s novels in relation to the concepts under study is done in the fifth chapter. The final chapter concludes the whole study, making an attempt at providing valuable insights into Deshpande’s art and vision of life on the basis of the findings arrived at during the course of the study.
NOTES


8 Sarabjeet K. Sandhu, p. 55.

9 Sarabjeet K. Sandhu, p. 45.


18 Ruby Milhoutra, p. 87.


20 K.V. Raghupati, p. 127.


24 S. Sengupta, p. 214.

25 Shashi Deshpande, *That Long Silence* (1988; rpt. New Delhi: Books, 1989), p. 144. All subsequent references to the text of the novel are from the same edition and page numbers in all such cases have been given within parentheses immediately after the quotations.


Robert Kane, p. 4.


John Calvin, cited in Perry D. Westbrook, p. 4.

Jacob Arminius, cited in Perry D. Westbrook p. 188.


Perry D. Westbrook, p.100.


Sigmund Freud, cited in Perry D. Westbrook, p. 113.
43 Sigmund Freud, cited in Perry D. Westbrook, p. 113.

44 William James, Psychology, cited in Perry D. Westbrook, p. 216.

45 Perry D. Westbrook, p. 220.


