

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande is one of the large numbers of women writers who have taken up their pens to create the world of women. As a result the protagonists in Deshpande's novels are all women. It is their outlook, their perspective that is projected. Obviously all these women are in relationships which Deshpande has delineated. Deshpande presents relationships as they are but the stream of consciousness of her heroines makes it clear how gender-oriented norms and taboos mark their experiences. All her novels are but unmasking of patriarchy in different garbs. They extend to the readers an insight into the characters voicing resistance against the different facets of patriarchy. Her profound perception and her shared feelings for being a woman have made it possible to bring her point home. She is well aware of the ways a woman is viewed in Indian culture and society. Her intervention into the cultural and social representation of woman makes her take an active role to decode the traditional images of women. Therefore she engages in re-inscribing the images of the passive and watched women. Her principal focus is on sexual and domestic structures that uphold a particularly coercive order. Women's subjection to different forms of social control marginalizes them but her characters succeed in recognizing the need for asserting their true selves. Her novels are but open-ended explorations of women's experiences which help to understand the lived experience of Indian women. They also provide basic information about Indian women which help the readers to situate and understand the dynamics of emergent Indian women in transition in a better way. This gets attested in Deshpande's use of cultural myths which are venerated through generations. Her women confront them, deconstruct them and manage to squeeze their meanings which can be validated in the present context and situation. Deshpande interrogates the subjectivity of women and projects the emerging women in her discourses. Women's subjectivity as a daughter, wife and mother may be found in Indian culture since ancient times. Indian society still remains basically patriarchal. At present interventions like Deshpande's prove that women no longer want to remain in their subjected position. The desire to do away with the shackles of 'good-wifeness' syndrome was also there since ancient times as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan points out:

If we seek a more radical repudiation of the entire syndrome of 'good wifehood' of which the act of Sati is only an item, we shall find it in the lives and works of the women *Bhakta* poets of India. These women-saints, mystics, poets- had to make life-choices: their devotion to god came into conflict with their sexuality and with the life of domesticity, both of which were normally regulated by the institution of marriage. They resolved this conflict by either bypassing marriage altogether, or once married, opting out of marital commitment. Here too we must be careful not to read their poetry as feminist credos. The ideological structure of the man-woman relationship is not itself displaced; the god of these women poets is male, cast as lover, husband, father or child, frequently indeed the first two, so that a highly eroticized idiom is brought into play. Nevertheless, as Madhu Kishwar has pointed out, *bhakti* did make a 'social space' available for women 'outrageously defied what are ordinarily considered the fundamental tenets of *stri dharma* [women's duty] - marriage and motherhood (Rajan 1980: 59).

Marriage and motherhood still baffle Indian women. They are strained by the conflict between male chauvinism and the feminist ideal for equal partnership. Deshpande was moved by the pervasive inequality that exists in our society. Her attempts are to recognize them in order to understand the relationship of women to men. She expressed her feelings vehemently as dismissal of women's experiences moved her. Her novels therefore became acknowledgements of women's experiences. Deshpande represents women's thought process, subversion and their recognition of selves. She portrays assertive women who fight patriarchy and agencies of patriarchy like stereotype women representing patriarchy.

Feminism and Deshpande

Deshpande's novels are not protestations of feminism as she herself says Feminism is not her subject as a movement. Still feminism works in her novels in a different way:

If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy – the weight of that long silence of one-half the world.
(Elizabeth Robins, in a speech to the WWSL, 1907)

Thus goes the epigraph of *That Long Silence*. And this only speaks volumes of Deshpande as a novelist. Though Deshpande is of the opinion that she writes without any specific agenda, she herself points out: 'But my ideology is going to permeate my writing; and my feelings, thoughts and ideas about women are very important parts of my ideology' (Naik 2005: 228).

As a consequence all the protagonists of her novels are educated, urban middle-class women. The reason she points out is – 'the people I know best are middle class'. That she pens the educated urban middle class woman is further clear from her own words: 'There are three things in my early life that have shaped me as a writer. These are: That my father was a writer, that I was educated exclusively in English and that I was born a female' (Deshpande 1996: 107).

Yet Deshpande has vehemently protested to be tagged as a feminist writer or a woman writer for she thinks she is interested in human relationships, not just women. But very recently she has expressed that it took her time to accept that she is a feminist writer or she is voicing forth woman's cause in her novels. As she says:

I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it (Deshpande 1983: 26).

Her idea about feminism is clearer when she says:

Feminism is not a matter of theory. It is different to apply Kate Millett or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, children or about not being married, not having children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences. And I actually feel that a lot of women in India are feminists without realizing it (Deshpande 1983: 26).

Thus Deshpande cannot be categorized as a feminist writer in the usual Western sense. She writes her novels to explore the experiences of woman and not to uphold women's liberation movement. In other words, her novels are articulations of womanhood in Indian context not banners of feminism. She is acutely conscious of gender inequality and suppression of women's individuality. Her acute awareness of the unequal position of women in society is apparent in her own words about her writing:

Most of my writing comes out of my own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, it comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing 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 my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All this makes my writing very clearly woman's writing (Deshpande 1996: 99).

Therefore, her protagonists are made to revolt against the age-old domination, discrimination and subordination. What is interesting and thought-provoking is the way they deal with their lives. They do not walk out on their husband and children rather they unite with the family with renewed courage and clear conception about the intricate nature of relationships. Deshpande chose to write about the experiences of life through the eyes of her protagonists. As the protagonists are women their experiences as women became indispensable for the novels. Though the experiences of her protagonists differ from each other they all are entangled with same problem of being subservient. This is the result of male chauvinism in the patriarchal society of India where women are treated as the 'Other'. A woman has to play certain roles at different stages of life remaining oblivious of her true self. Deshpande shows how modern educated urban women have tried to shake off the shackles of tradition and social taboos. Their education and experience have enabled them to assert their autonomy. Their indomitable spirits have helped them conquer many of their social impediments.

In the subsequent chapters I have tried to examine how Deshpande has projected Indian women in her novels. How in spite of her vehement protest to be a feminist writer in particular she has articulated characters who speak of Virginia Woolf and Betty Freidan. All her characters are victims of social injustice prevalent in Indian society. The

predicament of her characters is portrayed with graphic reality. Through her novels I would also try to investigate the particular discriminations that women face and resistance that women put up in Indian society. Though she has undertaken educated urban middleclass characters as her heroines, they seem to represent the women of India in general. Their experiences, feelings, thoughts are what every woman faces from childhood onwards.

In order to demonstrate how Shashi Deshpande is rewriting Indian woman it would be relevant to trace Indian woman's image in the historical context. Before it is done in case of India in particular, a general reference to the evolving discourse will be worthwhile.

In the history of human race the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been most remarkable in the lives of women for these two centuries have drastically changed and shaped their lives all over the world. One of the leading concerns of these centuries in the world is the subjugation of women. Women seen as the 'Other' have come forward to remove the stigma of womanhood enforced on them. The striving for equality was voiced forth first by the working-class women in their demand for equality of wage. Gradually the urge for equality spread out in the higher classes too. In 1928 English women got the right to vote. This alone shows that women have been denied equality until recently. When women woke up from their slumber and voiced forth their protest to achieve equal rights, their movement came to be known as feminism. Feminism is a movement of 'women, by women and for women' to achieve women's rights. It aims at sexual equality, eradication of sexual dominance with the goal to reach a transformed society where women are also considered as human beings.

Though the history of women suffrage dates long back, the patriarchal notions and ideologies were challenged most frequently in the twentieth century. Virginia Woolf published *A Room of One's Own* in 1929 and described how women are socially and physically dominated by men. She argued that the patriarchal society denied space to women generating gender inequality. Woolf reacted vehemently how women were considered as 'looking glass' by men and are regarded as the 'Other'. Rebecca West analysed the features of male power and reacted strongly against economic exploitations of working-class women. Vera Brittain was of the opinion that ideal marriage should be the combination of generous and intelligent comradeship. Simone de Beauvoir made outstanding contribution to feminism through her *The Second Sex* in 1949. Her opinion

that women are viewed in the society as the 'second sex' or the 'Other' is analogous to what Woolf said that woman is seen in the society as mirror. Beauvoir said 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman'. She explained how women have been given an inferior position in the male/female binary among such others as culture/nature: production/reproduction etc. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) shared the view of Beauvoir and objected to the idea of woman as the 'Other'. Kate Millett's '*Sexual Politics*' (1970) argued that ideological indoctrination and economic inequality are the causes of women's oppression. The above discussion shows how women outside India fought for their rights and how they are trying to achieve equality in the male-dominated society. The representation of the Third World woman in the feminist and postcolonialist discourses should also be taken into consideration. The Third World woman is doomed to be doubly colonized under imperial ideology and native and foreign patriarchies as Leela Gandhi opines in her book *Postcolonial Theory: A critical Introduction*. She points out that critics like Sara Suleri and Spivak object to the marginalized accommodation of the third-world woman in the Western discourses and literature. Trin. T. Minh-ha also points out how western feminist "creates an insuperable division between 'I-who-have-made-it and You-who-cannot-make-it'" (Trin. T. Minh-ha 1989: 86). Similarly Chandra Talpade Mohanty discerns in her article 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' that a discursive colonialism plays a vital part in the production of the "Third World Woman" as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist texts' (Talpade Mohanty 1994:196). The Third World Woman becomes a victim to double colonization because of the gap between the real and representational portrait of her. Edward Said also conceded about colonial discourse that the cultural privilege of the occident helps to represent the subjugated 'Other' or the oriental. Spivak's 'gendered subaltern' is here the 'Other' or the oriental for she has to work against a colonial legacy of patriarchy. In the postcolonial regime Third World women are under imperial threat of either patriarchy or western feminist representation. But the Third World Feminist texts in the last few decades produced self-knowledge by and for Third World women. They are the authenticated version of their plight without misinterpretation voicing resistance in the face of patriarchal ideologies. Here also interpretation of the privileged about their working class sisters may invoke misreading. But the accounts of the middle class educated urban working women in the Third World by the author of the same class as is the case of Deshpande are projections of real, lived experiences.

Image of Indian Womanhood (Historical & Theoretical Overview)

Now the plight of women in Indian context should be discussed in respect of this project. Women throughout the world irrespective of class, creed and race share to an extent the same experiences as regards their exploitation and discrimination. They are the victims of male chauvinism and age-old traditions everywhere. In India women got the right to vote with the adoption of the constitution after independence. The law and the Government safeguard their interests. But the actualities and realities of their experience are not soothing at all. The image of Indian womanhood is both awe-inspiring and baffling at the same time. Presently this image is more questioned by women themselves with their exposure to the world at large.

The individuality of women in India is largely shaped by the traditional beliefs and mythology. Woman is equated with 'Prakriti', the Nature or the field and man puts seeds into it. And this Nature can be tamed and ruled by 'Purusha', a cosmic personality. These 'Prakriti' and 'Purusha' unite through the sacred vows of wedlock and life springs on earth to continue the journey of mankind. As nature is both benevolent and fierce at times, men considered women as nature and feared her power and decided to control and rule her by any means. In this respect it is pertinent to discuss the popular code of conduct for women as stipulated by Manu, the Hindu law-giver. Manu preached that women deserve no freedom; they cannot do anything independently even inside their home; a female should worship her husband as God even if he seeks pleasure elsewhere etc. These codes of conduct are the scale by which the image of women is measured. If women do not match this standard, they are abused and outcast by society. Manu constantly stressed on the inferiority of women to men. Manu formulated the basic principle that all through her existence a woman must be made dependent on men:

In childhood must a female be dependent on her father; in youth, on her husband; her lord being dead, on her sons; if she has no sons, on the near kinsmen of her husband; if she has no paternal kinsmen, on the sovereign; a woman must never seek independence. (V. 148)

People want to see women in the age-old frame formed by such obsolete conducts, traditions and myths. The legendary figures of Sita, Savitri, Damayanti and Draupadi are embodiments of chastity, purity, dedication and devotion. Indian society demands that women should incarnate themselves in these images. Through the ages Indian women

have tried to mould themselves according to the demands of society by self-effacement. A woman is revered and worshipped if she abides by the ideology of 'Pativrata' (dedicated completely to her husband). She has been taught that she should achieve salvation if she can save and satisfy her husband and his family. Finally her womanhood gets completed when she has borne sons. Thus at different stages her different roles are those of a dutiful, chaste and dedicated wife and finally of the glorified and loving mother. She has no room of her own, no space for her own individuality and no time for nourishment of her emotional and intellectual self.

Indian society boasts of exalted position of women in ancient age. In Vedic age women were held in high esteem. Women participated in the various social activities and took important role in decision making. Even women are ascribed the authorship of some Vedic hymns. Gargi, Maitrayee, Lopa, Apala were learned women like any man and they also took active part in religious and philosophical discussions. Women's intellectual personality was valued. Marriage was not compulsory for girls. Remarriage of widows was allowed. Women were free to choose their husbands. But in later Vedic age women were held under restraint. The family being patriarchal women were generally subordinate to men. Since important religious rituals could be performed only by a son, male children were highly prized. The prayer for a male child is found in *The Atharva Veda*.

The birth of a girl, grant it elsewhere.

here grant a boy. (VI, 23)

Though in the early periods, women had choice in marriage as the story of Sita choosing Rama at a *Svayamvara* (self-choice ceremony) goes, however, later developments restricted this; choice of husband became subjected to caste, creed and parental control. Widow Remarriage was seen as sacrilegious though at the early stages there are references to widow remarriage. 'Sati', the practice of self-immolation by a woman on the death of her husband was in vogue.

Muslim dynasties took control of Delhi by 1192. A sizeable portion of Indian population became Muslim having converted to Islam. There came a cultural cross fertilization as rulers like Akbar adopted policy of reconciliation between Hinduism and Islam. Islamic women were not bound to wear veil but the institution of purdah was there. The position

of women deteriorated altogether. Female infanticide and child marriage were practised. They were not allowed to move freely and were rendered completely dependent on men. The social and historical necessity resulted into the deplorable condition of women in the medieval age. In the name of protecting women's virtue, honour and chastity, women were imprisoned in the home and were pushed behind the 'purdah'. Though many Hindu authors emphasise that the institution of 'purdah' came with the Muslim rulers, 'the principle of sex segregation and seclusion of women goes far back beyond the Mughal era and belongs to the same tradition as discrimination of widows, child-marriage and the pativrata ideal' (Mies 1980: 66). Thus both Hindu and Muslim women became subject to all the patriarchal oppressions of a caste-bound society.

The condition of women remained almost the same during British regime until the social reform movement of the nineteenth century. In this century both Hindu and Islamic reformers fought against many of these social evils. The nineteenth century social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar raised the issues of 'Sati', Widow-marriage, Polygamy, Child-marriage, denial of Property Rights and Education for Women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) was the foremost to champion women's cause in India. Being influenced by Western liberal thought he attempted to reform and rejuvenate Hinduism. He was a learned person whose classical education included Sanskrit, Arabian and Persian. He had been fluent and well-read in English too. He was exposed to the dissident Calcutta British radicals, Unitarians and advocates of free-trade and to Locke, Bentham, Montesquieu and Adam Smith, the liberal political thinkers of the West. Ram Mohan fought for women's rightful position at a time when women's emancipation was addressed in Europe. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) came up with her famous book *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1791) which had great impact in society. Ram Mohan is described as one of the male feminist thinkers of the nineteenth century, who might have been exposed to Mary Wollstonecraft's writings. Issues like 'Sati', Polygamy, Women's Education and Women's Property Rights were addressed by Ram Mohan. He published pamphlets criticizing the oppression of women where he wrote:

At marriage the wife is recognised as half of her husband, but in after-conduct they are treated worse than inferior animals. For the woman is employed to do the work of a slave in the house... to clear the place... to scour the dishes, wash the floor, to cook night and day, to prepare and serve food for her husband.

father, mother-in-law, brothers-in-law and friends and connections (Nag and Burman 1977: 156).

Roy's movement and campaign against Sati moved the public opinion against the practice and Government finally abolished 'Sati' by law in 1835 making it a criminal offence. The deplorable condition of women made Ram Mohan and other enlightened reformers to form Brahma Samaj to purify Hinduism and thus uplift the general condition of women in the country.

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), an ardent social reformer stressed on widow remarriage along with other reformers like Debendranath Tagore and Dayananda Saraswati. Vidyasagar published a pamphlet in 1856, '*Marriage of Hindu Widows*' and submitted a petition to the Government for making a law for widow remarriage. Ultimately Widow Remarriage Act was passed by the Government in 1856. Vidyasagar also raised his voice against polygamy along with other reformers. Child marriage was also taken up by Vidyasagar and other social reformers. Vidyasagar pointed out that Child-marriage was linked to the problem of Indian widows for many of the child brides were widowed soon after marriage. In 1872 Marriage Act was passed setting the higher age limit for marriage at 18 for males and 14 for females.

Subsequently, Right to Property was enacted in 1874 giving a widow equal share of husband's property equal to that of a son. Rabindranath Tagore established Santiniketan which was open to women to realise their creative potentiality. English education also enlightened women's minds as Chandu Menon advocated women's education with stress on English education:

If you wish to really enlighten your minds, you must learn English, whereby alone you can learn many things which you ought to know in these days and by such knowledge alone can you grasp the truth that you are of the same creation as man, that you are as free agents as men, that women are not the slaves of men (Menon 1965: 369).

During this time of reformation many schools for women were set up. But the nineteenth century social reformation included women on its agenda to produce good home makers perpetuating orthodox ideology. The politics of power played a crucial role in the nationalist ideology of making the '*bhadramahila*' or a good housewife to the elite male.

Still many women benefited from these reforms. They could embark on the avenues hitherto denied to them. Though education was mainly confined to the higher strata of life, Indian women's battle against the odds of conservatism gradually opened the scopes for women education in different fields.

But so far as the male reformers are concerned, the reform movement was still directed at improving their efficiency as wives in terms of traditional values. As Majumdar concedes:

Education would not turn the women away from their familial roles, but improve their efficiency as wives and mothers and *strengthen the hold of traditional values on society, since women are better carriers of these values* (Majumdar 1976: 49-50).

Unlike male reformers, women reformers 'started to overstep the home and family limits envisaged for them by the reformers' (Jayawardena 1986: 90). Most of these women reformers were linked by birth or marriage to families of male participants of reform movements. Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) was one of the most prominent women reformers of the time who fought for women's causes. She was daughter of a Maharastrian Sanskrit scholar and she herself was also a reputable Sanskrit scholar. She had knowledge of the gross social realities in which women in India lived and had a command over Hindu theology. She travelled extensively with the mission to uplift the condition of Indian women. She organised women's organisations and rigorously campaigned for women's education and health care. She wrote *Stree Dharma Neeti* (Women's Religious Law) which advocated women's emancipation and attacked social taboos. Another of her book *The High Caste Hindu Woman* revealed the true status of women in patriarchy. Another prominent woman of the time was Ramabai Ranade (wife M. G. Ranade) who actively worked for the poor and the destitute.

The restoration of the position of women in Indian society was further possible by their participation in the National movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi:

The Congress leaders saw the advantages of mobilizing women and always exhorted them to join the nationalist struggle as equals....Gandhi's basic ideas on women's rights were equality in some spheres and opportunities for self development and self realisation.... He argued that the rules of social conduct

must be developed only on the basis of cooperation and consultation, and should not be imposed by one sex on the other (Jayawardena 1986: 95).

Gandhiji believed that woman is but companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. Women have been suppressed by men under custom and law in the shaping of which women had no hand. He believed that every man and woman should perform his/her duty for self-realisation and social well being. He denounced that even the worthless men enjoy superiority over women by applying 'sheer force of vicious circumstances'. Gandhiji was all for women education but he stressed that men and women would be differently educated.

Gandhiji wanted woman to be self-sacrificing like mythical Sita. Sita was set as the role model for Indian women. Promotion of ideal woman like Sita was believed to help the revival of Hindu ideal. This ideal womanhood also played a strategic role in the political struggle for freedom from British bondage. Mies points out that though Gandhiji appreciated the Indian peasant women's role, he did not have any notion of economic independence for women. As Mies says:

In Gandhi's idealised image of women her economic activity, specially the aspect of her economic independence, is not emphasised. As the most important activity he recommends to the women spinning and weaving, both of which he considers as religious acts and conforming to the nature of woman. On the economic independence of women he speaks evasively. The image of the modern independent career woman does not fit into Gandhi's conception of the ideal woman (Mies 1980: 126).

Yet Gandhiji's role in bringing woman emancipation cannot be denied. He paved the way for women to emerge out of shackles of slavery. His recognition and respect for qualities in women obviously shaped women's liberation movement. He emphasised on women's participation in nationalist struggle. Women's participation in the political and social spheres brought them out of the narrow confines of homes. Gandhi stressed woman's participation in non-violent struggle. He claimed that women had greater ability to endure suffering and therefore they had a key role to perform in the movement. Gandhi, a believer of *ahimsa* (non-violence), believed that non-violent movement best suited to women who are by nature non-violent. Women have the courage to self-sacrifice which makes them superior to men. He suggested that women were used to 'passive resistance'

in their daily lives which would effectively help them to participate in movements like non-violence and non-cooperation led by him. He envisioned the role of women in transforming the reform movement into a revolutionary one. He declared himself, as 'uncompromising in the matter of women's rights'. He proclaimed that women should be treated as human beings with equal right for self-development. Thus Gandhi facilitated women's cause and inspired their participation in the political affairs. The result was massive entry of women in Satyagraha in 1930. He wanted women's education so that they can become ideal women and carry forward the image of Sita having all the qualities of chastity, purity, endurance and courage.

Jawaharlal Nehru's view on the position of woman was radical. His view on the status of women is markedly different from Mahatma Gandhi. For he incorporated the need of economic independence to women's emancipation:

Freedom depends on economic conditions even more than political, and if a woman is not economically free and self-earning, she will have to depend on her husband or someone else and dependants are never free (Luthra 1976: 5).

He emphasised that economic bondage was at the root of women's suffering. He wanted complete transformation of Indian society. Being progressive in attitude he wanted that Indian women must educate themselves so that they can be in keeping with the changing conditions of society.

I must confess to you that I am intensely dissatisfied with the lot of the Indian woman today. We hear a good deal about Sita and Savitri. They are revered names in India and rightly so, but I have a feeling that these echoes from the past are raised chiefly to hide our present deficiencies and prevent us from attacking the root cause of women's degradation in India today (Speech at Allahabad, 31 March 1928).

Nehru denounced that woman should have education only to be trained to be a good wife. He hated the ideas of woman's accepting marriage as profession. He wanted that women should get education to be able to pursue her dreams. He wanted women to be in equal pace with men.

I wonder if any of you here have read Ibsen's 'Doll's House', if so, you will perhaps appreciate the word 'doll' when I use it in this connection. The future of

India cannot consist of dolls and playthings and if you make half the population of a country the mere plaything of the other half, an encumbrance on others, how will you ever make progress? Therefore, I say that you must face the problem, boldly and attack the roots of evil (Speech at Allahabad, 31 March 1928).

Nehru enthusiastically appreciated women's participation in nationalist struggle. But Nehru could recognize that women had to fight not only imperialism but also patriarchy. He wanted that women should acquire the quality to get freedom from any bondage. He envisioned that India can never prosper until its women are free citizens without any domination by men. For this he wanted women to take active role to achieve freedom. As he said:

I should like to remind the women present here that no group, no community, no country, has ever got rid of its disabilities by the generosity of the oppressor. India will not be free until we are strong enough to force our will on England and the women of India will not attain their full rights by the mere generosity of the men of India. They will have to fight for them and force their will on the men folk before they can succeed (*Jawaharlal Nehru*, Speech at Allahabad, 31 March 1928).

During the nationalist agitation against imperialism Indian women started participating in political movements. They stepped out of home and became active in the outside world. This was possible because of the expansion of women's education envisioned by the social reformers. The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 which allowed women to be its members. Women like Annie Besant, the leader of Home Rule Movement and Sarojini Naidu, the first Indian woman to be elected president of the congress made much contribution to raise the status of woman. Naidu helped to build The Women's Indian Association and was the nucleus of the All India Women's Conference held in 1926. The National Council of Women was formed in 1925 to promote the cause of women. By this time women education spread drastically giving vent to a new lease of life for women. Modern education and urbanization helped to shape the emancipated women. Women writers and social reformers came forward as guiding stars to inspire their fellow sisters who still did not come under the purview of education due to poverty and social taboos. Toru Dutt (1856-77), Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), Swarnakumari Devi(1855-1932), Kamini Roy (1864-1933), Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), to name a few.

are some who contributed in the literary field and worked for the restoration of fallen, suffering and destitute women of their time.

Women's participation in Social Reform Movement and Nationalist struggle obviously helped to gain momentum in them. But little had been won by women to free themselves from the confines of family and home. Women did not raise their voice to bring revolutionary changes in their lives. With female education, abolition of certain social evils and mobilization of women for political movements, an 'illusion of change' was created while in reality women remained in perpetual bondage of family and society. Vina Majumdar opines:

... the woman's roles within the family as wives, daughters and mothers were re-emphasized or extended to be in tune with the requirements of the family in a changing society (Majumdar 1976: 63).

Mies also pointed out that women conformed to the prevalent ideology of the time and remained satisfied with limited space granted to them by the male leader:

To draw women into the political struggle is a tactical necessity of any anti-colonial or national liberation struggle. But it depends on the strategic goals of such movement whether the patriarchal family is protected as the basic social unit or not. The fact that the women themselves accepted their limited tactical function within the independence movement made them excellent instruments in the struggle. But they did not work out a strategy for their own liberation struggle for their own interests. By subordinating these goals to the national cause they conformed to the traditional *Pativrata* or *Sati* ideal of the self-sacrificing women (Mies 1980: 121).

From the above discussion it is presumed that though women did not show any militancy to achieve more liberty, they did play an active part in the struggle against imperialism. This shows just another aspect of Indian women who have displayed considerable courage to achieve national freedom. The women who participated in the national movement talked of that experience as the best period of their lives. But after the nationalist movement's struggle was called off, the women returned to their previous traditional lives. Thus their gains were temporary and were achieved only to be lost:

But often the women claim that some residual progress remains. The narrative of women's 'progress' is read as three steps forward and two steps backward, a slow and imperceptible advance (Rajan 1980: 141).

The absence of questions regarding the position of women in society could be located towards the close of the nineteenth century. It was not that the women's question had been resolved. Though nationalism and the women question were closely related, the relation between them must have been problematical to the nationalists. Nationalism tried to defend everything traditional and glorified India's past. The renaissance reformers were highly selective in their acceptance of liberal ideas from Europe. Sumit Sarkar points out that on the question of the social position of women there was fundamental absence in every phase of any significant autonomous struggle by women themselves to change relations within or outside family. He points out that concern with the social condition of women was less an ideological preference for liberalism and more an expression of certain 'acute problems of interpersonal adjustments within the family' (Sarkar 1985: 157-72). The nationalist ideology built its resolution around a separation of 'the domain of culture into two spheres – the material and the spiritual' (Chatterjee 1999: 119). To overcome European domination in the material spheres colonized people needed to learn the superior techniques of this sphere. But imitation of western aspect of life was not welcome. In fact, Indian nationalists only wanted to imitate material aspect of life for they stressed that in the spiritual domain East was superior to the West. Without losing the true identity Indian Nationalists wanted to retain the spiritual distinctiveness of Indian culture and make compromises in the requirements of a modern material life. With this the concepts of *ghar & bahir* (the home and the world) became strong. The world came to represent the external domain of the material life whereas home represented our spiritual self, our true identity. The women became the representation of home which must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material sphere. The national struggle tried to protect, preserve and strengthen this domain in order keep national culture intact. The imitation of and the adaptation to the western norms was a necessity in the outside world. At home such adaptation was considered to be annihilating one's own identity.

The literature on women in this period was concerned with the theme of the threatened westernization of Bengali women. Suggestions were made that westernized woman was fond of useless luxury and did not care for the home. Under the peculiar condition of

colonial rule the very institutions of home and family were challenged. Women were expected not to become essentially westernized. 'There would have to be a marked *difference* in the degree and manner of westernization of women, as distinct from men, in the modern world of the nation' (Sangari and Vaid 1986: 243). By this central principle nationalism resolved the women's question. In the rapidly changing situation in parity with the dichotomies of home/world modern woman started to shape themselves. The result was that she was subjected to a new type of patriarchy.

Attainment by her own efforts of a superior national culture was the mark of woman's newly acquired freedom. This was the central ideological strength of the nationalist resolution of the women's question (Sangari and Vaid 1986: 245).

The new Indian women aimed at cultural refinement which would establish their cultural superiority over both the western woman and the preceding generation of women and the women of the lower classes of their land who could not get access to education. Education became the tool to inculcate in women the typical 'bourgeois' virtues which would ensure their 'femininity'. The adulation of women as goddess or as mother was also emphasized in the era of nationalism. The new woman was said to have the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity, etc. It is in this sphere that nationalism considered itself not to be dominated and sovereign. The nationalists firmly believed that in this sphere the nation was acting on its own without the guidance and intervention of the imperial power. The nationalists did not want to make the women's question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state. That is why in the late nineteenth century there was disappearance of the issue of 'female emancipation' from public agenda of nationalist agitation. The lives of middle class women changed most rapidly during the nationalist agitation outside the arena of political agitation. Thus during colonized India the image of a refined, recast and regenerated woman was created whom every woman should follow. Women too carried forward the legacy of patriarchal ideology in newer forms and shapes. Kundamala Devi's appeal (1870) to her own folk testifies to this:

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If you have acquired real knowledge, then give no place in your heart to *mem-sahib* like behaviour. That is not becoming a Bengali housewife. See how an educated woman can do housework thoughtfully and systematically in a way unknown to an ignorant, uneducated woman. And see how if God had not

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appointed us to this place in the home, how unhappy a place this world would be! (Quoted in Chatterjee 1989: 247)

The construction of the image of Indian woman was thus complete. It can be elaborated in the words of Rajeswari Sunder Rajan:

... in the colonial encounter the Hindu 'good wife' is constructed as patriarchy's feminine ideal: she is offered simultaneously as a model and as a signifier of absolute cultural otherness, both exemplary and inimitable. She is also, as Spivak points out; both indispensable (the justification for the imperialist project itself) and eminently dispensable (the sacrifice offered to an emergent western feminist individualism) (Rajan 1980: 47-48).

It is pertinent to note here that the relationship between feminism and nationalism in India is distinctively different from the West. Aparna Basu's comments on Indian feminism and nationalism are relevant to discuss the characteristic feature of women's movement in India:

In India, feminism and nationalism were closely inter-linked. As the nationalist movement gained momentum, the goal of independence became the only concern for both men and women. The cause was Indian; the goal India's freedom. The women's movement in India had none of the man-woman antagonism characteristic of women's movements in the West (Basu 1976: 40).

Women's movement in India

At this point it is necessary to have a look at the women's movement in India. The formation of All India Women's Conference in 1927 was instrumental in bringing about some reforms for women like Dissolution of the Muslim Marriage Act 1939 in India. In its first session held at Poona from 5-8 January 1927, its President Maharani Gackwad of Baroda, stressed that they assembled to discuss things which were 'essential for the education and the general well-being of the future mothers of the race' (Chaudhuri 2004, 118). The unique nature of Indian womanhood was emphasised in her address. AIWC goaded women in the direction of achieving ideal womanhood. It also discussed whether women should participate in Indian politics or altogether refrain from it. However, education was 'perceived a kind of panacea for solving problems of women, family and society' (Chaudhuri 2004: 118). In the first AIWC the separation of education for men

and women was stressed in view of development of womanhood. It was deemed that for the education of girls in India teaching in the ideals of motherhood was necessary. In the second AIWC 1928, the need of women's participation for reformation of women's education was reiterated as until then whatever had been done for the education of women had been done by men. In the third AIWC, dissatisfaction was shown over the pre-defined conception of women's role. In the same session Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya expressed the need of wide and comprehensive women's movement encompassing all problems of women. AIWC Constitution enshrined in Article II defined its aims and objectives as not to engage in party politics. The realm of politics and the realm of women's welfare seemed to be mutually exclusive and antithetical. But from the fourth session onwards the necessity of participation in the politics was felt in order to bring social reforms for women. Gradually the voice in support of participation in politics grew louder.

At the eleventh session Margaret Cousins's presidential address was in favour of political participation.

...Can the Indian man or woman be free if India be a slave? ... How can we remain dumb about national freedom, the very basis of all great reforms?
(Eleventh Session of the AIWC 23-27 December 1936, p.31)

Rajkumary Amrit Kaur in her presidential address at the twelfth session of AIWC asserted:

Life is an indomitable whole and we cannot separate social and educational reform from political and economic reform any more than we can separate women from men (Twelfth Session of the AIWC 28-31 December 1937, p.29).

At the Seventeenth session Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in her presidential speech stated that:

To a subject people politics is its very life breath. To deny that urge is to deny life (Seventeenth Session of the AIWC 7-10 April 1944, p.24).

At the Eighteenth session of the Conference the Resolution on fundamental Rights of 1931 was reiterated.

Thus AIWC came to the stance that national liberation was a pre-condition for bringing women's liberation. The dominant discourse on women of the time was characterised by its desire:

...to distinguish the more strident nature of women's demands in the West from the legitimate yet proper character of the Indian movement; emphasise the spiritual superiority of Indian woman; the non-antagonistic relationship between Indian men and women based on mutual acceptance of sex roles; the positive contribution of women in lending a higher tone to public life and finally the imperative need for women to take up women's and children's issues to help progress of Indian society (Chaudhuri 2004: 126).

The distinct traces of 'Victorian notions' of women as home-makers, custodian of morality culture are clearly visible here.

After independence, when the nation had acquired political sovereignty, it became legitimate to embody the ideas of reform in legislative enactments about marriage rules, property rights, suffrage, equal pay, equality of opportunity etc. (Sangari and Vaid 1986). Indian constitution has provided women equal rights with men. Astonishingly during this period there is disappearance of the women's question from the public arena. Indeed the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI, 1974) enquired about the 'historical and ideological dimensions of women's role and status on the women's question, initiated during the freedom struggle faded out of the public arena' (Majumdar 2001). Now the question is whether the silence of the first two decades after independence is due to the complete disappearance of the fight for women's rights. Maitrayee Chaudhuri studies the period of the disappearance of women question:

... as a period marked by: *one*, development concerns and attempts by the state to implement some of the feminist visions articulated in documents such as 'Role of Women in a Planned Economy' and the Constitution generally; *two*, by a turnabout of the state wedded at once to socialist and feminist rhetoric and constitutive of social classes whose interest ran counter to these stated aims? Even a textual analysis of the first Five Year Plan document reveals the ruptures, and history bears out the rest (Chaudhuri 1996). The inevitable cracks began to appear in the Sixties. It probably became easier two decades after independence

to question a state that had appropriated to itself the goodwill and struggle of an entire nation (Chaudhuri 2004: XVII - XVIII).

By the mid-sixties it had become apparent that Government had failed to deliver anything substantial for women in India. A large number of questions about women-family, work distribute, male-female relationship had been raised by different women organisations. The decade of seventies saw women in mass movements in large numbers. The 'Total Revolution' of crisis-ridden Bihar and Chipko movement in the Garhwal Himalaya occurred in the seventies. A number of mass movements from this period contributed greatly to the discussion of the question of women subordination. In 1973 Government of India appointed a National Commission to furnish reports on the status of women. Its report was furnished in 1975 as *Towards Equality*. Jashodhara Bagchi, Chairperson, West Bengal Commission for Women opines in her introduction to *The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal* that:

The last three decades have been especially significant for developments within the women's movement all over India. Starting with the interventions in the Mathura Rape Case which led to the united struggle of women in India, demanding and achieving reform in the rape law, the publication of *Towards Equality*, the launching of the Indian Association of women's studies in the early eighties, the founding of the national and state commissions for women in the early nineties, down to the Supreme Court guidelines on sexual harassment at the workplace in 1997. This was also the period, in which the Government of India, in 1993 ratified the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), accepted by the UN in 1979. Autonomous women's groups, committed to gender justice came into existence in this phase (Bagchi 2005: 14).

The period 1975-85 had been officially declared as the UN decade for women. Various groups and voluntary agencies have come forward to facilitate women's access to education and their participation in social activities in order to advance them in social strata. In 1977 *Manushi*, a journal about women and society was started by a group of women in Delhi. It has become a living documentary of the various aspects of women's movement in India. Subsequently, *Saheli* was formed as a centre for women's resource, documentation and legal aid. After seventies many similar urban groups appeared in

Calcutta, Bangalore, Pune and elsewhere. Many of these groups have felt that political parties and mass organisations are not doing justice to the women question. The result is that the women question is generating intense debate. It is definite that in order to fight exploitation of patriarchy and achieve emancipation women will have to continue to fight men.

A plethora of writings decoding Indian women's mythic image has emerged after the 70s. Among the steady stream of collections of essays on women, some have become trendsetters. *Recasting women* by Sangari and Vaid published in 1989 by the feminist press Kali for Women pioneered new ways of perceiving women. *Women Writing in India* edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita in 1990 reinstated women's voices through their own writings. The filmy and fictional representation of women so far projected them as benevolent, sacrificing and self-effacing – almost raised to the image of super women. Searching for the real woman and presenting the real picture of women have become a recurring theme in the creative writing by women. The legal enactments and welfare measures have certainly proposed women to be equal to men. But the reality is different. A majority of Indian women cannot come under the purview of such legalities and welfare measures. Moreover the age-old traditions and orthodox customs are so ingrained in Indian society that the female is still now considered inferior to the male though they have established their worth equally with men. The traditional role of Indian women has been reasonably questioned in the fictional projections of Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Hariharan and so on. These women novelists delineate the experiences of women at different levels. Among them Deshpande's protagonists (all women) resemble the modern emergent new woman more graphically. In a sense, they are the embodiments of present-day Indian women – some convent-educated, working and economically independent, some educated but still accepting marriage as profession and the plots in the process cover working class women to orthodox, conservative women. The simple experiences of human life especially of woman's life were not paid heed to so earnestly earlier. The bare truths of women's lives in relationships had never been so well expressed in creative writing in English in India. The portrayal of women in the works of male novelists cannot escape the charge of being partial. The problems and dilemmas of women when they come out of women's hands are sure to be more realistic and true.

Deshpande and other Women Novelists

Twentieth Century in India has witnessed the emergence of a constellation of women novelists. Shashi Deshpande is one of the most luminous stars among them to reveal the inner experiences of women. Other members of this constellation are Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Gita Hariharan to name a few, who have also significantly contributed to focus on the various experiences of women. Most of the women novelists writing in English project woman as the central figure and reveal the predicaments of woman in patriarchy. The world of women – their reactions and responses, problems and perceptions, emotional and psychological upheavals, hopes and frustrations - is delineated by them with insightful and poignant understanding. The entanglement of women in violent and vicious circumstances, their neurotic reactions in facing the existential crisis, their responses to sexual and sensual pleasures are portrayed in life-size pictures. As a major Indian English novelist Deshpande has unfolded the realm of silence - an extremely marginalised territory of women. Probing into the conjugal relationship as well as other social relationships she delves deep into human psyche, especially women psyche. Therefore all her protagonists are women who have come to assert their individuality through inner and outer conflicts. The changing status of women with increasing education and employment is certainly at war with the age-old traditional image of women in India. As a result the middle class working women in course of their lives confront the crisis arising out of her demanded roles and the affirmation of her individuality. How this crisis is being handled by the emergent new women in Deshpande's novels is what leaves one gasping for breath. Deshpande's novels have become indeed, a manifesto of Indian womanhood for her exceptional way of telling the stories of women with ease and accuracy. Every Indian woman seems to identify herself with the characters' feelings and experiences in the patriarchal society in some way or other. Deshpande thus unravels the hearts of Indian women through the fabric of her intricate designs. And in this she is markedly different from her contemporary women writers. Let us now consider how Deshpande's women are different from other women novelists' women characters.

One of the most outstanding women novelists, Kamala Markandaya came up with novels like *Nectar in a Sieve* (1994), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), and *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977). Her women range from peasant woman (*Nectar in a sieve*), to the urban poor (*A Handful of Rice*), to the highest circles of princely life (*The Golden Honeycomb*). Her

novels show conflicts between tradition and modernity or between East and West. Unlike Deshpande, her tragedies emerge from politics, economics and even from spiritual realities. Being an Indian woman married to an Englishman her scenes shift from India to England and America. She also includes characters from foreign lands. Markandaya is not a radical feminist voicing male female imbalance in the society. Rather she portrays relationships at different levels. Her women are generally conformists and traditionalists. She has shown feminine sensibility in depicting the consciousness of the women. Her heroines possess considerable strength to face the calamities of life. They are wise enough to compromise and adjust with the situations e.g. Rukmini (*Nectar in a Sieve*). They stick to Indian ethos and retain their individuality. Markandaya interrogates the contemporary attitudes to men, women and marriage. Acutely aware of the gender difference in Indian society Markandaya shows how Indian women grow to become traditional.

Anita Desai has created hyper sensitive women like Maya in *Cry, The peacock*, Manisha in *Voices in the City*, who are alienated from their husbands as they are unable to correlate with each other. Desai sets her heroines in the contemporary urban Indian background. They are westernised, educated women with freedom of making choices. Her women confront the fundamental problems of modern life. They make 'the journey within' while they counteract the turmoil in the outside world and face existential crisis as they are thrown into a hostile environment. The penetrating agonies of existence impair their ability to adjust. Desai tries to plunge in the unexplored parts of women psychology. Her characters are capable of introspection and do not surrender their individual selves to anyone. They have their own ideals of marriage and wifehood. They long for love and unison of two hearts which to them are panacea for the ills of life. They are very much sensitive and refuse to compromise and surrender. They are fragile introverts and are unable to accept the perspective of their partners and become thereby victims of emotional traumas and isolation. They swim against the current in their quest for meaning and value of life. An in-depth analysis of her novels shows that her characters are frustrated and are emotionally dependents. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* tries to find out a saviour in a male quite unlike Deshpande's novels. Anita Desai does not delineate only man women relationship. She portrays woman as a wife, mother, daughter, sister and above all as human beings. Anita Desai herself is of the opinion that:

Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth - the truth that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call reality, writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth... My novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics, or character (Quoted in Mehrotra 2003: 227).

Ruth Praver Jhabvala has six novels in her credit – *To whom She will* (1955), *The Nature of passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The Householder* (1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) and *A Backward Place* (1965). She has portrayed women who covet modernity for the sake of fashion. She has exposed the real intentions of these women, who embraced modernity for convenience but not out of conviction. As her women are modern they refuse to conform. In her attempt to open up the hearts of these women Jhabvala uses sympathetic sarcasm instead of any bitterness. Jhabvala has portrayed trapped married women who either wriggle in pain in relationships or break loose to live separate lives. *The Householder* presents the tensions between the couple Prem and Indu. The newly married couple starts with the rudimentary cross-fire but in course of time overcome the irritations of not having enough money and the presence of a mother-in-law. They realise that such obstacles can be overcome with the passage of time. Prem finally qualifies to be a householder when his mother leaves to join her daughter. *A Backward Place* is about Judy who tries her best to sustain her husband and children. Judi's husband Bal is handsome and full of plans with fruitless results. Judi at last submits to her fate. In *To Whom She Will*, both Prema's and Tarla's marriages are failures. Prema's marriage to Suri is not marriage of souls and hence destined to fall apart, while Prema turns to sweets and sentimental novelettes. Tarla in *To Whom She Will* and Mrs. Kaul in *A Backward Place* turn to Ladies' Committees and in Cultural Dais respectively to overcome the shortcomings of their marriages. While Jhabvala's *The Widow* presents Durga, a young rich widow, struggling against her fate and accepting her lot in life to live a humble life, her Peggy in *The Aliens* and Cathy in *The Young Couple* are trapped beings fallen in uncongenial situation after marriage. Girls like Judy and Peggy marry Indian husbands out of love but find it difficult to adjust in their household with its inhabitants. Her women are powerless to break loose from their lots. Jhabvala has shown how women suffer in domestic life because of the individual's failure to reach out to each other. Unlike those of Deshpande her women are made to submit like animals like cows. They do not emerge as human beings with distinct identities. Moreover, Jhabvala

herself declared that she should not be considered as an Indian writer but rather 'as one of those European writers who have written about India.' Certainly she has delineated characters as an outside observer, a fact in sharp contrast with Deshpande who has delineated lived experiences.

Nayantara Sahgal, second of the three daughters of Vijaylakshmi Pandit (Nehru's sister) and R. S. Pandit (a Sanskrit scholar and lawyer), has combined the personal and the political in her novels. She has come up with the richest section of Indian society, but she is concerned with the rich cultural heritage of India. She has presented women who face challenges in life in their search for self-fulfilment. She has shown women to have virtue, innocence, purity and integrity. Her women protest against the denial of freedom to women by orthodox and outdated social constructs. Sahgal wants women not only to have social and economic freedom but also to reach a mental and emotional stage in order to recognise their true selves. According to Sahgal women need to defy the old and established conventions at the same time as they should recognize their individuality and refuse to tolerate any form of injustice. Women should not be treated as 'sex object' and 'glamour girl' fed by false dreams and fake promises. Rather they should be treated as honoured partners of men. Sahgal wanted to introduce a kind of new marital morality which would be based on mutual trust and respect free from any narrowness like selfishness or self-centredness. Her conviction for marital morality came from her own personal experience. The shattering experience of divorce made her reveal the predicament of women flouting the social conventions. She has tried to show how in a free country like India women are subjected to the moral and social pressures that cripple their freedom. Sahgal's intense indignation towards the false prejudices and social norms and customs is vented out in her novels. In Sahgal's works personal man-woman relationship is juxtaposed with the impersonal world of politics. Her humanistic approach is reflected in her works as Jasbir Jain observes that there is genuine concern for human values and human beings. Themes like the entrapment of women in conventional marriages (*Rich like Us*), extra-marital affairs (*Storm in Chandigarh*) have been used by Sahgal against the political backseat of the novels to explore women's predicament. Like Deshpande's, Sahgal's women believe in the purity of heart and not the chastity of the body (Deshpande's Indu in *Roots and Shadows*). The humanist in Sahgal believes that women should live being free from all kinds of inhibitions and taboos. She claimed that:

Perhaps both in India and the permissive West, the deciding factor before we act or judge the action of others should be the aesthetics of a particular situation. Is it guided by love and aspiration or greed or gluttony? Is there truth and beauty in it, or only desire for gain? (Sahgal "Adultery in Life and Literature", The Sunday Standard, 28th Sept 1975)

She has characterised her women as 'strivers and aspirers towards compassionate world.' Restoration of women's respect and honour is both Deshpande's and Sahgal's preoccupation. But unlike Deshpande whose plots are day-to-day life of women in domestic spheres, Sahgal sketches on the canvas of the political sphere.

From the above discussion it is clear that Deshpande stands distinct from some of the contemporary women writers. The subject matter of Deshpande's novels can be best described in the words of Jasbir Jain:

The stories question the whole notion of patriarchal authority, of the subjugation of a woman's life to her sexual functions, the guilt which society induces in them when they demand freedom or think of their own emotional and intellectual needs. Women feel a constant need to contest the hostile environment both within and outside the home. They are viewed primarily as service givers (Jain 2005: 16).

Deshpande's intervention is distinct in the sense that all her heroines are projected against the backdrop of domestic scenes. Her treatment of women is unusual for her poignant insight into the domestic life of women held in complex relationships. The way women come to interact in life with different relationships has been graphically represented. All of them are married and find themselves stifled in the domain of patriarchy both before and after marriage. They are victims of social constraints but they are bold at heart. Their indomitable spirit makes them understand the real nature of things. Though they have long suffered and tolerated the pain inflicted upon them, they are not failures in life. They are able to overcome every hurdle of life. They gather the power to face the world and are resolved to find a niche for themselves. Though long deprived of the rightful position and though they had neglected their call of the heart, at last they gather the courage needed to face the reality. Deshpande's conviction in the strength within the woman is shown through her characters. Every person's need for the nourishment of the creative soul is also a recurring idea in her novels. A person can enjoy supreme solace only when she is

in pursuit of her creativity. Thus almost all her protagonists are seen to have taken refuge in writing which would provide them with fulfilment in life and nourishment of soul.