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**SHORT FICTION
BY CONTEMPORARY INDIAN
ENGLISH WOMEN WRITERS**



Mohd Tariq

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH SWT THE MOST BENEFICENT AND THE MOST MERCIFUL. FIRST AND FOREMOST, I WOULD LIKE TO PRAISE AND THANK ALLAH, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO HAS GRANTED COUNTLESS BLESSING, KNOWLEDGE, AND OPPORTUNITY TO ME SO THAT I AM ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THIS WORK. I AM TOTALLY SURE THAT THIS WORK WOULD HAVE NEVER BECOME TRUTH, WITHOUT HIS GUIDANCE. PRAYERS AND PEACE BE UPON PROPHET MUHAMMAD SAW(PABUH), WHO HAS GUIDED MANKIND TO THE RIGHT PATH BLESSED BY THE LORD.

I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO THE MANY PEOPLE WHO PROVIDED ME SUPPORT, TALKED THINGS OVER, READ, WROTE, OFFERED COMMENTS, AND ASSISTED IN THE EDITING, PROOF READING AND DESIGN.

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LAST AND NOT LEAST: I BEG FORGIVENESS OF ALL THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN WITH ME OVER THE COURSE OF THE YEARS AND WHOSE NAMES I HAVE FAILED TO MENTION.

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Preface

The appearance of Indian women writers in English is intimately connected with the rise and development of Indian English Literature itself. Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu represent the early creative release of feminine sensibility. After them, women writers appeared sporadically and it was only after 1950 that there was an emergence of Indian English women Novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Anita Desai. The glorious beginning further resulted in the creative bloom in the post-Rushdie period so that one could speak of women's fiction. In this connection one may mention Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherji, Juliette Banerjee, Raji Narasimhan, Anjana Appachana, Githa Hariharan, Nisha da Cunha and Neelum Sharan Gour.

The leading new novelists of the last two decades of the twentieth century have generally been men, Arundhati Roy being an exception. However, the genre Short Fiction seems to be largely a feminine preserve in this period. Most male novelists have written short stories as a kind of subsidiary activity to their novels "a by-product of the novel workshop"; but the situation seems to have been reversed in the case of contemporary women writers whose favoured form is the short story. Some leading short story writers like Bulbul Sharma, Anjana Appachana and Neelum Sharan Gour have attempted writing novels, others like Nisha da Cunha, have dedicated themselves to short fiction alone.

Like the novel, this genre also deals with women's issues and is nowadays the most popular genre because it suits female sensibility and temperament. Women writers have revealed their peculiar experiences in this form and presented their vision of life. Their central characters act as a picture camera and present the real image of society and the predicament of women in a male dominated world. Within this patriarchal society, they are in search of identity. In other words, their lyric awareness reveals the inner self of women, their peculiar feelings, emotions and search for identity. They also examine Indian women as a stereotyped wife, as a child bearer, and as an object to please and allure men with her physical charms. Even a first casual reading of their stories reveals the shameful attitude of men towards women and their obsessive desire for sex.

A historico-critical survey of short fiction by Indian English women writers shows remarkable changes not only in society but also in women's approach to traditions, social conventions and their personal priorities. The submissive woman of the 'forties and 'fifties and the educated and assertive woman of the 'sixties and 'seventies, have been replaced by the 'new woman' of the 'eighties and 'nineties. This new woman has realised her woman-power. She is not in conflict with the male, and she has rejected, finally, choicelessness.

The significance of the present study lies in its critical focus on the contemporary Indian English short fiction by women and portrayal therein of women in the present social milieu. Women writers have depicted the social and psychological reality of the post-independence period. The Indian English short story by women writers has considerably matured and is now able to reflect social and individual reality with precision. Women writers have used it as a literary barometer and they have noticed political behaviour, joint family system, the generation gap, changing attitudes towards love, marriage, sex and the impact of feminism on contemporary women in the Indian society.

In Indian English short fiction by women, the feminist voice is loud enough to be heard. In neo-colonialism era in India, women short story writers are examining the role of family and society very positively. The present book aims at studying the writers chosen with a view to analyzing their themes (in the light of feminist theory), characterization and style.

The book is divided into five chapters. Chapter I – "Introduction" deals with the theory of short fiction, development of short fiction as a genre, followed by a historico-critical survey of Indian English short story particularly by women writers and a brief discussion of Feminism and feminist literary theory / criticism.

Chapter II – "Anita Desai" deals with her short stories. It contains a discussion of the making of the writer and analysis of her short stories from the angles of pessimism and feminism. It also focuses on the elements of symbolism and portrayal of women characters in her short stories.

Chapter III – “Shashi Deshpande” presents a synopsis of Deshpande’s literary career, influences on her writings and analysis of her representative short stories in the light of feminist literary theory and consequently presentation of women in them.

Chapter IV –“Other Indian English Women Writers of Short Fiction” deals with the analysis of the representative short stories of Attia Hosain, Raji Narasimhan, Kamala Das, Nergis Dalal, Githa Hariharan, Anjana Appachana, Shalan Savur, Prema Ramakrishnan and Tara Deshpande. Chapter V - forms the conclusion, where arguments of the preceding chapters are summarized and a cohesive picture is given. The analysis of short stories by contemporary Indian English women writers shows how cultural patterns run like a thread in the short stories of these women writers. Despite provincial disparities, they are successful in portraying the socio-cultural ethos which is basically Indian. Their short stories show formal diversity but there is a common denominator: feminist consciousness.

MOHD. TARIQ

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In the name of Allah SWT The Most Beneficent and The Most Merciful. First and foremost, I would like to praise and thank Allah, the almighty, Who has granted countless blessing, knowledge, and opportunity to me so that I am able to accomplish this work. I am totally sure that this work would have never become truth, without His guidance. Prayers and peace be upon Prophet Muhammad SAW(PABUH), who has guided mankind to the right path blessed by the Lord.

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Last and not least: I beg forgiveness of all those who have been with me over the course of the years and whose names I have failed to mention.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- GAT : Desai, Anita. *Games at Twilight*. Bombay:Allied, 1978
- DD : ---.*Diamond Dust and Oyher Stories*. London:Vintage,2001.
- LOS : Deshpande,Shashi. *The Legacy and Other Stories*.Calcutta: Writers' Workshop,1978
- IWTN : ---.*It was the Nightingale*. Calcutta:Writers' Workshop, 1986
- TM : ---. *The Miracle and Other Stories*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1986
- IWD : ---. *It was Dark*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993.
- IOS : ---. *The Intrusion and Other Stores*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993.
- CS : ---. *Collected Stories*. Vol. I. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003.
- PF : Hosain, Attia. *Phoenix Fled and Other Stories*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1953.
- TMOB : Narasimhan, Raji. *The Marriage of Bela and Other Stories*.

Calcutta: Writers' Workshop, 1978.

NOS : Dalal, Nergis. *The Nude and Other Stories*. New Delhi: Orient

Paperback, 1977.

ADCP : Das, Kamala. *A Doll For the Child Prostitute*. Delhi: Himalaya

Pocket Books, 1977.

PHOS : ---. *Padmavati, The Harlot and Other Stories* 1992.

IS : Appachana , Anjana. *Incantations and Other Stories*. London:

Virago Press, 1991.

Introduction

The short fiction, an American critical term for the short story, is a current trend in Indian English literature by women writers. A short story is a fictional narrative the length of which varies but which rarely exceeds 20,000 words. Any longer work is usually classified as a Novella or a short novel. A short story usually contains two or three characters and frequently focuses on simple incidents or a moment of sudden insight, as has been characterized by James Joyce as Epiphany. According to M. H. Abrams:

A short story is a work of prose fiction and most of the terms for analyzing the components parts, the types, and the various narrative techniques of the novel are applicable to the short fiction as well. It differs for example, from the anecdote incidents in that it organizes the action, thought, and interactions of its characters into the artful pattern of a plot, which has a beginning and develops through a middle to same sort of denouement at the end. The plot form may be comic or tragic or romantic, or satiric, the story is presented from one of the many available points of view; and it may be written in the mode of fantasy, realism or naturalism. (157)

There are many ways of taking the measure of the short story. Perhaps a glance at its history would prove to be useful. Probably the short story is as old as language itself and came into being in a cave when the baby Neanderthal said to the papa Neanderthal, "Daddy, tell me a story". However, anthropologists might dispute the conceiving of language as existing without the simultaneous existence of stories and tales. If man did not learn to talk in order to tell stories, he surely soon discovered that tale-telling was one of the chief glories of language. From the oral tradition to the

written was an easy step, and stories of the Greek gods or tales in the Bible remain the early examples of the genre. The form evolves from precursors such as Fable, Parable, and Folktale. The *Dictionary of World Literature* refers clearly to the universality of storytelling amongst primitive peoples of the world:

The art of story telling is native to all the ancient peoples, but perhaps the Egyptians were the first to endow random tales with a permanent literary form. A collection of short prose narratives from ancient Egypt contains from approximately 4000 B.C. (Shipley 373)

The oldest known tales are said to be of the *Shipwrecked Sailor* written on Egyptian Papyri (about 400 B.C.) or the *Book of Jonah* from the *Old Testament* (350-750 B.C.) *The Thousand and One Nights*, or *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, is the earliest collection of written stories. Originally written in Arabic, translation was introduced in Europe in the 18th century by Antoine Galland's translation of it into French and Edward William Lane's translation of it into English.

The beautiful damsel Scheherzade tells the stories of the Arabian Nights to the king Shehriar, as she wanted to save her as well as other women's life. The sons of Cheop had narrated stories to their father for his delight some 4000 B.C. in Egypt. Boccaccio's tales collected in *The Decameron* were written between 1348 and 1358 and were very popular throughout the Renaissance. The origin of Indian tales has been back to the Vedas and Upanishads, the Puranas and the Panchtantra, Hitopadesh and Jatak Kathas. The great Indian epics *The Ramayan* and *The Mahabharat* have been regarded as storehouse of tales, and they have continued to inspire generations of readers and creative writers. *The Katha Sarit Sagar*, *The Brihad Katha Manjari*, *The Jatak Tales*, *The Panchtantra* and *the Hitopadesh* are collections of short stories before the story became a distinct literary form as it is today.

These tales are based on oral tradition and are basically discursive, focusing on a moral point. The major difference between these and other such prose tales and the more recent nineteenth century short story is the artist's consciousness and treatment of his or her tale as a distinctive art form. The short story as a conscious literary form is younger than most other forms and certainly younger by a century than the novel. Just as readers and critics look back to the eighteenth century, and Richardson and Fielding, for the birth of the novel, so they look back to the nineteenth century, Poe in America and Gogol in Russia (both born in 1809), for the origin of the short story. In Irving and Hawthorne one can witness the essay, sketch, and legend changing into the short story. In the nineteenth century, the short story acquired a currency and character it had not had before. It is possible to discover in Poe the first public statement ever formulated about the nature of the short story as distinguished from other literary forms. Poe proclaimed that a short story must have a singleness of effect, a unity achieved primarily through invention and combination of appropriate incidents, that is, through intricate construction of plot. Such concentration and complexity distinguished the real short story from the slighter movements and the more relaxed time of events in the earlier tale, sketch, or anecdote.

According to some critics, the short story is an American invention. Peter S. Prescott says that "the thing itself is ours, invented by us a century and half ago, and dominated by Americans ever since." But this is not the case. This genre developed after passing through several states of evolution all over the world and acquired a distinct literary status. It may be admitted that the way in which they (Americans) have cultivated this genre, it has influenced other writers the world over.

Surinder Singh Uppal disagrees with the notion of American critics as well as

other critics who believe that the modern short story is a purely modern product having no connection with the preceding ages. He says:

It has its roots in the hoary past. It has evolved its modern form after passing through several stages and by getting the warmth of its innumerable lovers through so many centuries. (18)

J.A.K. Thomson contends that “the notion that the short story is something quite new or modern is a piece of self-deception on the part of those whose reading does not go beyond the present century” (61). According to G. H. Mair, “the faculty of telling stories is the oldest artistic faculty in the world and the deepest one implanted in the hearts of men. Before the rudest cave-pictures were scratched on the stone, the story teller, it is not unreasonable to suppose, was playing this trade” (178). From the time immemorial man has been in constant touch with and deriving pleasure and moral of life from it. The baptism of this form took place in 1933, when the term was used, for the first time, in OED Supplement. It was then acknowledged as a particular kind of literary product. As has been mentioned earlier, the short story evolved in its present form after passing through various stages. In America, the genre found its utmost flourishing during the 19th century in the hands of Poe, Melville and Hawthorne. Although Washington Irving is considered the first important exponent of the genre, Edgar Allen Poe was actually the first person who tried to discuss the form as it is taken today. He brought Aristotle’s *Poetics* into the short story with a vision to establish the latter as a distinct art form. In the review of Hawthorn’s *Twice Told Tales*, Poe presented the basic tenets of short story. This review is regarded as a universal treatise on the form, function, and fulness of the genre. It is regarded as a landmark in terms of the theory of short story, and it has influenced generations of

creative writers ever since. It states that the short story is far more subtle, succinct and serious in dealing with the basic problems of life.

Poe was a champion of uniqueness and single effect in the short story. However, his formula can only be derived if the story can be read in single sitting i.e. ranging from half an hour to one or even two hours. In this way, the reader gets the complete impression of the author's intention. The terseness of Poe's formula suggests that the brevity is the soul of short story. On the contrary Frank O' Connor discards the very concept of contraction. He says that the short story possesses "an intense awareness of human loneliness," (24) firmly believes that the term short story "itself is a misnomer". Further, he maintains that there is no simple criterion of the length of the short story other than that provided by the material itself. For him, a great story is not necessarily short at all, and the conception of the short story as a miniature form is inherently false" (25).

Another important element of a short story is content. The flexibility and versatility of the form allows everything under the sun to be considered as a possible raw material of a short story. According to H. E. Bates, a short story can be "from the death of a horse to a young girl's first love affair" (12). In the same way Cleanth Brooks says:

A story may start from anything from the death cry heard distantly ... from a character imagined from an episode seen or an anecdote heard, from a feeling that seems to come from nowhere and seeking an objective, mooring in actuality, from the atmosphere of a place that seems to yearn for some special thing to happen there, from a family affection or hatred, from idea or moral conviction. It may stem from anything that will start the imagination on its characteristic job of

putting things correctly together in movement towards meaning – no, not putting them together, but creating a world in which they can grow naturally together in a movement towards meaning .(296)

It captures the harsh realities of life, the mundanity of life, the sacred experience of the soul and the emotional encounter that affects person's life in physical and spiritual way and it also presents picture of sensitive people. Sanders in his terse statement defines the motif of a short story as "Man in conflict with something" (43). Whether it is the primitive man struggling in the natural jungle or the modern man struggling in the concrete jungle; man's inner and outer conflicts, his victories and defeats become the fundamental subject matter of the short story. The art and technique of the genre and its nature requires a subject matter. It doesn't mean that chronology of events but creative writers exploit these events to establish primacy of experience. These events present some hidden meaning. The purpose of a short story writer is to offer meaning beyond the events and to make an experience a part of reader's experience.

The short story as a form as it is understood today evolved in various stages. Poe, Melville and Hawthorn concentrated on the inner state of human life. Hawthorn considered the theme to be the chief concern. Melville focused on the issue of the good and the evil and Mark Twain on moral flaw. Bret Harte brought freshness, boldness, simplicity and humour in his short stories. O' Henry accentuated psychological elements. Henry James probed the consciousness of experiences of characters and tried to bring forth the moments of illumination. His short stories are more subjective in approach and closer to impression rather than reaction. At the turn of the 20th century, naturalism influenced the short fiction and its writers, and it had great impact on the genre. For example, Andersan's stories are influenced by

naturalism. As a result, the short story became a convenient vehicle to foster what Ross calls “the documentary enumeration and slice of life technique” as well as “interior monologue, impressionism, expressionism and even symbolism” (26). Thus assimilation of various “isms” and techniques in the art of short-fiction writing resulted in the emphasis on the spiritual resources of the characters. Thus, naturalism changed the approach of short-fiction writers from the old facts of life to the new emerging concern with the social environment as a controlling force. Hemingway introduced the philosophy of existentialism in short stories. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s stories are known for complexities with which he probes the human heart. Faulkner’s short stories deal with disintegration – a world of transition from a culture that is partly at odds with naturalistic force. According to Robert Geller, “the short story, an indigenous form like the movie, has been called delayed an act of “artful audacity” because of its marvellous compression and its ability to heighten feelings and evoke human response” (9).

In the 19th century, the theory of short fiction focused on plot design but today it focuses on methods of poetry (figurative and rhythmic) and drama. It has made difficult to define the short story but it is possible to recognize its prominent features.

Gerald Prince opines that no short story exist until three or more events conjoined, with at least two occurring at different intervals of time and being casually linked together (15).

According to Claude Bremond, temporal movement and logical linkage are just enough to make a short story. In the opinion of Arthur Dante for stories to be stories, and must leave things out (11-12). Few emphasise three phase action but a common opinion is that it is a concentrated form “appeals to feelings” and suggesting nature of life.

The short story is an experimental genre and every writer is experimenting with structure and texture. The elements of short story are combined together to provide concrete shape to the theme. According to Endora Welty, it contains personal vision of author. It means all the elements are set in motion by writer's perception of the mystery and magic of every day life. That is why a good story touches emotionally and intellectually and ignites imagination of readers. It becomes more interesting and meaningful when the personal vision of author embodied in the form of theme and content is related to the readers' own experiences of life.

The aim of short story writer is not to entertain or to move but to make us think. In the opinion of Guy de Maupassant, the serious goal of writer is not to tell a story, or to entertain or to move, but to make us think and understand the deep hidden meanings of events. A writer tries to communicate his personal view about the world and this description is so accurate with dissimulation and visible simplicity that it becomes difficult to decode it. A writer picks some characters and places them in some natural transition and then studies the influence of environment on the mind or personality of characters and uses these events which are unnoticed by clear sighted observers. His view is that a writer tries to present his/her illusion of the world by exploiting different techniques of literature.

Williams Carlos William opines that the short story is not a snippet from the newspaper. It is not realism. All forms of art take materials from daily life and occurrences and use them to raise our consciousness of life at a higher level. More description of daily events and textual description of facts is not a short story. It contains a single flight of imagination, complete in itself and the result is life, not morals. So it is life which comes alive in the narration.

According to Anton Chekhov, a true description of nature should be brief and have a character of relevance, while Edith Warton, commenting on the subject matter of the short story, observes that a good subject for a short story is never capable of being expanded into a novel. Every subject must necessarily contain within itself its dimensions. If it appears to be adapted to both the forms then it is not fit for either.

Nadine Gordimer observed that like a child suffering from healthy neglect, the short story survives. According to him, the short story is alive while the novel is dead, the reason must lie in approach and method. The short story as a form and a kind of creative vision must be better equipped to capture ultimate reality at a time when readers are drawing nearer to the mystery of life.

Frederic Jameson has suggested that a narrative is an epistemological category, one of the abstract coordinates by which we come to understand the world, ... (95). As Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel N. Medvedev observe, "If we approach genre from the point of view of its intrinsic thematic relationship to reality, we may say that every genre has its methods and means of seeing and conceptualizing reality which are accessible to it alone" (133). According to H. E. Bates, "As the sky is not made of bricks so stories are not put together with plumb-line and travel" (19).

In this way, the short story is a distinct form and can bear comparison with the novel. Both the short story and the novel basically make use of four main components of fictional narrative character, plot, atmosphere and situation but whereas the latter employs all the four principal elements in varying degrees, its success or failure depending upon the kind of subtle balance struck between the four, the former makes do with one but never more than three of the four components (Srivastava 150). It is when the artistic needs arise in which the focus of the artist is on one or two major facets of life too urgent to be ignored and too trivial for a longer and more solemn

treatment that the artist chooses the short story form rather than the novel form. It is only a few short story writers who have not attempted novels just as there are few novelists who have not tried their hands at the short story. It is the nature of the vision which the artist has to communicate and which determines his/her choice between the short story and the novel.

The short story, unlike the novel, deals only with the fragment in the lives of its characters, never aiming at giving us the whole. It can be concerned with any one particular aspect of life. Hence the emphasis on UNITY – unity of motive, purpose, action, narrative and above all, of impression and effect (Hudson 339).

It is said that the difference between the novel and the short story is that the short story is short. But this is not always true. The length of short stories varies; many short stories are quite long and so it is not possible to fix any maximum or minimum length for a short story. Frank o' Connor, pointing out the difference between novel and short story, observes that "the form of the novel is given by the length; in the short story the length is given by the form. There is simply no criterion of length of a short story other than that provided by the material itself. ..." (20). And the length varies because "for the short story writer there is no such thing as essential form. Because his frame of reference can never be the totality of human life, he must be forever selecting the point at which he can approach it, and each selection he makes contains the possibility of a new form as well as the possibility of complete fiasco" (Connor 21). This point in human life which he seeks to approach is "a point outside human time from which past and future can be viewed simultaneously" (166), for example, Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" presents a couple waiting for a train at a station to take them to Madrid where the man wants the woman to

undergo an abortion. Thus the short story is much more flexible and plastic. That is why H. E. Bates opines:

the short story holds over the novel, the advantages of elasticity, in both choice of character and use of time. The novel is predominantly an exploration of life, reflecting and describing in some form the impact, entanglement, friction, destruction or fulfilment of human emotions and desires. (19)

The short story has a small canvas. It fixes on an impact of life or facet of character or an incident or episode, and concentrates on it. It concerns itself with a slice of life, a province of personality. It presents a bust rather than a portrait. It shoots the snap as a pose rather than the photograph of the whole man. Since the canvas of the short story is smaller, its focus is more intensive than that of the novel. The canvas of the novel is in contrast, larger and so it is diffused. Because the short story has a smaller but a more intensive focus, it brings things into sharper focus. Moreover, the short story is more immediate, as it focuses on things of immediate interest and relevance.

The short story may, therefore, be called the most sensitive literary barometer that registers every shade of life. It is that kind of verbal art which tries to mirror events in flux, while the novel, the fable, the tale and the story represent events which are congealed in time. The raw stuff of short story lies scattered about or swiftly whisks past us every moment. A moment or movement of life has knocked the writer down, as it were, and he must immortalize the moment or movement by the power of creative word. It is life and the laughter and (more often) the tears in things – the heart throb and the heartache – the glory and the despair – the quiddities and profundities – that make the seamless web of existence. To seize the moment of the flow of this

seamless web of existence, to contain a little fragment of this riot of reality, is the aim of the short story writer.

According to Ian Watt, the novel creates the illusion of reality by presenting a literal authenticity to the material facts of external world while the short story attempts to be authentic to the immaterial reality of the inner world of the self in its relation to eternal rather than temporal reality. Lionel Trilling says that the novel's quest for extensional reality takes place in the social world and that, the field of research for the short story is primitive, antisocial world of the unconscious, and the material of its analysis are not manners but dreams. This distinction shows that while the novel is primarily a social and public form, the short story is mythic and spiritual.

The novel is primarily structured on a conceptual and philosophical framework while the short story is intuitive and lyrical. The novel exists to reaffirm the word of 'everyday' reality; the short story exists to 'defamiliarize' everyday. Story telling does not spring from one's confirmation with the everyday world, but rather from one's encounter with the sacred (in which true reality is revealed in all its plenitude) or with the absurd (in which true reality is revealed in all its vacuity).

The novelist may juggle about with chronology and throw the narrative overboard; all the time his characters have the reader by the hand. There is consistency of relationship throughout the experience that cannot and does not convey the quality of human life, where contact is more like the flash of fire flies, in and out, now here, now there, in darkness. Short story writers see by the light of the flash; theirs is the art of the only thing one can be sure of the present moment. Ideally, they have learned to do without an explanation of what went before and what happens beyond this point.

The short story is much more closer to poetry than to the novel. As Grace Paley in conversation with Ann Charters said, stories are closer to poetry than to the novel because they are shorter and second they are more concentrated, more economical in the sense of pulling together all the information. Unity in story means something has to be whole, even if it ends in that an open way, “in writing poetry I wanted to talk to the world, I wanted to address the world, so to speak. But writing stories, I wanted to get the world to explain itself to me”. Bowen’s opinion is that it is like poetic drama:

Man has to live how he can, overlooked and dwarfed he makes himself his own theatre. In the drama inside heroic or pathological? Outward acts have often an inside magnitude. The short story, with its shorter span than the novel’s with its freedom from forced complexity, its possible lucidness, is able, like the poetic drama, to measure man by his aspirations and dreams and place him alone on that stage which inwardly, every man is conscious of occupying alone .(16)

The short story is more flexible and open to experiment than the novel. The short story writer enjoys wider freedom than the novelist, He/She is concerned with the present moment without giving any explanation to what happened in past or what will happen beyond a point and the information about how character will appear, think and comprehend tomorrow or at any other time. For them such questions are largely irrelevant. Thus, a short story is a monument erected for a moment. The short story doesn’t deal in cumulative and its aim is discrete moment of truth not the moment of truth. According to George Luckacs the short story is the “most artistic form” (51).

It is a fragmented and restless form, a matter of hit and miss, and that is why it suits the modern consciousness which seems best expressed on flashes of fearful insight alternating with near hypnotic states of indifference.

From the “romantic tale” of the 19th century to the present day short story, a sea change is noticeable which is the result of writers’ attitude of accentuating myth and sacred experience. This emphasis results into coherence of the short story. According to May, this coherence is significant, related it to modern short story and emphasised that this coherence is inevitable in the development of the short story. As he has aptly remarked that “short fiction is so bound up with the experience of the sacred and the mythic perception”. He further opines that “it is no accident that the short story as we knew it today, got its important impetus as an art form from the romantic effort in the early years of the 19th century to regain what has been lost in religion” (124). It has become a medium to communicate human experiences which are emotionally encountered. It presents general truths of routine life, and it is incomparable to any form of literature. It presents blend of aesthetics and truth of life, which provides peculiar uniqueness. This genre is popular genre and flourishing of magazines, newspapers, journals helped in its development in various countries. So this genre is still developing and imbibing the search for meaning. Having gained a sense of what involves the short story as a genre, it would now be in order to direct the theoretical insights culled in the foregoing discussion to the specific terrain of Indian English Writing.

Indian English Writing is the result of colonial encounter and the rise of Indian English Literature was an aspect of Indian Renaissance. The English men were rediscovering India’s past; there was gradual spread of English education and Western ideas which was possible after implementation of Macaulay’s Educational reform. At

initial stage the English Language was used for translations, political agitation, administrative works, social reforms, law and education. It led to emergence of a new literature which was earlier known as Indo-Anglian Literature and now it is known as Indian English Literature (IEL) or Indian English Writing (IEW). IEL has established its credentials all over the world. Indian writers in English have been using almost all the major forms, of literature, and the short story being one of them.

If Indian English Fiction originated in the 20th century, Indian English short story can't be thought of earlier than this time. Of course, the short story is a simpler and more popular form of communication than the wide ranging and complex fiction. It is deeply rooted in Indian tradition, which used to give folk tales and fables from the earliest times. And this tradition has always been enriched by oral as well as written tales. It is unquestionably as old as Indian society and culture itself.

The early short story writers were inspired by the ancient tales of *Panchatantra* and in the *Buddhistic Jataka Tales*, which are usually didactic in tone, gripping in narration and epigrammatical in structure. Both the works may be regarded as “fables”, in which some animals symbolise human beings and their virtues or vices. Folk tales, preserved in the form of *Katha Saritsagar* (based on Brihadkatha of Gunadhya) and *Dashkumaracharitam* by noted Sanskrit author Dandin also influenced Indian English short story. Besides, the story elements can be find also in *Upanishads* and Puranas, and the religious epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, *Padmapurana* by Ravi Sena and *Mahapurana* by Jinasera and Gimabhadra (Jain authors). These works influenced Indian English short story and provided creative stimulus to Indian English short story writers.

Like other genres, the Indian short story in English began under the influence of British writers. In this way, the Indian short story writers in English are inheritors

of British legacy bequeathed to them by such eminent practitioners as O' Henry, John Galsworthy, Somerset Maugham, Rudyard Kipling, who themselves were greatly inspired by the French author, Maupassant. However, it can be said that the Indian short story writers in English began their work under the impact of the west, and that slowly yet steadily spread their wings to incorporate the charms of a finished form and a natural prose style. According to S. K. Das, "There are at least three distinct stages in the growth of the short story as a modern literary form. All these stages are autonomous and self sufficient but interrelated" (302). The three stages mentioned by Das are the following: tales and fables, and short fiction. The third stage according to him emerged during the 19th century with the arrival of journals and periodicals. These journals and periodicals encouraged the writings such as character-sketches and the reports of incidents and events. Consequently short fiction came into existence: Das observes that:

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

When printing press came into existence the stories from the great treasure of epics, tales, parables, and fables were the first to appear in the printed form with slight alteration. The short story as a literary genre came into existence in almost all the Indian languages in particular, when "the mythological, adventurous and marvelous stories had exhausted their possibilities and the novel had got established" (Das 302).

In different regions it came to be described as Katha, akhyan, upakhaym afsana and dastan among others. At the level of form and perception on the part of writer and reader, they reveal variation and distinctiveness. It was clear that the author had strong desires to distinguish his stories from the older ones.

The focus of Indian Literature shifted from men enjoying high fortune to the common man and his problem. The entry of the common man played a significant role in the development of the short story in India. The short story, like the novel of the time, portrays the common man and his plight in society which as Das remarks, “acted as a balance between the historical novels and the novels dealing with social problems by identifying a new zone of experience” (Das 307). At initial stage, it showed affinity with the novel but after certain period it established its relationship with the lyric and revealed its true nature. The art of compactness of form and the unity of emotion it learnt from lyric and gave new meaning to the ordinary things in life and nature.

The first Indian to give a short story in the modern sense is Fakir Mohan Senapati, publishing his story “Lachmania” in 1868. Shoshee Chunder Dutt in London published the earliest collection of short stories entitled *Realities of Indian Life: Stories Collected from Criminal Reports of India* in 1885. In the same year, S. C. Dutt and Surinder Tagore published *The Times of Yore: Tales from Indian History* P. V. Ramaswami Raju published two collections: *The Tales of Sixty Mandrin* (1886) and *Indian Fables* (1887). In 1895 Kshetrapal Chakravarty published *Sarala and Hingara: Tales Descriptive of Indian Life* and Kamala Sattianandhan published *Stories of Indian Christian Life* in 1898 B. R. Rajan Iyer’s Stories appeared in *The Prabudha Bharata* between 1896-98 but later on in 1905 they appeared in the form of anthology entitled *Rambles in the Vedanta*, followed by S. M. Nateshaa Sastri’s *Indian Folk*

Tales (1908), Durjendra Nath Neogi's *Sacred Short Stories of India* (1916), A Madhaviah's *Short Stories by Kushika*, (1916) K. S. Venkataramani's *Paper Boats* (1921) and *Jatadharan and Other Stories* (1937) Shankar Ram's two volumes of short stories were *Children of the Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All* (1932) and K. Nagragam's *Cold Rice* (1945). Stories in these collections by various writers deal with religious, philosophical and social themes. S. K. Chettur and G. K. Chettur evoked a sense of awe and supernatural through their short fiction. The most notable of the five collections of stories by A. S. P. Ayyar was *Sense in Sex and Other Stories* (1929) dealing with the evils of sex and marriage faced by the Indian women of the day.

The mid '30s of the 20th century saw the emergence of the Big Three. The first artistic work in this genre was Mulk Raj Anand's *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934), voicing the silence and predicament of the lost ones and the sufferer in Indian society. Narayan occupies a prominent place as a writer of short stories in a lighter vein. His collections are : *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* 1947, *Lawley Road and Other Stories, Old and New* (1981), *Old and New* (1981), *Malgudi Days* (1982) Raja Rao's Ist Collection, *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* published in 1947 was followed by *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978) and *On the Ganga Ghat* 1989. He has made a mark in this genre with just three collections. His stories evoke Indian thought and tradition and deal with social and political themes. Other memorable short story writers are Manjeri S. Isvaran, Khushwant Singh, K. A. Abbas, G. D. Khosla, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Bunny Reuban, Chaman Nahal, Shiv K. Kumar, K. N. Daruwalla, Bala Krishnan, Ruskin Bond, Arun Joshi, Manoj Das, Jug Suraiya, Farrukh Dhondy, Keshav Malik, P. Lal, Jayanta Mahapatra, Randhir P. Lal, Randhir Khare, G. S. Sharat Chandra, Rohinton Mistry, Ranga Rao, Shashi Tharoor, Salman

Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, Amit Chaudhuri, S. Mutiah, besides many other major and minor male writers of short stories.

The short story form best expresses the fractured female identity that struggles to break out of centuries of enforced silence. This literary form is often unjustifiably referred to as “truncated novel”. The short story form is a tool for the female artist, who forges a language, chisels a flexible form and mirrors an experience that reflects the rhythm of the body and the mind. The historical relativity of human experiences is absorbed into the personal female experiences of the woman writer who writes her story. More than any other literary form, the short story has always defied classification and regulations for it has a literary identity of its own, identity that is marked by flexibility and adaptability.

Among the well known female short story writers are Ruth Praver Jhabwala, Bharati Mukherji, Shashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kamala Das, Anjana Appachana, Bulbul Sharma, Githa Hariharan and Neelum Sharan Gour and other major and minor writers of short stories. In the short story no strictly detailed plot or elaborate character delineation is required but the story must be in conformity with the limited canvas and must arouse interest by portraying some aspect of the human element. The above mentioned writers reveal a humanistic core in their stories while retaining their essentially feminist stance. Virginia Woolf hinted at the women writers finding a suitable form other than the novel as early as in the beginning of the 20th century:

The novel alone was young enough to be soft in her hands ... yet, who shall say that ever now the novel is rightly shaped for her use. No doubt, we shall find her ... providing some new vehicle, not necessarily in verse, for the poetry in her. (77-78)

In the last two decades, an increasing number of women writers have turned to the short story to express the poetry in their selves. The potentialities latent in the short story, which is more appropriately called the “Short Text”, have been explored with great intensity in the past few years. These recent short story writers place the human derelicts of Indian society, especially women, at the centre of their stories of exploitation. They have special affinity to the marginalization of women in society.

It is by virtue of this lack of rigid structure that the woman writer mentally frees herself from a traditionally bound form and language. The woman writer identifies a spatial context and begins to explore and experiment with her hitherto muted experiences. The short story is like a sphere that lifts writer out of linear time and patriarchal logic. The women characters in their short stories are caught in a man-centred society. They confront the evils of society and accept their roles in a morally bankrupt world of false values and crumbling ideology. The number of women short story writers nowadays is very large. Male writers have taken it as a by-product of their creativity but women writers have developed it as a significant tool of expression.

This favoured form is the short story. Some leading short story writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bulbul Sharma, Anjana Appachana and Neelum Sharan Gour have attempted writing novels; others like Nisha da Cunha, have dedicated themselves to the shorter form alone.

From Cornelia Sorabji down to Shashi Deshpande and other women writers of short fiction have used this form to express women issues. Most of the stories in Sorabji's collections of short stories *Love and Life Behind Purdah* (1901), *Sunbabies: Studies in the Child Life of India* (1904), *Between the Twilights: Being Studies of Indian Women by One of Themselves* (1908) and *Indian Tales of the Great Ones*

Among Men, Women and Bird People (1916), deal with plight of woman in Indian society, purdah system, problem of polygamy and polyandry, and other social issues. She is the pioneer Indian English women writer who highlighted the problems of woman in India.

In the same way, most of the stories in Sunity Devee's collection of Short Stories, *Bengal Decoits and Tigers* (1916), *The Beautiful Mughal Princess* (1918) and *The Rajput Princesses* are sorts of retelling of folk tales, legends and parables. They are simple in art, as they tend to be anecdotal, sentimental and didactic. These short stories reveal that she sought inspiration from ancient Indian classics, nevertheless the influence of western short story writers one cannot deny.

There are several other women writers with a solitary collection each to their credit. Krishna Huthesing's *Shadow on the Wall* (1948) is based on the lives of women prisoners. Attia Hosain's *Phoenix Fled and Other Stories* (1953) contains evocative sketches of North Indian women; Jai Nimbkar in her *The Lotus Leaves and Other Stories* (1971) deals realistically in the middle-class Maharashtrian life. Sujatha Bala Subramanian's *The House in the Hill and Other Stories* (1973) reveals a keen understanding of different kinds of people. In the collection, *The Nude* (1977) Nergis Dalal mostly offers well made stories with surprise ending or melodrama. The stories in *A Doll For the Child Prostitute* (1977) by Kamala Das generally revolves around the sex-theme. Some of the other short story collections by women are the following: Perin C Mehta's *Short Stories*; Rajkumari Singh's *A Garland of Stories* 1960; Usha John's *The Unknown Lover and Other Stories* (1960); Jaya Bir's *Song and the Dream and Other Short Stories* (1971), Padma Hejmadi's *Coigns of Vantage* (1972); Margaret Chatterjee's *At the Homeopath's [Sic] and other Stories* (1973). Nayantara

Sahgal has published few stories in periodicals, but these stories are not available in the form of collection, they are yet to be collected.

The short stories of Ruth Praver Jhabvala are similar to her novels. They show the same attitude and response that characterized her novels. Her short stories have a larger canvas like her novels. Her four collections of short stories are : *Like Birds, Like Fishes* (1963), *An Experience of India* (1966), *A Stronger Climate* (1968) and *How can I Became A Holy Mother* (1976). Her stories are based on joint family system in India and show her keen understanding of complex personal relationships. Even sometimes her stories offer subtle mental analysis of characters. Generally, her characters are adolescents and young people of both the sexes and middle-aged women ranging from house wives to kept women.

An Experience of India shows her changing response to India and *A Stronger Climate* deals with Westerners' response to India. *Out of India: Selected Stories* (1986) presents the picture of India reinforces its image as exotic land of sexy men. *East into Upper East* deals with emotional exploitation. She tries to prove that this emotional deprivation, disillusionment, pain and suffering are common to both worlds i.e. East and West.

Sasthi Brata's collections of short stories are : *My God Died Young* , *A Search For Home* and *Encounter* (1975). Her short stories are marked by autobiographical element, they show the authors reflections on Indian life and culture particularly life in Calcutta. Most of her short stories deal with theme of East-West encounter. Her short stories are known for boldness, which is one of the qualities of women writings today and this quality is visible in her works particularly in her collection entitled *Encounter* (1975).

Anita Desai's first collection of short stories, *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* was published in 1978 and her second collection *Diamond Dust* in 2000. Like her novels, her short stories are psychological in approach and underscore her fascination for the country of the mind. But she being feminist writer feminism oozes out from her short stories obliquely.

The last part of the '70s saw emergence of three significant writers of short fiction. These writers are: Raji Narasimhan; Juliett Banerjee and Shashi Deshpande. Narasimhan's *The Marriage of Bela and Other Stories* (1978), Banerjee's *The Boyfriend and Other Stories* (1978) deals with woman-in-transition; women characters in these collections belong to middle-class section of society, but they are highly educated according to their social standards. Short Stories in these collections show plight of modern women and their conflicting situation in society. These short stories voice not only the silence but also the protest of marginals can also be heard under the influence of American Feminism. These short stories represent the phase of protest in feminist writings in India. Deshpande's other collections of short stories are : *The Miracle and Other Stories* (1986), *The Intrusion and Other Stories* (1993), *It was Dark* (1986) and *It was the Nightingale, Collected Stories Vol. I and Collected Stories Vol. II*. Her stories are about familial relationships- husband-wife relationships, the bond between mother and daughter and peculiar experiences of female.

Like Deshpande, Dina Mehta, too, started her writing career with short stories. Her first collection of short stories entitled *The Other Woman and Other Stories* was published in 1981, followed by *Miss Menon Did Not Believe in Magic and Other Stories* (1994). Her short stories are woman-centred and present Indian life from the point of view of a woman. Like Deshpande, she also presents the complex husband and wife relationships, but her short stories have a touch of humour.

Vera Sharma is the author of two collections of short stories. *The Unrepentant and Other Stories* (1982) and *Naina and Other Stories* (1989). Characters in her short stories represent cultural ethos, linguistic and other peculiarities of a particular Indian community. She documented the changes which have come in Indian society, women in particular and society in general. She shows how women get a chance to choose their husband. Though traditional society opposes it, love-marriages are still in vogue. Her short fiction not only notices but also focuses on complex familial relationships like possessiveness and selflessness in maternal love. Her stories are imaginative investigations into complex society.

Gauri Deshpande is a bilingual writer. She is equally adept in both Marathi and English. She is known for her innovative writing and Marathi translation of Richard Burton's Sixteen-volume *Arabian Nights*. Earlier, her stories appeared in reputed journals like *The Illustrated Weekly of India* but later on were collected as *The Lackadaisical Sweeper and Other Stories* (1977). The short stories in this collection are women-centred and reveal powerlessness and poor self image of the average Indian woman, but a prominent thing about this collection is that woman is not always the victim. Many of the stories are marked by an element of humour.

Nisha da Cunha has authored three collections of short stories. Her first collection of short stories, *Old Cypress* was published in 1991 and followed by the *Permanence of Grief* (1993) and *Set My Heart in Aspic* (1998). Stories in these collections are pervaded by a sense of loss. She has started writing short stories after teaching English almost three decades but there is no academic impact on her stories. Language of these short stories reflects poetic sensibility, imagery is not obscure and she presents mood and sensibility of the protagonist with great vividness. Her stories are set in Bombay and Goa and deal with familial relationships, psychology of metro

city youngsters, extra marital relationships and other women issues. Her second volume of short stories concentrates on grief, loneliness and frustration of old age. The third collection is also pessimistic like earlier ones.

Many other women short story writers made their debut in the nineties. All these writers belong to the post-independence era (except Nisha da Cunha). Their collections reveal their feel for language, their understanding of contemporary life in India particularly regional variations in India. Their stories are generally about urban middle-class particularly (females) women. Anjana Appachana, Manju Kak, Bulbul Sharma, Subhadra Sen Gupta, Deepa, Kalpana Swaminathan and Anita Nair have made their debut with short fiction. Some women writer's like Neelum Sharan Gour have developed a new variety of short fiction i.e. known as Mofassil Fiction which means fiction based on small cities and towns.

Anjana Appachana's collection of short stories, *Incantations and Other Stories* (1992) deals with the theme of conflict and problems in the institution of marriage, dissatisfaction in personal relationships and the plight of being born a girl in the traditional Indian society. Men in her short stories are shown in traditional roles while women are presented as symbols of protest. Her female protagonists break all traditional bonds and sometimes even choose independence instead of fulfilment in marriage and motherhood.

Like Appachana, Indrani Aikath-Gyaltsen's short stories also deal with subjugation and low status of women in India. Her collection, *Daughters of the House* (1991) contains three short stories and a novella. Stories in this collection deal with evocation of a small village, problems of factory workers, depressing state of women in Indian society particularly women who belong to the rural and working class and plight of widow in conventional Hindu society.

Bulbul Sharma's first collection of short stories, *My Sainted Aunts* was published in 1992. It contains eight lengthy short stories, giving her an opportunity to develop memorable characters. They have been painted with the stroke of pathos. Her characters belong to the older generation in Bengal. As in "The Child Bride" she focuses here on the feelings of seven year old dark complexioned a rich daughter of land owner and her other stories, too, focus on women issues and suppression of women in India society. Generally stories are women centred except "R.C's First Holiday" which focuses on male character. Although stories are women-centred, melancholic portrayal of womanhood is absent in this collection. *The Perfect Woman* (1994) her second collection of short stories, also deals with the "Woman Question" but the women characters here are passive in comparison to the earlier collections. In her third collection *The Anger of Aubergines* (1991) she introduces recipes for cooking common Indian dishes. The work can be compared to Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolates* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel, *Mistress of Spices*. The purpose of the writer is to provide an opportunity to participate in everyday activity of cooking, serving and eating, which dominates the lives of these characters. Bulbul Sharma provides an original perspective on Indian womanhood and her portrayal is not stereotyped.

Neelum Sharan Gour's first collection *Grey Pigeon and Other Stories* (1993) contains nineteen short stories. They deal with a variety of themes and the author has adopted various literary styles in them. "A New Year's Party" which has uncertain ending and "Coming of Age" are set in the British India. The former deals with ambience of a Memsahib's party. These two stories are serious but "A Gift for Prince Charles" is humorous. "Notes and Chapters" belongs to the category of "silver fork fiction" because it presents a picture of a part of a decaying princely state through the

eyes of a young researcher. She uses scholarly jargons in this story but the narrator slowly abandons when history and legend merge together. Gour's stories show her understanding and awareness of past and present of India. "Two Women, Two Trees" and "A Lane in Lucknow" are short stories from her second collection, *Winter companion and other stories* (1997). The former deals with woman's sense of loss and the latter deals with the life of an Urdu poet and the latter is one of the best short stories of Gour. The title story is about two old women who meet in a park unlike other women writers of short fiction her short stories are not women-centred and not related to women issues. Like Shobha De' and others she is not writing about the metropolis. That is why her short fiction is also known as "Moffassil Fiction".

A collection of short stories entitled *Hot Death and Cold Soup* by Manjula Padmanabhan, a leading cartoonist, was published in 1996. Stories in this collection are generally long and marked by pinching humour. Most of the stories are related to problems of communication and show that it is due to cultural barriers, class and gender differences. Certain stories also highlight gender perception.

Manju Kak is a well known painter. Her first collection, *First Flight in Colonelpura* was published in 1994. The subtitle of this book is "Short Stories", but it is divided into twelve chapters which are interlinked with one another. It focuses on the consciousness of a narrator, a young girl who grows up in the course of the book and notices the changes that have come in the town of Colonelpura. It is like Narayan's Malgudi. In the same manner small - town India is recreated in *Requiem for an Unsung Revolutionary and Other Stories* (1996). Subhadra Sen Gupta's Collection, *Good Girls Make Bad News* (1993) reveals a sensitive awareness of Indian society Kalpana Swaminathan's collection *Cryptic Death and Other Stories* (1997) contains detective short stories which are narrated by a young woman and

cases are solved by her aunt who is modelled on Agatha Christie's Miss Marple. Swaminathan has presented Indian setting in her stories in a very realistic manner. In the same way Reena Gupta's Collection, *The Midnight and Other Ghost Stories* (1999), her short fiction can be compared with short fiction of Ruskin Bond. The stories in this collection are written in a lucid style and can also be read by children.

As has been mentioned earlier, Jai Nimbkar's first collection, *The Lotus Leaves and Other Stories* was published in 1972, her second collection *The Phantom Bird and Other Stories* was published in 1993. Stories in this collection are remarkable for the sensitive treatment of day-to-day life in India by the author. Padma Perera who was earlier known as Padma Hejmadi published a new collection of short stories *Birthday, Deathday* in 1986. Her first collection *Coigns of Vantage* appeared in 1972. Stories in the second collection are more mature in terms of treatment of subject matter, theme and style in comparison to the earlier one; they show development in the author.

Like Desai and Nimbkar, some of the younger women writers have published novels as well as short stories and Githa Hariharan is one of them. Her first collection of short stories, *The Art of Dying* was published in 1993. It contains twenty short stories and they are pessimistic in tone. Her stories reveal pessimistic outlook of life in India. The title story is based on a mother and a daughter relationship and "Remains of the Feast" shows relationship between an old woman, dying from cancer and her teenage great grand daughter. Like her novels she focuses on different generations of women in Indian family system in her short stories.

Nina Sibal's first novel *Yatra* (1989) was followed by *The Secret Life of Gujjar Mal and Other Stories* (1991). The short stories in this collection highlight the middle-class Indian society. Shobha De has earned the nickname of "Porn Queen"

because of her novels. The social realism of her novels is submerged in erotic details but her collection of short stories, *Small Betrayals* (1995) is her most serious work. Stories in this collection reveal her roots in the middle-class society of India, which does not roll about in sex. Anita Nair made her debut in Indian English writing with *Satyr of the Subway and Eleven Other Stories* (1997). It was followed by a novel, *The Better Man* (1999). Deepa Shah's collection of short stories was published before her novel, *The Solitude of Surabhi* (1997). Manorama Mathai's first book, *Lilies that Fester* published in 1988 contains a novella and four short stories. Her stories focus on inequality present in Indian society, particularly the treatment of women and the poor.

Esther David also started her career as a novelist in 1997 with the publication of her first novel *The Walled City* but her second book published in 1999 is a short fiction, *By the Sabarmati* contains twentytwo women-centred short stories. The stories are realistic in treatment and present a clear picture of down trodden Indian society. According to the author, these stories are based on real life stories of poor women whom she had met. Men are presented in a bad light except in last story and voice of pessimism emerges from there stories and the tone is depressing. Lakshmi Kannan's three collections of short stories: *Rhythms: A Collection of Short Stories* (1986), *Parijata and Other Stories* (1993) all are based on Tamil works. The stories in these collections present a critique of life in contemporary India. The recurring themes of these stories are gender biases, inequality and dual standards for children due to gender differences and woman's responsibility for inequality and the exploitation of woman in society. Kannan's stories present the sensibility of the middle class in a lucid and poetic language.

Nandita C. Puri's *Nine on Nine* (2005) is her first collection of short stories and contains nine short stories. Her short stories are a fictionalization of reality, and they show that she observes too much, and so minutely. The character of Mrs. D'souza in "The Piano Teacher" is a result of superb craftsmanship. "Pages from Indulata Debi's Diary" is remarkable for its style and form. It is biography, history and at the same time perfect form of short story. In the story titled "An Arranged Marriage". She shows that an arranged marriage falls tragically short of expectations when in a beauty parlour, friendly gossip enearths uncomfortable truths. In one of her short stories she presents the predicament of woman in pre-independence India and presents a woman as achiever (a young widow fights to succeed in a profession that is an exclusive male pressure). Underlying Puri's tongue-in-check humour and buoyant tone is a rare perception of human nature. Her protagonists are women with motives that are at times comprehensible, and at others, baffling - as fall of surprises as life itself. She has captured verbal nuances of different communities and has covered a wide range of subjects.

Besides the women writers surveyed earlier, there are other women writers who have contributed to this form. There are so many collections in this category which includes Vasantha Ravindran's *Old House and Other Stories* (1982), Prema Sastri's *The Blue Convertible and Other Stories* (1985) Joyshri Lobo's *The Untouchables Wife and Other Stories* (1989), Prema Ramakrishnan's *The Homemaker and Other Stories* (1994), Sunipa Basu's *The Man in the Red Maruti and Other Stories* (1994) Anjana Muralidharan's *The Coconut Cutter and Other Stories* (2000), Chandramani Narayanswamy's *Better Late than Never and Other Stories* (1994), *The Second Judgment* (1996), *The Shape of Things to Come* (1996) and *The Price of a Vote and Other Stories* (1997). The women writers of the above mentioned

collections present the contemporary picture of India. They have not attempted to play exotic aspect of the country, because they have written stories for Indian audience. The language of these collections is simple and lucid and there is no experimentation with the language and form.

The short story writers of today idealise the victimized of society for the selfless, self-effacing, noble qualities that set these lonely, socially rejected characters apart from the selfish majority who in their self-absorption fail to even notice the needs of others. The marginalised and victimised of writers with feminist leanings are mainly women. The ability of a good writer or artist to enable ordinary men and women like us to see and feel the suffering and pain of others is something that will continue to intrigue us. The stories of such writers have the capacity to draw us into the shrunken world of the marginalized and to observe them in their full magnificence and beauty. The language of narration is simple but the stories have the complex energy of an epiphany and subtly reveal multilayered facets about human nature and existence.

The 1990s seems to be the decade of the Indian English short story; there is a plethora of collection of short stories in different Indian languages which were published during this decade. Indian short stories do not fulfil the usual criterion of a Western short story, that is being centred around one critical or intense moment, nor are they lavish in the description of the external.

In the short stories of these women writers various images of the Indian women emerge. They highlight the exploitation of women by men and the neglected condition of women in society. By placing women in such situations and making them frank to expose the hypocrisies of men and the ironies existing in society. They want “to disturb society out of its complacency” (Das 139-150).

The women short story writers of recent times select precisely those themes that give their writings a vividness and compelling power to arouse and disturb. The female subject destabilizes readers' notion of what is female and feminine and dislocates the given Indian cultural and social relations. The woman is the central figure in their works, and they present the predicament of women with a fine feminine sensibility. A typically feminine woman grows in the course of the story and acquires traits of a feminist. Like Simone de Beauvoir, the women writers feel that "woman is a female in the extent that she feels herself as such" (69).

They seem to protest when the woman in their stories is exploited. There is a central woman character in all their stories and the woman curiously is referred to as "she" without a name. One wonders whether it is deliberately done to suggest a type rather than an individual. Though of the traditional mould, in the beginning the women emerge as strong individuals within and without, with a characteristic twist at the end of the story Gerda Lerner in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* expresses hope for a whole which will "enable women and men to free their minds from patriarchal thought and at least build a world free of dominance and hierarchy and a world that is truly human" (229).

But that which is most relevant in the Indian context is the one relating to the freedom from dependence syndrome. The male dominated society has always favoured the description of a woman as are depending on either the father, brother, husband or the son. Males are seen as symbols of corrosion, the destroyers of feminine chastity and even of "the essential human goodness", as Anisur Rehman remarks, the 'she' in all the stories thinks and acts independently. When she is face to face with indignities or pushed against the wall, one can see the feminist in her responding to the situation.

The short story writers of the 20th century had generally found the Indian tale to be admirably suited to their purpose of recreating vividly the contemporary social scene of traditional marriages and of male domination in such wedlocks. As Marilyn French reported in her article “Women and Work: India”:

Most Indian women are married young by their families to men they have not met before; they then have not met before; they then move to their husband's parent's home, where they are essentially servants.
(174 - 201)

As already stated before, the contemporary Indian English women writers of short fiction have shown their serious concern with the depiction of women in literature and have expressed restlessness regarding the traditional positioning of women. In this connection Helen Cixous asserts:

Women must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently from their bodies - for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal, woman must put herself into this text - as into the word and into history - by her own movements. (245)

As mentioned above, they depicted women as central characters grappling with their conflicting situation. According to these women writers, women's education and their economic independence have given rise to conflicts in society torn between traditional values and the new outlook. It is interesting to note that whereas some writers are advocating change, others are not quite sure whether the economic independence is giving women self-confidence or making them wayward. But generally these women writers disdain spineless women characters and expect from them to react and fight for their rights. Some writers like Sashi Deshpande see women

as individuals not as types. Hence, they want them to stand-up for themselves and reject the traditional subjugation and victimization. Some of the woman writers like Dina Mehta enjoy the tit-for-tat tactics. She presents male's plight that has been paid in same coin. Some women writers are bold and frank in presenting life as it is.

They show that woman is trying to find her 'self' and that she has crossed many a hurdle, passed through the ferment of rebellion and has become a conscious agent of change. In the period just after the independence the major concern of women writers was to bring before society the plight of the powerless and uneducated woman. They focused on self-confidence and self-dependence through economic independence, and their aim was to generate consciousness. The female characters depicted by the women writers of this period do not reject the patriarchal system altogether but they make a conscious effort for the betterment of the condition of women within the patriarchal system. They have praised self-sacrifice and other virtues, and focused even on the problems of women and their purpose was to awaken the reading public.

Analysis of the short fiction of the latter half of '60s and the decade of '70s shows a kind of ambivalence in woman's roles. Some writers have shown intellectual woman has been suspect and some portray as an unattractive male dominating and having her way while others show pitfalls in path. Aggression and assertion have given women self-confidence but in this bargain she has been made an object of ridicule in the orthodox society.

A major change has been noticed in the short fiction dealing with women. The picture is becoming clearer; they are asserting their identity. Earlier they had accepted the image imposed by the male but now they want to break that stereo-typed image. This new found identity is responsible for their suffering.

This educated, employed and enlightened woman has established her personality. Now the condition of man is no more supreme in the family. Her condition is not secondary. She doesn't want to be marginal in the family and society. This has given rise to conflicts in man-woman relationship and women short fiction writers present this conflict.

Women short fiction writers have depicted the condition of institution of marriage and show that attitude regarding love, sex and marriage is undergoing change. Female characters in some short stories find that they are trapped in loveless and lifeless marriage and they crave for inner satisfaction and emotional support. So they are challenging the established norms and taboos of society. In this fight they are alone and alienated.

This alienation and aggression slowly gives way to the new woman reaching her goal. There is great shift in depiction of female characters (women in post - independence short stories). The social and political events influenced the life of woman, and contemporary woman is caught up between tradition and modernity, self-assertion and self-effacement, economic independence and psychological dependence. Post - independence women short fiction writers are giving voice to just order (new order) for women in society. Now the traditional image is gradually fading away but still the woman is caught in her past.

A few critics believed that this concept of 'new woman' is imported from the West but surveys conducted by sociologists show that it is the result of changing social and political condition of Indian society and the breaking of joint family into nuclear family. So the emergence of "new woman" is the by-product of socio-cultural changes taking place in Indian society.

But this new woman is striving for identity of her own and it is not copy of the model of the West. In West it is now question of identity and equality but here woman is caught up between old and new values. Some sort of phase of transition still exists. That is why in some short stories writers like Shashi Deshpande one can find 'woman-in-transition' performing dual role in society- as an educated employed modern woman outside the family and as a traditional woman in the family. Here question of identity secondary and survival is primary. So the short fiction by women as a genre registers the imbalances in society from the point of a woman.

These women writers are also showing that the sexually free wayward woman who is imitating male is not a new woman but new woman has to achieve her real self - which is the real power as in short stories of Shashi Deshpande.

Since independence, short fiction as a genre, particularly by Indian English woman writers has matured and nothing has escaped from this genre. Like a sensitive barometer, it has registered each and every changing moment of society. The changing pattern of life in cities and towns, degradation of values, disintegration of joint family system, generation gap (as in "Winterscape") attitude towards love, sex, marriage, invasion of feminist ideology and tussle between traditional and modern ideology women writers have focused on every issue that concerns society in general and woman in particular.

Short fiction by contemporary Indian English women writers is not only influenced by feminism but it is also influenced by other movements / thoughts like Marxism, existentialism, realism, naturalism and surrealism. Although these movements / thoughts are Western in origin but they have been used to suit Indian social environment.

But majority of women writers including Gauri Deshpande, who is frank and rebellious, doesn't approve Western model of feminism. She believes that Indian feminists have to look into social history of Indian and then they have to invent their own model of feminism. The present investigation deals with women's short stories and their short stories are influenced by Feminism, so a compendious discussion of feminism as a theory is present in the following paragraphs.

Feminism concerns itself with women's inferior position in society and with the discrimination encountered by women because of their sex. All feminists call for changes in the social, economic political or cultural order, to reduce and eventually overcome this discrimination against women. Although there are social similarities, it is difficult to come up with any other 'common ground' between the different strands of feminism. According to Delmar, "one cannot assume that agreement or feminist unity underlies the extreme fragmentation of contemporary feminism" (13).

It is difficult to define feminism in terms of concepts, but it can be better defined in terms of historical origin. This term is relatively a modern one - controversies exist over when and where it was for the first time used, but this term seems to have been first time used in 1871 in a French medical text to describe cessation in development of the sexual organ and characteristics in male patients, who were perceived as thus suffering from 'feminization' of their bodies (Fraisie 1985). After that, Alexander Dumas, a French writer, republican and antifeminist used it in a pamphlet on woman adultery entitled *Phomme-Femme*. Earlier this was a medical term to describe feminization of male. Later on in political terms it was used to describe virilisation of women. This concept of gender confusion in the 19th century was very fearing one, and it is still present in some modified form or in variation in

today's era and it is challenging natural differences between men and women. The term feminism was not introduced but was rather adopted by the theorist.

In the mid of the 19th century, the women's rights movement started in the U.K. and the U.S. the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 and the Declaration of Sentiments which claimed the principles of equality and liberty for women in the American Declaration of Independence. In 1840s we saw emergence of women suffrage movements in U.K. and U.S. Elizabeth Lady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony founded the National Woman Suffrage Association.

But even before the emergence of this organised movements and woman Suffrage Association in mid of the 19th century in different parts of Europe particularly in U.K. and U.S., women had been voicing their silence about their inequalities and exploitation, injustices done to them and their social condition and not only breaking their silence but campaigning for change in the social set up. A *Vindication of the Rights* by Mary Wollstone Craft published in 1794, it advocates the rights of women and at the same time Olype de Gauges and Theroigne de Mericourt were fighting for the same cause in France. It can be said that women had started fighting for their rights before mid of the 19th century but the revolt against patriarchy acquired an organised form in the mid of the 19th century.

The term feminism emerged long after women started questioning their inferior position in society and demanded betterment / improvement and change in social status. Even many groups who were championing the rights of women were not using this term even though the term was already in circulation. In the '60s and the '70s many women's liberation organization were not using this term, i.e., they were not calling themselves Feminist. It was used for specific group. According to Delmar,

“the term Feminist had a restricted use in relation to specific concerns and specific groups” (13).

Of late, this term has come to be used for all women’s rights groups without any hesitation but it has given rise to another problem: what criteria are to be chosen in deciding whether particular group, action or person is a “feminist”? Here, the question is, can people call all theories and social political movements that improve women’s social condition whether intentionally or unintentionally Feminist? Or must there be a conscious intent to undertake “Feminist” activity? If the first case is adopted then the meaning of feminism gets almost diffused. Similarly there are so many women’s political organization which do not have any specific purpose should they be called feminist. A positive answer to this question will also lead towards the diffusion of meaning. There are some theorists of feminism who offer very tight definition of feminism:

There are those who claim that feminists does have a complex of ideas about women, specific to or emanating from feminists. This means that it should be possible to separate out feminism and feminists from the multiplicity of those concerned with women issues. It is by no means absurd to suggest that you don’t have to be a feminist to support women’s rights to equal treatment, and that not all those supportive of women’s demands are feminists. In this light feminism can claim its own history, its own practices, its own ideas, but feminists can make no claim to an exclusive interest in or copyright over problems affecting women. Feminism can thus be established as a field (and this even if skepticism is still needed in the face of claims or demands for a unified feminism), but cannot claim women as its domain.(Delmar 13)

It can be said that feminism can claim to be a field with its own ideas, history and practice. However, history and practice are far from unified and still it is matter of great debate but its historical classification will be helpful in understanding of this thought but is should not be taken as a fixed yardstick.

A study of feminism in its historical context, reveals that strong feminist movements at different period of time rose as a series of 'waves'. The 'first wave' of feminism refers to the later-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century feminist movements. The first wave of feminism was concerned with the equal rights for women particularly rights of suffrage. 'Second Wave' of feminism refers to resurgence of feminist movements in the late 1960s and 70s. The 'second-wave' was centered on the women's inequality. This phase showed women's inequality in politics, family, work and sexuality. It is also known as violent phase of feminism, phase of protest or phase of combat. This historical classification doesn't mean that outside these two waves there was no movement but shows there was less feminist activity before first wave. There are several instances present in the history that could be termed as Feminist activity or movement before suffrage movement of the 19th century and the 20th century. Between first wave and second wave the feminist activity was not dead but only voices were less heard. Similarly first and second wave refers to group of different voices of feminist thought under a general heading of first wave and second wave. The diversity which is present in these two phases has given one label.

The historical study doesn't mean that feminism emerged in waves but is a continuous process of thought and action. This classification doesn't mean that feminism can be classified historically and outside these two phases there was no feminist struggle. It is only for the sake of taxonomical convenience.

Some theorists classify feminism into different theoretical families. Basically, they categorize feminisms and feminists, Marxist or Socialist Feminism and radical feminism. Liberal feminists include all those who campaign for the equal rights for women within the framework of liberal state, arguing that the theoretical basis on which the state is built is sound but that the rights and privileges it confers must be extended to women to give them equal citizenship with men; Marxist and Socialist feminists link gender inequality and women's oppression to the capitalist system of production and the division of labour consistent with this system; and radical feminists see men's domination of women as the result of the system of patriarchy, which is independent of all social structures - that is, it is not a product of capitalism. Another group is 'dual systems' - feminists who combine features of the radical and the Marxist feminist thinking. To this, recently, a few more categories of Feminism have been added: psychoanalytical feminism, post structuralist or post modern feminism, black feminism and so on. Feminist insights have been applied to literature and have produced interesting results.

Feminist criticism means the applications to literature of the principles of feminist theory. It focuses on two points: 'the woman as reader' and 'the woman as writer'. Elaine Showalter in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" put it as follows:

The first type is concerned with ... woman as the consumer of male-produced literature, and with the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of its textural codes ... Its subjects include images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions of and the misconception about women in criticism, and the fissures in male constructed literary history. (128)

When feminist criticism focuses on 'the woman as writer,' it concerns itself with:

Woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, genres and structures of literatures by women. Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective literary career; literary history; and ofcourse, studies of particular writers and works. (Showalter 128)

Basically it addresses two questions. “Do men and women read in different ways?” and “Do they write in different ways?” If one follows Elaine Showalter’s categorization, the first type of feminist criticism asks the following questions: What sort of roles did female characters play in literature? With what sort of themes were they associated? What are the implicit presuppositions of a given text with regard to its readers? (Upon closer inspections, many texts clearly assume that their readers are males - just like commercials in which fast cars are presented by seductive young women).

Feminist criticism concerned itself with the stereotypical roles of women and offered a critique of this essentialist representation. According to Feminist criticism, this stereotyped representation is the result of cultural hegemony. Not only does it scrutinize the texts by male authors but female authors also come under close scrutiny for their representation of female characters in a stereotypical manner.

Feminist criticism can be traced to the work of Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) but chiefly it grew out of the women’s movement in the ‘60s. The women’s movement at first tended to hold that women were pretty much the same as men and therefore, should be treated equally. But much recent feminist criticism has emphasised and explored the difference between women and men. Because the experiences of women and men (sexes) are different, the argument goes that their

values and sensibilities and their responses to literature are different too. Further, literature written by women is different from literature written by men. Literature produced by women is seen by some feminist critics as embodying the experiences of a minority culture, a group marginalized by the dominant male culture. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall Paper" (1892) and Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" 1916 are examples of differing ways in which males and females perceive the world.

Since its emergence in the late 1960s, feminist criticism has undergone a series of significant development and changes, moving from a concentration on the representation of women in literature to the promotion and analysis of the neglected women writers (Gynocriticism), to a wide ranging theoretical critique of traditional thought and social practice. The consistent strain throughout this process has been the focus on PATRIARCHY, rule by men, and its cultural correlates. Feminist criticism sees itself as an extension of the social and political goals of feminism in general.

A seminal text in feminist literary theory emerged in the '60s; it was Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) which discussed the relegation of women in literature and life to the category of the "Other". De Beauvoir augmented her argument of the literary representation of woman as the "Other" by foregrounding the portrayal of women in the works of Stendhal and D. H. Lawrence.

De Beauvoir's argument was further developed by Mary Ellman in her *Thinking About Women*. Kate Millet in her *Sexual Politics* (1970) is also on the same line of thinking and shows the development of De Beauvoir's approach. The book offers a critique of Norman Mailer's writings, particularly focussing on the characterization of the image of women and due to this it became a *cause célèbre*. Millet's book also shows a break with the critical tradition of the time, not only in its

feminist subject matter but also in its abandonment of any pretense of objectivity. Millet was angry and made no attempt to hide it.

Millett emphasized the issue of the distinction between sex and gender in feminist thought. Sex determines the biological difference between men and women while gender refers to the cultural differences that are the product of social conditioning. This distinction was critical in reconsidering women writers who had traditionally been viewed as usurpers in the “male” domain of creativity.

Feminists cite, Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) for presenting the problems faced by women writers and their treatment in literary history. In this work, she presents Judith Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s fictional sister, as a symbol of women who have been prohibited from freely exercising their creativity, portraying her as one who would have been the creative equal of her brother, but who never had an opportunity to express herself.

Feminist critics rightly point out that men have established the conventions and canon of literature. Broadly speaking, in this patriarchal or male dominated body of literature, men are valued for being strong and active, whereas women are expected to be weak and passive. Thus in the world of fairy tales, the admirable male is the energetic hero but the admirable female is the passive sleeping beauty. (Active women such as the wicked step mother or a disguised form of the same thing - the witches are generally villainous (there are ofcourse some exceptions such as Gretel, in “Hansel and Gretel”).) A woman hearing or reading the story of Sleeping Beauty or of Little Red Riding Hood (rescued by the powerful woodcutter) or any other work in which women seem to be trivialized will respond differently from a man. For instance, a woman may be socially conditioned into admiring sleeping beauty; but only at great cost to her mental well - being. A more resistant female reader may

recognise in herself no kinship with the beautiful passive sleeping beauty and may respond to the story indignantly.

Another way to put it is this: The male reader perceives a romantic story, but the resistant female reader perceives a story of oppression. Here it becomes necessary to mention such as *Gender and Reading* (1985), eds. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schencikart and Judith Fetterley's book, *The Resisting Reader* (1978). These works deal with the discussion of the ways in which, or has been argued, women ought to read.

Feminist criticism is concerned not only with the depiction of women and men in a male dominated literary canon and with the female responses to these images but also with another topic women's writing. Women have had fewer opportunities than men to become writers of fiction, poetry and drama. For one thing, they have been less well educated in the things that the male patriarchy valued - but even when they have managed to write, men sometimes have neglected their work simply because it is by a woman. Feminists have further argued that certain forms of writing have been the province of women - journals, diaries, and letters - predictably, these forms have not been given adequate space in the traditional male oriented canon.

In 1972, in an essay entitled "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision", the poet and essayist Adrienne Rich summed up the matter:

A radical critique of literature feminist in its impulse would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see and therefore live - a fresh ... We need to know the writing of the past and

know it differently than we have ever known it : not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.(150)

As mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, Feminist Criticism emphasises ‘the woman as writer’. In that condition it studies the tradition of female writing. In this connection Hans Bertens in his *Literary Theory: The Basics* observes:

The textual focus that we find in studies of how literary representation of women are gendered also characterizes attempts to establish a specifically female tradition or specifically female traditions - in writing by women. A famous example with regard to the specificity of nineteenth century female writing in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Mad woman in the Attic : The Woman Writers and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979). For Gilbert and Gubar the limitations - social and otherwise - that a nineteenth century female writer faced led to an obsessive interest in these limited options. In the work of these writers that interest expressed itself is an ‘obsessive imagery of confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists feel trapped and sickened both by suffocating alternatives and by the culture that had created them’ (Gilbert and Gubar 64) An example in the madwoman in the attic of Gilbert and Gubar title: the supposedly mad wife that James employer and future husband Rochester keeps locked up in the attic in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). Female critics because of their personal experience of the workings of patriarchy, are arguably better equipped to bring to light and analyse such typically female preoccupations. Not unexpectedly, then, the attempts to establish a female literary tradition fairly soon led to calls

for a specifically female form of literary studies, for ways of reading and theorizing that could tell as how typically female experience has over the ages been reflected in literature by women. (99-100)

Feminist criticism / literary theory focuses particularly on (feminist) female themes, genres, styles and also on the origin and development of larger female traditions. This search for female tradition has benefited literary studies in general. Feminist criticism discovered forgotten female authors, rehabilitated ignored female authors and it has encouraged women to voice their silence through the writing of personal nature - letters, diaries, travel, journals, autobiographies. It has redefined and expanded literary field. It has expanded the canon and rehabilitated forgotten genres like domestic novel, and constructed a dynamic canon of women writing within the larger literary tradition.

As feminist criticism points out, women writers were ignored because their work was evaluated on the basis of the norms established by male critics, and they were not accepted in the main tradition because of male prejudices and biases. These anti-female biases were present in academic circles. So feminist criticism not only scrutinizes literature but also the criticism of women's writing at institutional level. Under the pressure of feminist scrutiny in the first two decades, now this Institutional level is forced to recognize the personal experiences of the female (critic) under the light of which they analysed any text which was regarded as obscure.

Feminist criticism discards the notion of impersonality in literary matters. According to feminist critics, this approach is down right irresponsible. They are hard or impersonalist and defenders of impersonality in literary matters. In their use of subjective material or autobiographical approach, female academics have followed the trend set by earlier female writers and poets such as Sylvia Plath (1932-1963). Anne

Sexton (1928-1974) and Andrienne Rich (1929-). After the mid 'sixties, women writers have focused on personal experiences, increasingly incorporating female sexuality, child birth, mothering, rape and other specifically female themes into their work.

Feminist criticism also concerned itself with the connections between the writer's biography and her life. Suzanne Tuhasz in her Introduction to *Feminist critics Read Emily Dickinson* (1983), puts it this way:

The central assumption of feminist criticism is that gender informs the nature of art, the nature of biography and the relation between them. Dickinson is a woman poet, and this fact is integral to her identity. Feminist criticism and sensitivity to the components of female experience in general and to Dickinson's identity as a woman generates essential insights about her ... Attention to the relationship of Feminist criticism to disregard it further strengthens those divisions continually created by traditional criticism, so that nothing about the woman writer can be seen whole. (1-5)

Another offshoot of British Feminism is Marxist Feminism. In Marxist's perspective, history is dominated by class struggle and will end when classless society has been achieved. According to this school, women are under privileged class but it ignored the experience of women. Its primary task was to open the complex relationships between gender and economy. Althusser's concept of ideology and interpellation proved useful for feminist literary studies and film studies. According to Althusser, people experienced themselves as complete individuals (concrete subjects) through ideology and ideology is inescapable because it is what actually gives them what they experience as their individuality. Althusserian feminism evaluates how

literary texts film, commercials, and so on interpellate their readers or their audience and position them with regard to gender. He raises two questions. In what way art, literature and recorded arts try to manoeuvre audience through specific strategy of narration? And how do they persuade female audience to accept liberal humanist ideology that so clearly disadvantages them?

Although it is charged with being insensitive to different classes of women, Black Marxist feminist critics criticise it for not eschewing racial differences. But its main issues as found in literary context are present in Cora Kaplan's critique of that radical Feminism and of Michele Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminism Analysis* (1980). In this, Barrett presents Marxist feminist analysis of gender representation. Raman Seldon pointed out three issues in this context:

First she applauds Virginia Woolf's materialists argument that the condition under which men and women produce literature are materially different and influence the form and content of what they write: we cannot separate questions of gender stereotyping from their material conditions in history. This means that liberation will not come merely from changes in culture. Second, the ideology of gender affects the way the writings of men and women are read and how canons of excellence are established. Third, feminist critics must take account of the fictional nature of literary texts and not indulge in rampant moralism by condemning all male authors for the sexism of their books (vide Millite) and approving all women authors for raising the issue of gender. Texts have no fixed meanings: interpretations depend on the situation and ideology of the reader. Nevertheless, women can and

should try to assert their influence upon the way in which gender is defined and represented culturally. (135)

Marxist feminist criticism criticizes materialist feminist criticism which escapes the 'tragic' feminist critics who project women as universally good and universally powerless. It criticises the narrow literariness of Gilbert and Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, which ignored social and economic factors in construction of gender roles. Penny Boumeahla and Cora Kaplan brought the approach of Althusser and Macherey in Marxist feminist criticism in order to understand the historical foundation of gender categories. However, it is not at highest point at present because of postmodernity and also because of over ridding debate between Anglo-American and French one.

French Feminist criticism derives from Simone de Beauvoir's perception of woman as 'Other' to man and its aim is to break down conventional, male constructed stereotypes of sexual difference (stereotypes and differences which are manipulated socially and culturally in ways which cause one group to dominate other). It has focused on language as the domain in which such stereotypes are structured, and evidence of the liberating sexual difference which may be described in a specifically 'women's language' Literature is one highly significant discourse in which this can be perceived and mobilized.

The major exponents of French feminist criticism are Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. These writers have been influenced by the discourse of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, by linguistic theories and by the Postructuralist accounts of language and human subjectivity. Irigary and Kristeva, for example, take very seriously Lacan's idea that rather than the subject speaking language, language in fact speaks the subject (we cannot say "I" without language, we cannot have a concept of

self hood without words). They concentrate therefore on linguistic formations, and on their psychic effects speaking subjects, motivated in part by the fact that French is absolutely gender - inflicted language. The subjects they discuss are not always women but women will have a different response to language and culture which defines them as lack and as 'Other' and which is the language which shares up the patriarchal law of the father. They seek, then, the gaps and fissures of language into which the displaced feminized (though not always female) subject may insert him/herself.

Kristeva coins a new meaning for the word 'Semiotic'. For her the word is a description of language, its silences, elisions, ellipses, its rhythms and sounds rather than the semantic functions. She sees the semiotic as the space of femininity. Where gynocritics often accuanted a mimetic relationship between literature and reality, to the extent that it could not properly account for the textuality of avant-garde writing by women, the writings of French feminist have, in different ways, provided tools for thinking about experimental writing, whatever the gender of the writer or character described.

French feminism has been deeply influenced by Lacan's reworking of Freud's concept of 'Penis envy' and it is responsible for 'castration complex'. Ernest Jones calls it 'Phallogentric' a term widely adopted by feminists when discussing male domination. Juliet Mitchell, however, in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1975) defended Freud, arguing that 'Psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society by analysis of one'. According to her, Freud is describing the mental representation of social reality and not the reality itself. Her defence of Freud helped provide the basis for contemporary Psychoanalytic feminism, alongwith the Lacanian - influenced works of Jacqueline Rose and Shoshana Felman.

Feminist criticism also concerned itself with the examination of gender roles.

As Hans Bertens has summed up:

To put what I have just sketched in some what different terms: This type of feminist criticism leads to a thorough examination of gender roles. Gender has to do not with how females (and males) really are, but with the way that a given culture or subculture sees them, how they are culturally constructed. To say that women have two breasts is to say something about their biological nature, to say something about what it is to be a female; to say that women are naturally timid, or sweet, or intuitive or dependent, or self-pitying is to construct a role for them. It tells us how the speaker wants to see them what traditionally has been called 'feminine', then is a cultural construction, a gender role that has been culturally assigned to countless generations of women. The same holds for masculinity, with its connotations of strength, rationality, stoicism, and self-reliance. Like femininity, traditional masculinity is a gender role that has far less to do with actual males than with the wishful thinking projected into the heroes of Westerners, hard-boiled private eyes, and British secret agents. Masculinity, too is a cultural construction. We can see this, for instance, in one of the traditional representation of homosexuality in which maleness and masculinity are uncoupled. Although homosexuals are male, they are often portrayed as feminine that is lacking masculinity. (98)

He further says:

Feminism, then, has been focused right from the beginning on gender because a thorough revision of gender roles seemed the most effective way of changing the power relations between men and women. Since no cue in their right mind will want to give serious power to a person who must be timid, dependent, irritational, and self-pitying because she is a woman, the effort to purge the culture of such gendered stereotyping is absolutely critical (It is all the more crucial because thinking in terms of gender stereotypes has rather brought a good many timid, dependent, irritational and self-pitying males when everybody automatically assumed to be 'masculine' to positions of great and dangerous power.) Feminism has politicized gender- by showing its constructed nature - and put it firmly on the agenda of the later twentieth century. Moreover, after its initial focus on the gendered representation of women (and men) in Western culture, it has effectively widened the issue and shown how seemingly neutral references, descriptions, definitions and so on are in fact gendered and always according to the same pattern. A masculine gendering is supposed to evoke positive connotations; a feminine gendering is supposed to evoke negative ones. Feminism has shown how the binary opposition - to use the structuralist term for such pairs - is pervasively present in the way we think about nature, emotion, science, action (or non-action), art and so on. (98-99)

Feminist criticism deals with the Lesbian and Gay Criticism. In other words, it can be said that Lesbian and Gay criticism have their roots in it. Lesbian and gay criticism introduced many questions, and they are exploring newer developments.

Before coming to some questions that lesbian and gay critics address, it becomes necessary here to mention that they are not symmetrical. Lesbian and gay relationship themselves are not symmetrical. Society has traditionally been more tolerant of or blinder to lesbianism than male homosexuality. Further, lesbian theory has tended to see more affinities with feminist theory rather than with the gay theory; that is the emphasis has been more on gender (male/female) rather than on sexuality (homosexuality/bisexuality/heterosexuality). On the other hand, some gays and lesbians have been writing what is now being called Queer Theory. Some of the questions that this criticism addresses are the following:

- ❑ Do lesbians and gays read in ways that differ from the ways straight people read?
- ❑ Do they write in ways that differ from those of straight people?
- ❑ How have straight writers portrayed lesbians and gays and how have lesbian and gay writers portrayed straight women and men?
- ❑ What strategies did lesbian and gay writers use to make their work acceptable to a general public in an age when lesbian and gay behaviour was unmentionable?

Gender studies can help to illuminate literary works, but it should be added too, that many gay and lesbian critics write also as activists, reporting their findings not only to enable us to understand and to enjoy the works of, say, Whitman, but also to change society's view of sexuality. Critics like Michael Moon are not satisfied with the earlier critical rhapsodies about Whitman's universalism. That is why he presented a critique of earlier approach in his book *Disseminating Whitman* (1991). It is used to be said that Whitman's celebration of the male body was a sexless celebration of brotherly love in a democracy, but the gist of Moon's view is that we must neither

whitewash Whitman's poems with such high minded talk nor reject them as indecent; rather, people must see exactly what Whitman is saying about a kind of experience that society had shut its eyes to and Whitman's view must be taken seriously.

One assumption in much lesbian and gay critical writing is that although gender greatly influences the ways in which people read, reading is a skill that can be learned and therefore straight people - aided by lesbian and gay critics can learn to read with pleasure and profit, the lesbian and gay writers. The assumption also underlines much feminist criticism, which often assumes that men must stop ignoring books by women and must learn (with the help of feminist critics) how to read them, and in fact, how to read - with newly opened eyes - the sexist writings of men of the past and present.

Still, it is somewhat traditional in its subject as it emphasises that female characters like male counterpart free and autonomous and once the cultural restraints on women have been lifted, they will be self-determining and free like men. Earlier feminist criticism believed that like liberal humanism they speak for all women, regardless of role, culture and class. It is unarguably more modest than liberal humanist assumption that it speaks for all of human kind, but it ignores the experiences of women who belong to different culture, race and class. It also ignored that all feminists are not white, heterosexual, and middle class. In 1977 Barbara Smith argued that black women writers were ignored by academic feminism. According to Audre Lord, a black poet and writer:

By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore difference of race, sexual preference, class and age. There is a preference to homogeneity of experience covered by the words sisterhood that does not in fact exist. (631)

More and more feminist groups – African-American women, Chicana women, Lesbian women are now asserting an identity of their own and are attempting to create separate feminist literary traditions. Particularly, black feminist writers argue that their folk tradition culture has been ignored by white women and it is distinct from white women.

These developments resulted into the division of American feminism and Feminist literary studies into ethnic and sexual identity and brought under close scrutiny its liberalist perspective.

As regards the Indian Literary Feminism, critics believe that first phase emphasised women as readers and insisted on the importance of reading a work as an experience of the reality presented therein. It is marked by analyzing and exposing the distorted pictures of women as stereotypes and archetypes - as symbols of purity, docility, self-effacing denials and selfless angels, or as temptresses, villains and victimisers. The attack was on both men and women writers who created unreal pictures of women. For instance, the 'Sati-Savitri' image has come under close scrutiny. Mulkraj Anand has subverted the Sita myth in his Gauri. He presented his Gauri as self-assertive and not like self-effacing Sita. Desai's Monisha and Maya are not satisfied with their lifeless treatments (as dolls).

Deshpande's Amba in "The Inner Room" is not a mute sufferer like Ambika and Ambalika. These Indian English women writers provide critique of existing situations, situations which explode the myth of the submissive wife. Such ideological moorings are in consonance with the feminist views expressed by such critics as Kate Millet.

The second phase emphasized the relationship between literature and personal experience. They generally placed their works in socio-cultural context and

emphasised mainly on the effect of society, culture and environment on the life and works of women writers. This is the phase of historical biographical feminist literary criticism. Jasbir Jain and Amina Amin criticise the “purdah culture” in their work *Margins of Erasure*.

The next step of Indian Feminist criticism was to study women as writers. Certain women writers like Shashi Deshpande resent being labelled as ‘women’ writers or feminist writers. She doesn’t consider herself as a feminist writer. They argue that in this way they will be cut off from the mainstream and their works will be taken as ‘subculture’ writings. But critics find it necessary to tag this label so as to fight the politics of power and to save women from misinterpretation.

Not only the thematic concerns but also the language used comes under close scrutiny. Margaret Homans pointed out that language is closely related to gender. “Language is not neutral medium, she says, “but rather ... its very construction is based upon the presupposition about gender that devalues women: the speaking or the writing subject is constitutively masculine while the silent object is feminine” (xii). Experience cannot be separated from language; they are not fully co-extensive either.

Indian Feminist criticism is Western in origin. So question arises whether or not it is suitable for Indian English Literature. Spivak raised this question: How can the unexamined universalising discourse of a certain kind of feminism become useful for us? The chief concern for Indian and non-european critics is that the Western theories produce a colonial subject that is constituted by the intellectual practices of the hegemonic First World. According to Spivak, India has a different history, different ethos, different forms of social stratifications and patriarchal domination. The tradition of women writing in India which is traced by Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha is very ancient and recent women’s literature in Indian English Writing alongwith

Indian Languages can well be understood with the indigenous ethos, and not with the Western theories. K. Sachidanandan advocates in his editorial “The Laughing Medusa or The Raging Draupadi”, for the Indian feminist critical approach. He feels that there are certain specific nuances in Indian society and culture for which it is impossible to find a parallel in the West. Indian Literature is specific and as he says, needs:

... specific forms of requirements and constraints and the patterns of the inscribed culture. This must be obvious even to casual leaders of women’s writings in India and in the west, for we come across few parallels not only to Akkamahadevi, Ramabai, Janabai but even to Ashapurna Devi, Lalitambika Antarnjanam, Qurratulain Hyder or Ismat Chughtai in the west. If in the former group it is metaphysical urge for transcendence that makes the difference, in the latter it is uniquely indigenous ethos, outlook and way of life that makes it. Again the modes of patriarchal control and of the gender based divisions of labour have been different in India ... The pervasive presence of religion and caste in the everyday is another factor that over determines our sexual politics as well as our textual politics besides, of course our post colonial situation that leaves its stamp on every aspect of our existence. (5-8)

History, social circumstances, race and ideology: these factors have great impact on the forms of feminine writing in India. In order to understand women’s writing in India, critics will have to be deconstructionists and myth-decipherers, readers of silence and seers of absences to get at the reality of the text (Sachidanandan 8). Feminist perspective should be balanced, and it should avoid myopic vision (Nair) because it is a kind of negation in which woman refuses to see things properly.

According to Jaidev, women are writing sob-stories which anger critics; they are writing angry protest which scare critics. The purpose of Indian feminist criticism is whether they are writing sentimental stories or angry protest; instead of having shocking outlook towards their work, critics should be able to understand the female psyche.

With this possibility in mind, feminists have uncovered a rich repository of long overlooked literature written by women. This recovery, however, has raised questions that have led to a broader theoretical debate involving questions such as the following: will emphasis on a distinctive *écriture féminine* (women's writing) result in ghettoization of women's literature, allowing its existence as a sub-genre but denying its entrance into the main stream? Is there a danger of assuming a monolithic category of "women's literature" with recognizing the important historical and individual differences among women themselves?

Among those who have raised the second question are black feminist critics. Indian feminist critics and Third World feminist critics have suggested that the feminist agenda has been written by middle class white women without any regard for black woman and Asian women's double oppression of race and sex. Similarly, lesbian feminists have critiqued the heterosexual focus of early feminism. Alice Walker, for example, has coined the term 'womanist' to describe a feminist poetics "of colour" and French feminist Monique Wittig has argued that for a feminist "lesbian" is the more appropriate term than woman since it redefines the female sex in a non-patriarchal term. While not necessarily endorsing Walker's and Wittig's specific suggestions, many feminists would agree on the need to break from the constraints of male-dominated discourse.

The new woman / newly born woman is no longer a myth in Indian English Writing, particularly in Indian English Short Fiction by women. They are raising certain questions which are regarded as taboo in the conventional society, subverting the 'Sati-Savitri' stereotyped image of traditional Indian woman, in other words, myths of purity, virginity and motherhood. Women writers are showing concern for new woman / newly born woman and they are also showing that the new woman is not a Western model but she is authentically Indian. In short fiction by women writers, people find feminist thematic concerns. Women characters are presented as mouthpiece of new ideology. In fact their short fiction shows development of feminine sensibility, they offer a new archetype. It can be said that in feminist creative critical corpus complete transformation from the feminine to the female state is discernible. The woman-in-transition of the '70s is now the woman of the female phase.

The book is based on the hypothesis that short fiction by contemporary Indian English Women writers has been highly neglected despite being prolific and significant. Another point is that women writers have similarities and dissimilarities in treatment of subject matter, themes, characterization and style while they are responding to the same time, place and action and their short stories are both traditional and experimental. The critical assessment of their short stories shows the journey of selfhood which is traced through the journey of the short story from the pre-independence era to the present time. The book is based on a study of selected short stories of prominent women writers such as Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and others - Attia Hosain, Raji Narasimhan, Juliette Banerjee, Kamala Das, Nergis Dalal, Githa Hariharan, Anjana Appachana, Shalan Savur, Prema Ramakrishnan and Tara Deshpande. The aim of this book is to provide an overall view of Indian women

writers' short fiction, to analyse them separately from the angle of thematic concerns, characterization and style in the light of feminist theory, their contribution to the genre and status of Indian English short fiction with specific reference to contemporary Indian English women writers.

The present study is spread over the following chapters:

- i. Introduction
- ii. Anita Desai
- iii. Shashi Deshpande
- iv. Other Indian English Women Writers of Short Fiction
- v. Conclusion

The book offers analysis of short fiction by contemporary Indian English women writers in the light of feminist theory, particularly focusing on short stories of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. Chapter-I, Introduction, shows the journey of selfhood which is traced through the journey of the short story from the early post-independence era to present time. The next chapter focuses on the short stories of Anita Desai from the vantage points of pessimism and feminism and in this chapter an attempt has been made to establish that women writers don't suffer from paucity of themes by analysing stories of Desai. Sometimes they offer plural interpretation. The next two chapters foreground the thematic patterns and feminist leanings in short stories of Deshpande and Other Indian English Women Writers of Short Fiction.

Anita Desai

In Indian English fiction, Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* marks a new phase: Psychological phase. Being a woman writer, her works centered around women and issues of women. So her works are specimens of psychological as well as feminist writing. Desai has presented feminist issues from a psychological perspective. She started writing in the '60s but before her arrival on Indian English literary scene the Big Three had already enriched Indian English fiction and the '50s saw the emergence of women writers like Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala, who merged into the main stream of Indian English writing. The socio-political issues which were the result of colonization were common themes in this phase. Nayantara Sahgal's novels highlighted the emotional incompatibility of contemporary society along with colonial and post colonial issues. So Desai cannot, therefore, be called a pioneer in fictionalizing Indian women's issues. Nevertheless, she has given a unique dimension to Indian English writing which shifted the focus towards the female psychology. Her early novels focus on the conflict between feminine sensibility and callousness of a male centered society (*Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Where Shall We Go This Summer?*). Her later novels reveal her apprehension of the existential element and mental anguish in modern man trapped in loneliness and alienated from family and society. With more than ten novels and two collections of short stories to her credit, Desai is an established and prominent figure among Indian English women writers. The range of her novels and fictional oeuvre is remarkable. She presents images of woman's condition and the predicament of modern man in fictionalized form in a very poetic and sensitive language.

Anita Desai is usually reticent about her personal life. She was born in a multilingual environment with an Indian father and German mother in Mussoorie in

1937. She grew up in Delhi where she acquired a B.A. Honours degree in English. She started writing at the early age of seven. Several of her short stories were published in magazines and journals before her marriage in 1958. Her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, was published in 1963, which has been followed by ten others. Three of her novels, *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), have been nominated for the Booker Prize. Desai's contribution to children's literature has also been widely acknowledged.

Anita Desai has been an honorary fellow of Grifton College, Cambridge as well as a professor of English at Mount Holyoke College in the United States of America. She became the teacher of creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1993. She has received several awards, among them, the Winifred Holtby prize (1978), the Sahitya Akademi Award (1979), the Guardian Award for children's literature (1982), and the Padmashri Award (1989). Desai became a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London in 1978. Desai's writings have been translated into many Indian and European languages.

Her understanding of the problems (alienation, loneliness, restlessness) of the sensitive and tender-hearted people and her cosmopolitan outlook derives from her parentage, upbringing, and expatriate experiences as a Diaspora writer.

Her works reveal a withdrawn self, and it was her tendency to probe into the innermost recesses of a psyche that carved out a niche for Desai, in the earlier phase of her career, among Indian English novelists. The canvas of her imagination is very wide and her novels and short stories deal with so many issues. The evolution of her writings shows that initially she was pre-occupied with the female issues and was only interested in unrevealed female psychology but later on this obsession gave way to themes related to larger human interest which images the growth of the writer. *Bye-*

Bye Blackbird offers her experience as an immigrant and the prominent theme in her novels and short fiction is aloneness of man as it is depicted in *Fire on the Mountain*, *In Custody*, *Baumgartner's Bombay*, etc. Most of her characters show the burden of existence hanging on them and neurosis or death is the only way out for some of them. But some of her later works show a positive approach towards life, as in Journey to Ithaka.

Her works reveal modern sensibility of the average Indian middle-class. As D. Maya remarks:

The modern sensibility that seeks expression through Anita Desai's novels is that of the average middle class Indian – a product of the multicultural, multi religious Indian society. Her own mixed parentage, her early education in a Christian missionary school in Delhi – Itself an amalgam of Muslim, British and Hindu culture – must have made the author particularly sensitive to the conglomeration of cultures woven into the very texture of Indian life. Her later status as a non-resident Indian must have sharpened her sensibility towards the emotional and cultural stability of the modern Indian. Desai's protagonists, mostly centered in the cities, turnout to be drifting alienated products of mixed heritage. (137)

The element of dislocation or uncentredness underlying the sense of alienation and rootlessness shapes Desai's characters. According to D. Maya:

Dislocation or uncentredness – geographic, emotional or cultural – can be seen to be root malady underlying the sense of alienation and rootlessness sitting in on Anita Desai's characters. With women it often results from an incompatible partnership with an intensive,

practical and successful male. The voids in understanding lead to partners drifting apart resulting in death, neurosis, murder etc. the choice of an urban locale as fictional background validated the emotional insecurity of her protagonists. The sensitive individual – male or female is poised against hostile or in different forces of the family or the society leading to unmitigated loneliness (137)

In this way, Desai cannot be regarded as a social realist. Her specialization, as K. R. Sreenivasa Iyengar remarks, “is the exploration of sensibility, the particular kind of modern sensibility that is ill at ease” (64). She explores the inner reality and her canvas is the mindscape of her character. Her works show conflict between self and society, or forces beyond the search for answers on the part of the self which form the pattern of narrative.

All her novels are psychological studies of her protagonists who are almost invariably women. With her tender feminine sensibility Anita Desai portrays their psychological and existential problems. *Cry, the Peacock*, her first novel, is typically feminine, a novel of sensibility exploring the husband-wife alienation from a feminine angle. Her perceptive understanding of the female psyche is revealed in her portrayal of Maya, Sita Nanda Kaul, and Bim. Her fiction illuminates her feminine sensibility both in respect of themes and style.

Anita Desai confesses that while she “feels about India as an Indian”, she thinks about it “as an outsider”. Desai probably derived this point of view from her German mother, whom she aptly describes as carrying “a European core in her which protested against certain Indian things, which always maintained its independence and its separateness.” Her oeuvre has explored the lives of outsiders within Indian society and, more recently, also within the West. Her fiction has covered themes such as

women's oppression and quest for a fulfilling identity, family relationship and contrasts, the crumbling of traditions, and anti-Semitism. The Eurocentric and social biases that are sometimes detected in her fiction, therefore, may be more productively read as the result of the author's focus on uprooted and marginalized identities. Tellingly, the literary example which Desai chose to emulate was that of another migrant to India of German origin: Ruth Praver Jhabvala. Though some critics detect a Western disdain for Indian social customs in her fiction, ultimately Desai's literary world is not sharply divided along Western and Eastern lines. On the contrary, ever since her novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* was published in 1987. Here East and West have been treated as mirror images of each other.

Desai's novels and short stories evoke characters, events and moods with recourse to a rich use of visual imagery and details, which has led to comparisons with the modernist sensibilities of T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. The origin of her stories, as the writer explains, is itself rooted in images: "there are so many images that remain in the mind but they often are also forgotten, they pass through one's life and then they vanish. But there are certain images, characters, and words that people find they don't lose, they remember them (images, characters and words), they stay with themselves and eventually these come together, people begin to see what the connection is between them". Thus, the immobility and frustration of the central female character in *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Bim Das, an apparently independent woman who is hostage of her past memories, are conveyed by zooming in on several details of the house where she lives, signifying decay and dullness. Bim's sister Tara, who is visiting her in the crumbling family mansion in Delhi during the momentous days of Partition, observes that "the dullness and the boredom of her childhood, her youth, were stored here in the room under the worn dusty red rugs, in

the bloated brassware, amongst the dried grasses in the swollen vases, behind the yellowed photographs in the oval frames - everything, everything that she had so hated as a child and that was still preserved here as if this were the storeroom of some dull, uninviting provincial museum". The generational confrontation in *Clear Light of Day* is echoed in most of Desai's other works from the early *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), which considers the relationship between a recluse grandmother and her granddaughter, to the later novels *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). In the former, the spiritual pilgrimage to India of a young and wealthy European couple, Matteo and Sophie, is a later version of that of their ageing guru, the Mother, while the latter depicts the struggles of Uma, Aruna and Arun to strike a balance between their parents' expectations and their own personal realization. Typical of Desai's other fiction is also the use of the house as a place of confinement for women, like Bim, Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*, Lotte in *Baumgartner's Bombay*, and Uma, her mother and Mrs. Patton in *Fasting, Feasting*. In her article "A Secret Connivance", Desai describes, in similar terms the fate of Indian women who "have had to confine themselves to the domestic scene-few women have had any experience of the world outside their homes and families."

As Desai herself admits, her novels are not populated by heroic characters, whether male or female, at least in the traditional sense. Her protagonists are marked by certain passivity and have been criticised as being swept away by historical and social forces rather than being able to face and control them. Yet, Desai claims that "my characters who appear like losers, victims show a kind of heroism, of survival. I think if you can come through the experience of life with the heart and mind intact, without compromising yourself, that to me is a heroic act that needs to be celebrated." In spite of the heroic nuances of these survivals, Desai's characters often meet tragic

endings. Desai portrays a fictional world where, according to her own definition, “History is a kind of ‘juggernaut’ which completely drives over characters without mercy.” *Baumgartner's Bombay* is a typical case in point. The protagonist, Hugo Baumgartner, is a Jew who fled from Nazi Germany to India, only to find that he cannot be fully accepted by Indian society either: he is first interned in a camp for Germans during the second world war, and then remains a *firanghi*, a stranger, in post-independence India. In the end, his escape to India is pointless as he is killed by a German drifter whom he is trying to set free from drug addiction. The novel is a powerful literary embodiment of Desai's claim that East and West are parallel, not contrasting, worlds: “I could have made a contrast of the way Europe treated Baumgartner and the way India treats him but I always discover that there isn't great contrast, there are always parallels: India too excludes him because he is a foreigner, the way he was excluded in Europe.”

Fasting, Feasting might have as its epigraph the author's assertion “different lives are parallel lives”, as constant correspondences are drawn between an Indian and an American middle-class family. Uma's traditional Indian parents, desperately trying to arrange a good marriage for Uma with disastrous consequences, suffer from the same lack of communication with their children as the Pattons, the American suburban family where Uma's brother Arun is staying while on vacation from his American University. Whether Desai's characters live on the banks of the Ganges or amidst the excesses of Massachusetts, they cannot find meaningful personal relationships other than with their own solitude.

In her long and distinguished career, Anita Desai has focused her capacious vision on questions of culture and identity. Her mesmerizing new novel, *The Zigzag Way*, brings her fiction to an unexpected region of the world: mythical, lush Mexico.

In this seductive landscape, a young American stumbles upon an unlikely path to self-discovery. Eric is a newly minted historian just out of graduate school, unsure of his past choices and future options. With no clear direction, he follows his lover, Em, when she travels to the Yucatan for her scientific research, but he ends up alone in this foreign place. And so he pursues his own private quest, tracing his family's history to a Mexican ghost town, where, a hundred years earlier, young Cornish miners toiled to the death. With vivid sympathy, Desai conjure the struggles of Eric's grandparents and their community. Now, in place of the Cornish workers, the native Huichol Indians suffer the cruelty of the mines. When he inquires into their lives, Eric provokes the ire of their self-appointed savior, Doha Vera. Known as the "Queen of the Sierra", Doha Vera is the widow of a mining baron who has dedicated her fortune to preserving the Huichol culture. But her formidable presence belies a dubious past. The zigzag paths of these characters converge on the Day of the Dead, bringing together past and present in a moment of powerful epiphany. Haunting and atmospheric, with splashes of exuberant colour and darker violence, *The Zigzag Way* is a magical novel of elegiac beauty.

Desai is one of the best feminist writers in India who has explored various themes with creative freshness and vigour. Her fiction has made her an outstanding point of reference for a whole generation of women writers in Indian subcontinents, especially as she has often been a precursor of times. Symbolism is a typical quality of her novels/short stories - her works are powerfully emotive, creating dream-like atmosphere and are marked by surrealism coupled with a distinctive atmosphere of pessimism.

The short stories in her first collection, *Games at Twilight* (1978) deal with the local and familiar. She has chosen everyday significant moments to build her

narrations. She seems to be closer to everyday actualities in these short stories. The second collection *Diamond Dust* (2000) spans a number of geographic places and the short stories in this collection reveal depths of meaning unrevealed at the first reading.

Her first collection, *Games at Twilight* (1978), underscores her fascination for the country of the mind in preference to what happens in the world of men and matters. Her characters are persons with keen sensibility and it is not surprising that many of them are children, artists and introverts. She peeps inside the mind of these characters and highlights their suffering through the theme of pessimism.

In her second richly-diverse collection, *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* (2000), she trains her luminous spotlight on private universes, stretching from India to New England, from Cornwall to Mexico - skilfully navigating the fault lines between social obligation and personal loyalties, the men and women in these nine tales set out on journeys that suddenly go beyond the pale - or surprisingly lead them back to where they started from. In the mischievous title story, a beloved dog brings nothing but disaster to his obsessed master; in other tales, old friendships and family ties stir up buried feelings, demanding either renewed commitment or escape. And in the final exquisite story a young woman discovers a new kind of freedom in Delhi's rooftop community. With her trademark perspectiveness, delicacy of language, and sharp wit in full evidence here, Anita Desai once again gloriously confirms that she is India's finest writer in English. As Basawaraj Naikar observes:

In ... *Diamond Dust*, a collection of nine short stories, ... she has exhibited here creative talent in the short stories also. One of the striking features of her writing happens to be her typically feminine point of view, which is expressed through her microscopic observation of life in a very subtle and lyrical language. Whether the setting is

Indian, Canadian or British, she has a remarkable power of evoking the atmosphere in a photographic but poetic way. Like a good story teller, she selects a single event or thematic unit and explores its intricacies and highlights its significance in a very subtle manner. Like a goldsmith or an embroider, she deals with superfine aspects of life with a microscopic vision. Her stories, therefore, add to the beauty and richness of the genre of Indian short story. (136)

Among her most characteristic fictional traits, the use of symbolism appears as a recurrent technique employed in her books. Her writing is charmingly evocative, the atmospheres created have an intense trance-like and surreal connection, and the tone and the mood lingering in the stories regularly create an aura of defeatism so that the parallel with Kafka's novels is almost immediate: "Like the Kafkaesque characters, Desai's characters suffer from the oppressive walls of sounds from which there is no release" (Bhatt 95). This aura of defeatism creates a pessimistic atmosphere in her short stories. The nature of her pessimism is not dissimilar to Kafka's perception of the world.

The pessimism in Desai's short fiction derives from the outlandish situation against which her characters are pitted: they fail to come to terms with their context, for example, in "Surface Texture" the protagonist Harish, a respectable clerk, loses his job, walks of his family and lives as a Swami or in "Sale" where painter first appears very confident about his works but later on he begs customers to buy some of his paintings in a very embarrassing situation. In *Diamond Dust* there is an element of communication gap which is present in almost every story.

She emphasises the communication gap between characters: in "Tepoztlan Tomorrow" it is a generational gap. She highlights the generation gap, between the

old and the young, ones nostalgic attachment to one's native city and progressive deterioration of the city, Lewis, son of Teresa, who is the protagonist of this story goes to Tepoztlan and meets Dona Celia. While having his dinner, he advertently refers to Pedro and spoils Dona Celia's mood. It is very unpleasant for Dona Celia to remember Pedro who was her suitor but whose family she had disliked. Next morning Dona Celia and her daughter Nadya complain to Louis about a neighbour who is a professional garbage picker and who disturbs them with the stinking smell and the loud music of radio and TV and by her other dirty habits. Louis meets his friend Arturo and talks about the past very nostalgically. Arturo invites him to the golf club for having some fun. Then he meets Don Beto who enquires about his thesis and study at University of Houston and advises him to write polemical articles and to oppose the golf club. Later, Louis goes to the golf club where he sees Alesandro playing guitar and Arturo. Then he sees some parts of the city, returns to Dona Celia's home and takes his leave with the pretext of continuing his research. The story thus shows a picture of decadence of the city in various ways, quite in line with Nirad C. Chaudhari's picture of American decadence as part of global decadence.

In "Winterscape", there is a cultural gap. This difference of two cultures creates communication gap and the whole relationship degenerates into chaos. Characters approach life from their point of view, and there is no hope of communication between them. This individualistic approach sometimes makes characters very pathetic, as in the case of "The Man Who Saw Himself Drawn", where the central character is unable to come to terms with others. The culture of incommunicability is not limited to individuals but it is prevalent in the whole society and Desai's pessimism is a critique of failure of human relationship which is not limited to one nation but it is a global culture. The aura of pessimism lingers across

the stories and takes the form of defeatism when Desai's characters accept their mediocrity. A sense of passivity is present in the characters. "The Accompanist" deals with the story of a young tanpura player who is a support player of a renowned singer Ustad Rahim Khan. He is satisfied with his job but his friends tempt him to become a solo player. Temptations shake the sensibility of the young musician. At last he accepts passivity.

"Studies in the Park" is told from the point of view of Suno, a young man whose family is continually pressuring him to study for a major examination which would determine his future educational track. But all of the members of his family - his mother, father, and uncle, as well as his brothers and sisters-make so much noise and interrupt him so frequently that he can't concentrate on his studies. According to a noted critic Balaram Gupta, "... this delicate moment is emphasized by the fact that the boy is crossing the symbolic stage of "adolescence into adulthood" (155). In exasperation, Suno leaves his house to study at a cafe; but even the cafe is not without noise and interruptions. Finally, Suno discovers that many young men like him study in the park near his house, and he too begins to study there every day. One day, shortly before his examination, Suno sees what he interprets as a "vision" in the park: a beautiful, but sickly, young woman lying on a park bench with her head in the lap of another man. Suno is so stuck to this "vision" that he experiences a transformation, as a result of which he chooses not to take the examination after all, but to pursue life as an adventure, rather than as a race contrary to what family expects of him. Yet the final leads him towards wisdom, on more practical level. "Studies in the Park" explores several themes which are central to the stories of Anita Desai. The narration is concerned with the internal consciousness of the central character, who struggles

for a sense of individuality against the pressures from his family to conform to societal expectations.

In a mundane, world where every activity is monotonous and the acceptance of claustrophobic reality is not the solution to every problem, some characters break all bonds and strive to attain their goal but they pay a heavy price for their choices and it result into isolation, for example, Harish in “Surface Texture” and with the central character of “The Man Who Saw Himself Drown”, both break all bonds and keep them tied to their absurd activities but they lose everything even their families. Although the break has not yet materialised, a similar situation is present in “Tepoztlan Tomorrow” and “The Roof Top Dwellers”.

Anita Desai gives preference to illness because it is one of the causes of isolation. The weak characters are exposed in complete situational dejection and misery. Illness is the major cause of incommunicability and disconnectedness in “The Devoted Son.” The title itself comments on the perspective of an aged parent and a son. Rakesh, a brilliant student of medicine, who was on a scholarship to the U.S.A and he pursued career in various hospitals of the U.S.A. He returns to his country marries according to parents' wish. As his old parent becomes senile and falls ill Rakesh put him on particular medicated diet. But the old parent unable to understand the intention of son and daughter- in-law. The story ends with the old father lying in his bed and invoking death. Mr. Basu, an intolerant character in “Pigeons at Daybreak” is similar to the former one exposed to the theme of isolation. It is not the foolish attitude but the nature of gap that develops a wall among characters. It leads towards incommunicability as in “Underground” in which illness is responsible for incommunicability. In *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* it affects the minds of sick person and it also affects communication. Her characters are surrounded by the

walls which can not be broken by them. They separate those who are living normal life from those who are sick.

The theme of isolation is present in almost every story. Incommunicability not only occurs due to illness, lack of communication or incapacity to communicate with others but loneliness also can be seen in public gathering as in “Pineapple Cake” and “Farewell Party”. “Pineapple Cake” shows the mass’s dreary behaviour. “Farewell Party” accounts for people’s disingenuousness. Readers can feel the pessimism pervading everywhere in the story. “Readers can feel that it is not the fault of Desai’s characters: on the basis of this one can justify the character of “Tepoztlan Tomorrow”, who think that “Liveliness was not to them a quality they would have preferred it a morgue” (DD 140).

She also provides weapons to her characters against a hostile world. Silence is one of them. Silence pervades all novels as well as short stories because it saves characters in their tiny, isolated, detached world. They do not communicate at all as in case of Helen and Bob Mc Taggart in “Underground”. They create a personal space for them like a cocoon, where no one can enter. They build their own rules and regulations for their inner world. But this leads towards a conflict between inner and outer world. In this perspective illusion and fantasy acquire their significant role like silence these are other weapons which allow them to enter in the world of illusion and allow them to come to ground reality. This is what happens to Ravi in “Games at Twilight”. The courage of the boy turns out to be meaningless as all other children forget about him. The same mechanism is present in “Sale”, and “Diamond Dust”. Majority of her characters either live in isolation or show their reluctance to face reality. When the illusion breaks, their collapse is inevitable.

The charge levelled against women creative writers that they have paucity of themes is not completely true. It is evident from an appraisal of Desai's short fiction but at the same time it should be emphasised that she is a feminist writer and being a feminist writer she can't ignore feminist perspective. Consciously or unconsciously feminism emerges as a major theme in her novels as well as in her short stories. One of the striking features of her writings happens to be her typically feminine point of view, which is expressed through her microscopic observation of life in a very subtle and lyrical language. Desai's fiction, from the very beginning, has presented an unambiguous comment on the position of women in contemporary Indian society. She presents women of different cultures and strata of society engaged in their struggle to get rid of restriction imposed upon them by society to adhere to culturally approved behaviour at the cost of their own happiness in a patriarchal society. Her women characters experience a perpetual dilemma between personal freedom and social norms for feminine demeanour.

The stories deal with a great variety of subjects but the female protagonists are present in more than half of them. Feminist themes emerge from short stories. The second aspect is that the male protagonists are sometimes characterized as very mild and hesitant, a feature common to other male characters involves such as *In Custody* and *Baumgartner's Bombay*. In her short stories, this happens in "Private Tuition by Mr. Bose", with the teacher caught between the impertinent and attractive girl he is tutoring and his jealous wife, or in "Royalty" with Sarla irritated as Raja's indecisiveness and exclaiming: Raja's is incapable of making decisions - we "will make for him." (17). The presence of a bossy, tyrannical old matriarch (or mother), such as appears in "Tepoztlan Tomorrow" or in "The Roof Top Dwellers".

The women characters in Desai's latest work *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* are trapped in the patriarchal society and yearn for freedom from social labels and the mundane reality of existence, hoping for different ways in the gender based role thrust upon them. The nine stories in this collection explore different themes: human obsessions, nostalgia for the past, insensitivity for others, ties of blood, friendship and marriage. However, feminine perspective emerges in these stories, a number of which feature women's predicament at different stages.

The representation of female characters in her short stories reflects her own experience of the position of women in contemporary society. In her short stories, subordinate positioning of female sex and governed by male dominated society. Her characters are trapped in rambling situations of the household responsibilities, social expectations and femininity. These women characters do not passively suffer but they react against the situation. They are a combination of passion and romance, custom and convenience.

In *Diamond Dust*, while the thrust of the stories is on the various facets of the human temperament and prejudices, feminist issues arise obliquely as women characters interact with the males through their relationships as friends, spouses, mothers, sisters, and children. In "Royalty", the first story in this collection, the central character, Sarla, wavers between an intense desire to exercise her freedom, and the sense of responsibility as a hostess. Overwhelmed by the summer heat in Delhi, Sarla and Ravi, a middle-aged couple has finalized to the last detail a holiday trip to a hill station. They are taken by surprise by a letter from an old friend Raja living in California, a poet of considerable repute. Raja announces in his letter his plans to visit them shortly, and their "house became the one chosen by Raja for a visitation, a house in waiting" (2). Through the use of irony and paradox, the story

delineates Sarla's predicament, as her plans for a holiday are jeopardized by Raja's arrival and his refusal to accompany the couple to Winhaven.

The character of Sarla is very interesting in depicting her administration of Raja with her sense of importance in being selected by him as his hostess. Sarla's hidden social ego compels her to agree to each of Raja's unreasonable demands at the cost of her own freedom and happiness. Her perceptions assume importance in the story, as they alternate between a sense of obligation as the hostess of famous poet and, frustration at being used as a pawn in Raja's pursuit of pleasure and Raja's poetic talent and his innate ability to transform the common place with a fresh perspective over-whelmed Sarla. She realizes that Raja made them see a familiar place “as they never saw it themselves, as a place of magic, enchantment, of pleasure so immense and rich that it could never be exhausted” (19). At the same time, she finds it difficult to shake off the numbing influence of Raja's royal airs and graces, and idiosyncrasy reinforced by his own name. Sarla feels that she has to “sharpen her faculties” to overcome the urge to “go down on her knees and to remove Raja's slipper from his feet, or to bring water in basin and wash them” (8). Vacillating between these two polar points of view, Sarla has to cope with Raja's skilful manoeuvring and the unforeseen problems created by the same.

Raja simulates a close relationship with Sarla which helps him to manipulate her actions to his own benefit. When informing her of his plans to visit them in Delhi, he writes that he hopes to find her there, “She would be there, wouldn't she? 'You won't desert me?’” (2). He expects Sarla to drive him to “The silver market in Chandini Chowk” (12) where he may select an exquisitely crafted piece to take with him to California. Later when she insists that the heat is unbearable, he suggests that Sarla needs “a walk in the sublime Lodi Gardens when the sun is setting and Venus

appears in the sky so silently” (18), not disclosing to her the fact that he has already fixed a meeting there with three of his women admirers, including Sarla's sister Maya.

Sarla's inability to take a firm stand against Raja's exploitative manoeuvres allows the latter to dominate her and to reject her opinions. Her irritation and cynicism fails to make a mark upon Raja's decision to prolong his stay in Delhi. To Sarla's suggestion that Winhaven would be a more comfortable option than Delhi with its sweltering heat, Raja retorts, “Now I don't ever notice the heat.... Oh, think of the fruit alone that summer brings us” (20). “He forces her to arrange a party and a song-recital by Ila Dutta Ray though Sarla has expressed no enthusiasm for the same, but Raja would not hear of refusal, or accept any excuse” (15). The party later becomes the root of a misunderstanding between Sarla and maya.

Desai, through the character of Raja suggests that most poets are very selfish, demanding and calculating. Raja's poetic talent enables him to view everything as “romantic paradisiacal” (9) while overlooking the negative points. Yet he is impervious to the feelings of people around him, and his actions are centered around only his won dreams and desires. He enjoys being flattered by his admirers, and his sojourn in Sarla and Ravi's house is meant to fulfill that purpose, and not as he proclaims that he had come “all the way to Delhi in the heart of June, to see them, so relive the remembered joys of their beautiful home” (11). Raja is in fact an egoist, in love only with himself, and his sensitivity to the beauty of physical world is an elaborate pose which receives all his admirers. Marjorie Boulton points out, “Deceit, the effects of deceit, and the unmasking of deceit are such obviously interesting themes and so convenient for devising plots with surprises, that deceivers play a large

part in fiction”(93). In “Royalty”, Raja's pretentiousness is not revealed in the beginning, but the reader is gradually allowed to see through his deception.

The women characters in “Royalty”, Sarla, Maya and Ila Dutta Ray are caught in a social game in which emotions and compassion have a very little role. Sarla's relationship with her sister Maya is seen to be influenced of by the social artifice and politesse which is an inescapable part of metropolitan city life. When Sarla forgets to invite Maya for Ila Dutta Ray's song-recital party and makes a last minute request, Maya coldly rejects it giving a flimsy excuse. She evens the score by deliberately not inviting Sarla and Ravi for a party in the honour of bureaucrat's wife who wanted to meet Raja, the famous poet “in an intimate setting” (17). Ila Dutta Ray has been of no help to Sarla and Ravi “when they had first arrived servants, placing their children in school...” (15). Yet, she readily accepts Raja's request for a song recital in Sarla's home, and invites Raja to accompany her family to Kashmir for a respite from the summer.

The irony in this story is directed against each of the three principal characters, Sarla, Raja and Ravi. Sarla is satirized by Desai in her reluctance to pay the price for the social approval she enjoys due to Raja's presence in her home . Raja's artistic greatness and royalty is subverted by the author by portraying his selfishness and egoism. Ravi's inability to resolve the situation in which his wife and he are trapped is again a stroke of irony and reflects his weakness.

Desai brings in the issue of gender disparity through the contrasting perceptions of Raja and Sarla. In the story, when due to the unexpected departure of her cook, Raja leaves with the Dutta Rays to visit Kashmir. Sarla's reproof, “we could have gone to Winhaven ages ago! I asked you, you remember?” (21), is dismissed casually by Raja. He is unable to perceive the degree of inconvenience caused to Sarla

by ignoring her request, and is oblivious to the innumerable arrangements made by Sarla to make his stay comfortable in her home. This is a reflection of the insensitivity of men to the traditional feminine responsibility of managing the household, and their incapability of appreciating the amount of hard work involved in performing domestic duties.

The male shows lack of concern for woman in the home is presented again in the title story “Diamond Dust: A Tragedy”. Mrs. Das who is principally affected by her husband Mr. Das's obsession for his devilish dog Diamond, is an archetypal figure, seen repeatedly in the Indian society and in literary works. Mrs. Das is portrayed by Desai as one whose views do not count, and her husband turns a deaf ear to her outbursts and constant complaints about the botheration caused to her due to the dog. The opening lines of the story make a strong impact as Mrs. Das laments, “That dog will kill me, kill me one day!” (50) thereby emphasising the fact that he dog is a more privileged member than she in her home.

Mrs. Das repeatedly reacts to her husband's abnormal love for his pet. But Mr. Das ignores her point of view, as he does the point of view of all the people whose physical safety and mental tranquility is threatened by Diamond's ferociousness. Mrs. Das objects to Mr. Das's taking pains to offer the dog buffalo meat (54-55), to the inconvenience caused to the postman (57), to the terror unleashed by Diamond due to which “innocent people doing their jobs” (58) could not approach their house. Mr. Das resents the fact that his wife does not share his love for the dog and feels that the children in his colony “were more appreciative and properly admiring, than his wife...” (56). The irony is heightened when Desai uses the image of “some forlorn lover whose beloved had scorned him and departed with another...” (60) for Mr. Das when Diamond escapes for the second time in search of female partner.

Mrs. Das complains that Mr. Das had not expressed such solicitude for their children or for their grandchildren, and she “repeated it, not once, or twice, or thrice, but at regular intervals” throughout the period when Diamond grew up to be a young dog (51). The reader is forced to wonder why Mr. Das cannot relate to human beings, while he showers excessive love upon a dog. Kathleen Wheeler states that one of the Principal themes of many Desai's novel is “the conflict between duty, relationships or participation and the individual's need to withdraw or her or his inability to relate” (260). Does Mr. Das's obsession suggest that he deliberately distances himself from rational creatures because they question, assert, demand, and expect in return for their love for him? Here, the dog loves his master unconditionally, and in Mr. Das's relationship with the dog there is no space for rational interaction. However, this one-sided relationship isolates Mr. Das from his peers and his family, making him an object of ridicule, and rapidly drives him to his end.

When discussing the structure of story, Ian Reid draws attention to the fact that the “incremental trebling of actions which recurs in so many durably appealing tales” as in “Goldilocks, and The Three Bears”, has a deep aesthetic basis behind it (6). Reid states that as in Aristotle's definition of a plot with a beginning, middle and end, in a short story too, “a three-phase action is generally accepted as basic” (5). According to Reid, the tripartite sequence of events recurring in short stories is a reflection of the three stages of action in a short story. In “Diamond Dust” Mr. Das's extreme bounding with the dog is indicated by describing how Diamond escapes thrice from Mr. Das's house, and how the last getaway becomes the cause of his owner's tragic death. The tension and the difficulties faced by Mr. Das mount with each escape of the dog, and the third escapade draws the threads of the story to a climax.

Mr. Das ignores the instinctive needs of the dog and chases him twice only to imprison him at home. That he is blind to the physical desires of the dog suggest that Mr. Das in his own marital life also suffers from a similar lack of physical desire which is reflected in his insensitivity to his wife. This idea is accentuated by the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Das are shown rather formally in the narrative and remain as such till the end of the story. The warmth and tenderness expected in a marital relationship appears to be lacking here.

Strong irony is directed at the madness and the unnatural pre-occupation of Mr. Das with the dog. Desai makes his case reflect obsessive tendencies to some males which become the cause of rift between partners. Like Mr. Das, most men pay no heed to their partners' opinions which gradually lead to their disintegration. In the contemporary society, the men enjoy, greater freedom, authority and power than women, are seen to adopt far more profane habits than those of Mr. Das. The repeated warnings of the women are ignored by the men. When Mr. Das trudges through the chilly night in the dust, wrapped in woollens, looking for Diamond when he has absconded for the third time, Mrs. Das advises him, "Give him up before this search kills you" (63). By portraying the "sad" end of Mr. Das due to his mania for his dog, Desai gives a clarion call to those individuals in society who take to harmful pre-occupations, unmindful of the loss the other or they themselves might suffer because of their obsessions. Cleverly Desai creates an ambivalent reaction to Mr. Das as the reader does not empathies with him for his tragic death, as she is aware of the abnormality in his behavior.

In "Winterscape", another story in this collection, the question of women's struggles in a male-dominated society arises through the different stages in the lives of the principal characters, the sisters Asha and Anu. In the Indian Society where a

male child is desired by most married couples, Anu, the younger of the two sisters suffers more, for the birth has belied for the second time, her parents, expectation for a son. Asha is a confident, vivacious child but Anu's personality is repressed due to the social censure she hears around her. Anu develops into a shy and nervous girl, an introvert, and dependent on Asha for trifles, and “An understanding grew between them, strengthened by strand upon strand upon strand of complicity” (28). She is intelligent but her academic career is cut short as she is expected to stay at home to help her mother after Asha is married.

Asha and Anu are alter egos, as they are emotionally dependent upon each other, and come to each other's aid in tumultuous times. When Asha is embittered due to a series of miscarriages and still-births suffered by her, Anu lets Asha take care of her son Rakesh to alleviate her pain. Asha and her husband are delighted, “he was the child of their dreams, their thwarted hopes and desires” (31). Anu decides to leave the child with her sister when Asha's husband die in an accident on Rakesh's first birthday. Anu tells her husband. “Asha needs him. We can have more sons for ourselves” (33). Anu's decision reflects the damaging influence of the social repression on her personality. Due to her emotional dependence on her sister, Anu readily goes to the extent of giving away her only child to please Asha, at the cost of her own marital happiness.

Asha and Anu are represented as having great strength of character, though they are both widows living in a village in Punjab. Asha uses a great part of her money for Rakesh's education and later sends him to Canada for further studies, “the two women selling off bits and pieces of land to pay for them till there was nothing left but the old farmhouse” (38). Rakesh takes up a job in Canada and later marries a Canadian girl Beth and sends them photographs of the formal registration of the

marriage. Asha and Anu are disappointed, but when they are informed of Beth's pregnancy, Anu writes to Rakesh "with a unaccustomed boldness their intention to reveal to Canada and see their grandchild for themselves" (39).

Sibling and filial relationship is presented from cross-cultural perspective in Desai's story. Beth is perplexed to know that Rakesh has "two mothers" (27) and that his mother Anu had given her child away "out of love. The love sister feels" (35). Beth finds it difficult to understand Anu's self-negation for the sake of her sister's happiness. Beth has a sister living in a trailer in Manitoba with her unemployed husband and a string of children. She feels that she can never give away her yet unborn child, even to her sister. Beth discusses the issue with her mother, but they are unable to perceive what motivated Anu to share her son with her sister.

Though the two sisters have sacrificed everything for the sake of their son Rakesh, their hopes of receiving his love and sympathy are shattered when they go to Canada to visit him. After ten years of exile from his home and country, Rakesh finds it difficult to relate to his two mothers, and to their stories of the people of their village in India and he "would give embarrassed laughs, glance at Beth in appeal, and find reasons to stay late at work" (44). Asha and Anu are disappointed by Rakesh's withdrawal and inability to relate but they are unassertive and do not explicitly express their disillusionment. The past has been erased from Rakesh's mind after his long stay in Canada, and Asha and Anu fail to recreate their old relationship with him.

Beth, their daughter-in-law, who is a foreigner and also a stranger to them, is portrayed as a sensitive woman, and her reaction to the two women is a contrast that of their son. Beth is moved to sympathy to see them so thinly dressed when they arrive at the airport: "She had always thought of them as having so much; now her reaction was: they have so little!" (41). She takes them to the stores and overloads

them with woolens. Beth attends to their little needs, trying to makeup for Rakesh's failure. She takes them out to visit places, brings home videos for them, switches on the television to engage their attention. Asha and Anu though grateful to Beth for her concern for them, are ill at ease, however, unable to adjust to the very different life and culture in Canada.

In “Winterscape”, a symbolic picture which finds reference in the beginning, middle and end of the story best captures the situation as well as the relationship of the two principal characters in the story. As Asha and Anu look amazedly out of a window in a house in Canada at their first experience of snowfall, the narrator comments that: “The photograph somehow calls for silence, creates silence, like snow” (25). Throughout their lives Asha and Anu have been image of silence as they face the vicissitudes of life without protesting against the gender-based discrimination practiced in society. Social silence is seen by Kaplan, as part of the constitution of female identity (79) and points out that culture and society prefer women to be silent. In Desai's story Asha and Anu's lives are built upon social silence though they enjoy a mutually dependent and exclusive relationship which becomes the basis of life, hope and happiness in spite of misfortune. The picture captures the strength, the mutual dependence and the non-dependence on male support of the two women.

In “The Rooftop Dwellers” Desai with remarkable economy, presents the agony and the ecstasy of living on one's own away from home. The story focuses on Moyna, a young girl as she struggles to adjust to the demands of an independent existence as a working woman in Delhi. She had earlier accommodated to the rigid life in a working women's hostel, where in the beginning “she felt she was trapped in a cell; whenever she shut the door, she was swallowed by the cell, its prisoner” (160). But like Mr. Das's love for a dog in “Diamond Dust”, Moyna's concern for a kitten

causes her to get an eviction notice from the warden, and she has to shift to a barsati, a roof top dwelling.

According to Lorna Sage, Desai's "characters are constantly under pressure to test their survival skills" (182). Though Moyna discover unexpected freedom and happiness living alone in the barsati, she also becomes aware of the fact that she is observed as a female "body" by the males around her, like the other rooftop dwellers, and her landowner's servant boy who sings lewd movie songs on seeing her, "With blouse cut low, with hair cut short. This memsahib so fine"(195). She learns to ignore the piercing glances of these men who are conveniently laced to ogle at her whenever she is outside her room. Due to her "single working woman status" (163), Moyna is viewed with suspicious by the Bhallas, her landowners, who find it difficult to accept the fact that Moyna enjoys the company of both her male and female friends.

Living alone, Moyna develops new acquaintances and friendships, and discovers her own latent abilities and unexplored dimensions of her own personality. At home Moyna courageously faces the problems her independent existence brings her, like the theft of her precious belongings and a long period of illness. At the office front she is satisfied with her position of an assistant to the editor Tara of the literary journal books. While unpacking copies of the journal fresh from the press, she thinks of her family, "how proud they would be if they could see her, their youngest, and how incredulous..." (174).

Moyna comes to a crossroad when Mr. Bose, the founder of the journal decides to close down its publication due to a nosedive in its sale. Shocked with the realization that she will lose her job as well as her barsati, Moyna fluctuates between the decision to quit the job or to continue working for Mr. Bose's next venture - a journal on rural development. However, at this critical juncture, a letter from her

mother informs Moyna of a prospective matrimonial alliance for her. Moyna is overjoyed at the news, “She was free, she was determined, she had made her decision, and she set up, laughing” (207). Her decision to revert to a more traditional, restricting way of life is a natural consequence of Moyna's gradual understanding of the hardships faced by women when living alone without male partners. As a barsatidweller, Moyna has developed as an individual, and has carefully exercised her choice to get married, though it means the loss of the freedom she enjoys as a single woman living in an alien city.

Discussing the modern short story, Suzanne C. Ferguson foregrounds the point that “setting” and “characterization” are deeply linked and that “setting is a more significant factor in the modern story than in the nouvelle and in terms of proportion of discourse space allotted to it” (21). It is observed that in Desai's story, all the characters involved in the publication of the journal *Books*, are “rooftop dwellers” in metaphorical sense, living as tenants, and waiting for a more permanent home. For each of them the responsibility of the journal is a temporary refuge, which might lead them to a more lasting occupation, paradoxically, in a more limiting way. Mr Bose opts for publishing a sociological journal, Tara for an independent home away from her mother-in-law, 'the dragon lady's' interference (204-5), Moyna for a settled married life, and Mohan for a job in the travel agency. Commenting on Desai's characters, Bruce King observes, “The main characters have escaped confining limitations, but liberated, they create an even more sterile existence” (239). Although these alternatives seem to be promising, all these characters are moving to a stagnant way of life compared to the enriching possibility of putting in efforts to develop and grow a literary journal.

While discussing her style of writing, Anita Desai has commented that “Story, action, and drama mean little to me except insofar as they emanate directly from the personalities I have chosen to write about, born of their dreams and wills” (qtd. in King 238). Desai's stories lay more stress on the characters' inner awareness, dilemmas and realizations than on dramatic plots or on climactic conflict. Different facets of the characters' personalities and perceptions are explored as they grapple with the element of contingency in life. Desai's short stories create significant situations in the lives of their characters, and relate them to the social environment. Gender conflicts are rooted in the social atmosphere and conventions, shaping and moulding characters deeply. The women characters in these stories are caught in the deep-rooted patriarchal system, and the narratives bring out their strengths and weaknesses as they struggle to assert themselves in a largely unresponsive society.

Not only do her short stories offer pessimist and feminist readings but the thrust of the stories is also laid on the various facets of human temperament and prejudices. For example, “Winterscape” not only offers pessimist and feminist readings but it also highlights the contrast between Eastern Culture and Western Culture. Whereas in Eastern Culture filial bonds transcend the barriers of technical relationships of kinship, in Western culture, they are restricted by technical bonds. Whereas Eastern culture believes in a collective happiness, Western culture believes in the individual happiness. This contrast is brought out in a subtle manner by the writer. The title story, “Diamond Dust”, depicts the theme of usually intimate relationship between man and animal, between Mr. Das, the protagonist and his pet dog called Diamond. His deep attachment for the pet dog makes him reckless and costs him his life. Anita Desai seems to teach the lesson that all over-whether of the man, or woman, bird or beast - requires some kind of sacrifice.

“Five Hours to Simla or Faisla”, is one of the successful stories because of the clarity of motif in it. It is a humorous story about the advance of a Sardarji causing a good deal of tension to the travellers on way to Simla. A family is going to Simla in a car. They have to travel another five hours to reach the place. But on way, they are forced to stop the car as an unexpected difficulty crops up. When the Sardarji is driving his truck along the road, some goatherd pelts a stone at his vehicle as a consequence of which the windscreen of his truck is broken. Now the Sardarji gets angry, parks his truck across the road thereby blocking the traffic from both sides. He demands compensation for the breakage of his windscreen by the goatherd. There is a traffic jam for miles. The Sardarji sits leisurely on the bridge wall without heeding for the tension of other travellers. They do not know how to tackle him because of irrational demand. Some people go in search of the goatherd. Some others go to the nearest city to find out a police station. Meanwhile a temporary market gathers there.

The family members feel restless and helpless in the car. Beggers, hawkers, tea-vendors and toy-vendors assemble there to make the best of the situation. During the four or five hours of tension and waiting, the members in the car compromise with the situation gradually. Necessity impels them to neglect the ideals of hygiene. They are forced to eat and drink the cheap stuff that is available with the hawkers and vendors: After a long and tedious waiting, they are surprised to see a police van come from a nearby town. All the travellers are expecting an exchange of words between the Sardarji and the police officers. But to their surprise, the Sardarji, for from asking for any compensation, climbs into his truck, starts it and drives away from there without any demur. The family has a sigh of relief after great tension. The Sardarji's behaviour is obviously as adamant as irrational and humorous. The story is presented in a humorous form but it teaches us lesson that life is compromise at every step. If

someone is trapped in a particular situation no one can let him out or person himself unable.

In her short stories readers find contrasting situations. Juxtaposed position of situations symbolises her point of view, for example, in “Pegions at Daybreak” the miserable condition of the character is contrasted with the cool breeze and flight of pегion which symbolises freedom from the suffering. It also symbolises that present moral order is rotten/ decaying and new kind of moral order is required. She has not only presented contrasting situations but she has also compared weak characters with strong characters. This comparison symbolises that how these weak characters survive and struggle for their existence. They are weak but their inner courage is very strong. This way present her philosophy that life is struggle at every step, no one can escape from it. In a symbolic way she gives this moral that the kind of capacity to survive in harsh situation her weak characters have got people must have it. It can be inferred that her characters and situations are set in binary opposition. Sandhyarani Dash remarks about the position of characters in Desai’s fiction “Characters are set in binary opposition in terms of values, attitudes, temperaments and out look on life” (14). In “Winterscape”, Asha and Anu are extremely different from each other in their personalities skills, emotional disposition. In “Royalty”, Maya is a contrast to Sarla and has a stronger emotional make up, letting not even her sister Sarla to take her for granted.

The titles of her short stories are suggestive and symbolic. The evocative title “Diamond Dust: A Tragedy”, through the use of antithetical words, is an ironical reminder of the transience of all material riches. It suggests origin of Diamond as born of the dust and worth literally nothing. It is also a harsh pointer to the pitiable fate of Mr. Das who is finally condemned to the dust because of his fixation with the dog.

The title of the story “The Roof Top Dwellers” is suggestive of the protest of the new generation of women against the harsh, cruel man dominated world. It symbolises that the new generation of women wants to attain a position/space in society. As Virginia Woolf talked about space for woman in her famous book, *A Room of One's Own*. They wish to reach at the top. They want to attain identity of their own but the situation is ironical. They have to make compromises at every step. This title also symbolises transitory phase of every character in this story and they are in search of some permanent settlement.

The title of the story “Games at Twilight” symbolises imperfect understanding of the central character. The titles of her stories symbolise the climaxes of the stories. “Winterscape” “Studies in the Park”, “Pineapple Cake”, “The Accompanist”, “A Devoted Son”, “The Farewell Party” , “The Artistic Life” etc. all these titles symbolise the climaxes of the stories which are like epiphanies, dramatic moments encapsulated into lesser events switching the protagonists’ level of conscience towards a deeper level of self-awareness.

Her first collection *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* was published in 1978 and *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* was published in 2000. There is a gap of two decades in two collections. They are indicative of the two different periods in which they were conceived, respectively the end of the seventies and the end of the nineties. These two collections are a material proof of Desai’s writing. They show evolution in her style. The first collection of stories had a more immediate grip on the reader and followed the very instinctive urge of their narrator; the recent ones successfully mediate between this unconscious predisposition towards narration and a more distant attitude monitoring the whole effect from a neutral and detached position. The result is that the stories in the second collection *Diamond Dust* do not

focus on the characters and events constituting the base plot but it focus on series of elements which create vivid and colourful environment. As for as structure of stories is concerned in *Games at Twilight* started with the matters “in medias res”, while in *Diamond Dust* creating a whole complex situation first and then gradually narrator starts settling on all the details, establishing a sort of gap between the tension of an event in progress and the detached tone of the narrator.

Another difference in more conceptual and centres on the nature of pessimism. In *Games at Twilight* : the world Anita Desai describes is quite ordinary with the exception of some mild eccentricities which are out of the ordinary. This way her concept of pessimism differs from that of Kafka's pessimism. Pessimism in Kafka's works spring from the outlandishness of having common everyday characters living in an isolated world whose mechanisms were unfamiliar to them. There is a slight modification in Diamond Dust. Disconnectness is the central theme of every story and incommunicability is the result of the incapacity of coming to terms with the others. Yet, what distinguishes the two collections of short stories on a theoretical ground is that the lack of communication is not the result of an incorrect approach to human relationships by an individual but it is the law regulating the dynamics with in society. It is a global culture. Odd eccentricities are present in both collections are not omnipresent in the stories and they are not always the key factor which creates obstructions within human relationships. She extends her pessimistic evaluation of the failure of human relationship not only to Indian society as in her *Games at Twilight* but to other areas as well, such as Mexico, England or Northern America, and makes such a perspective the key of interpretation to a mechanism without geographical limits. A few factors may differentiate the two collections of short stories. The difference readers notice it is due to the evolution of an artist but the aura of

pessimism hanging over the stories remains unchanged. Her short stories deal in the variety of subjects and recalls different facts of life. But at the same time being a woman writer she can't ignore feminist issues. In her short stories feminism oozes out obliquely. It is evident that female protagonists are present in half of them and male characters/protagonists are sometimes characterised as very mild and hesitant as in "Private Tuition by Mr. Bose" and "Royalty". This feature is common to other male characters in her other novels such as *In Custody* and *Baumgartner's Bombay*. The presence of Bossy matriarch (mother) in "Tepoztlan Tomorrow" and "The Roof Top Dwellers", "Winterscape" reveals feminist understones. They deal with the predicament of women in Indian society. "Winterscape" also shows liking for a male child in Indian society, which is common problem. Her short stories lay more emphasis on the character's self realization and inner awareness than plot. Although characters pay a heavy price for their choices but they attain enlightenment at the end of the story as in "Games at Twilight". In her short stories different facets of the character's personalities and perception are explored as they grapple with uncertainties in life. Her short stories create significant conditions in the lives of their character and relate them to social environment. Gender conflicts are present in society. The conflicts related to gender which are present in society and conventions influence woman deeply. The women characters are caught in the deep-rooted patriarchal system, and the stories bring out their strength and weakness as they struggle to attain identity of their own in this unresponsive male dominated society.

It can be said, then, that her writings employ the technique of symbolism and therefore lends itself easily to different critical approaches. Anita Desai is ever acutely aware of and responsive to the general predicament of woman in the patriarchal society, her short stories support the reading from the pessimist angle and the feminist

angle. There are several stories in both collections which offer the pessimist and the feminist readings. In the light of the above discussion it would be reasonable to argue that her short fiction does not have paucity of themes and her short stories offer plural interpretations.

Anita Desai is essentially a symbolist and from the view point of symbolism her short stories are studied with exquisite symbols employed functionally and artistically. Her symbolism is influenced and invigorated by, the symbolic European and American Literatures. Indeed, she has written her novels under the impact of celebrated modern symbolist writers, such as D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, Henry James and others. Admitting their influences she says:

In my twenties when I first began to work seriously and consciously on my novels, it was D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, and Proust that influenced me more strongly. Latterly, the novels of the Japanese writer, Kawabata and, more and more, modern poetry particularly that of Rimbaud, Hopkins and Lawrence. (Srivastava 217)

In her short fiction the extensive use of symbols is a necessity. She believes that the world is an iceberg - the one - tenth visible above the surface of the water and is called reality, while the nine-tenth of it is submerged under water and is the truth. According to Desai, every writer and artist is in constant search and communication of this truth. As Dalmia remarks, "Writing is an effort to discard and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things" (13).

It is difficult to explore and express the inner, true significance of things through the medium of language in its literal and direct form, she uses character, action, atmosphere and images to evoke and suggest it. This is one of the reasons why there is abundant symbolism in her short stories.

In order to discover and convey her vision of the hidden meaning of things, she feels the need of using symbols frequently. Thus symbols are an integral part of her short stories; she has artistically and functionally interwoven them into the texture of her short stories.

She is primarily concerned with the exploration and delineation of psyche, with the examination and presentation of the inner being of people, and not with the external life of systematic thinking, coherent speaking, and intelligible actions based on the principle of causality. Apropos to this, she states: life is reality you see on the surface the visible world-while literature plumbs the depths below that lie hidden and need to be explored and described. Shelley on poets: “They measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all penetrating spirit” (Srivastava 218).

She employs symbols spontaneously and unconsciously. Anita Desai remarks about the unconscious and spontaneous use of symbols in her novels. In reply to Ramesh K. Srivastava's pointed questions, “Do you use symbols in your novels” and “Are you conscious of them?” She says: I use them unconsciously I mean I employ metaphors and images which acquire significance and suggest deeper meanings than they state i.e. turn into symbols (Srivastava 218). A patent fact about the writer of the symbolic writer is that he usually takes his images from the familiar real life, and invests them with symbolic meaning by repeating them, and this way symbolises his own personal view of life. Anita Desai is not exception to it. She proclaims that she imparts symbolic significance to her images, takes from real life, by repeating them. Every author, according to her, endeavours to symbolise his personal vision of his life in his writings. She affirms that she employs “certain images again and again and that, although real, they acquire the significance of symbols. I imagine each writer end by

thus revealing his own mythology, anthology that symbolises his private morality and philosophy” (Vinson 13).

Her short stories are studied with brilliant symbols. All stories either dealing with psychological condition of characters or dealing with the external reality deeply embedded in symbolism. Quite a good number of symbols are used by her to bring out the essence of life. As in “Games at Twilight” - the twilight is symbolising state of imperfect understanding. The imperfect understanding of character results into isolation and his talent was not recognized.

All characters in Desai’s short fiction symbolise much more than what they appear to be. Thus Ravi, Mr. Das, Mrs. Das, Moyna, Harish, Bob, Mrs. Fernandez etc. all stands for different approaches of life. In her short fiction city is used as a major symbol. City Delhi the centre of action in short stories of Desai. It becomes a living character in the short stories and is a puissant presence in the life of its inhabitants. It symbolises both the living and destructive forces of the cosmos: it infuses life into those who come to it, but destroys those who challenge and detest it.

Like Delhi, Canada in “Winterscape” is highly evocative. It suggests a world bright and fascinating externally but cold and hard internally. It has lively natural surroundings, but it is a cold city where people live in hiding and do not want to have any relationship other than the essential ones.

The central characters are presented as the very symbol of misery, agony and alienation like Moyna in “The Roof Top Dwellers”, Ravi in “Games at Twilight”, Harish in “Surface Texture” and Mr. Das in “Diamond Dust”. By presenting characters as symbols of misery, agony and alienation and by showing their miserable lives and deaths, Anita Desai stresses the ephemerality and hollowness of life.

She has also used animal and bird symbols abundantly in her short stories fiction. Through pigeons, dog etc. she portrays different facets of life. Such as name of dog in “Diamond Dust” is Diamond, which suggests the origin of Diamond (Black diamond or “coal, Koyla” (51) (as he is called contemptuously by Mr. Das's colleagues), as born of the dust, and worth literally nothing. It symbolises fate of Mr. Das and it also symbolises that when fixation with animals, human beings or as material riches reaches at highest extent it degenerates into chaos and leads towards tragedy.

The preceding reading establishes the argument that her short stories reflect the Kaleidoscope of urban life. They present all shades of both Indian and foreign cities. Her stories are a blend of ‘self’ and society and it can be said that they contain an element of social documentation. As a social historian, she presents the picture of self and society from the perspective of a woman. Her short stories are psychological and social in nature, and she has presented a blend of the two elements in a very artistic way that leaves everlasting impression on the minds of readers. She deals with complex themes in her short stories and they are manifested through her characters. That is why her characters are not normal human beings whom people normally come across in their daily life but are rather alienated, not so much sociable. Her characters are outstanding. They belong to some Kafkian world. In order to present the complexities of life and characters, she has adopted the style that delves deep into the minds of characters and presents the hidden world which is one-tenth visible and nine-tenth submerged in the water of mystery.

Shashi Deshpande

Shashi Deshpande is a prominent Indian English woman writer, championing the cause of those women who have suffered the age-old domination of patriarchy. Ethically woman's position is complementary to man. Woman, intimate and yet enigmatic co-associate in human relationships but she has often been at the margin in the male dominated society. In the native context she could hardly raise objection a couple of decades ago because her utterances were suppressed in predefined roles. Deshpande has probed into the suffocated psyche of woman to highlight women's suppressed desires to lay bare their ambition and frustration, soothe their aches and pains and activate their slumberous feminine "I". This requires a deep understanding of female psychology, clarity of perception and audacity of expression. Deshpande's short fiction is an effort in this direction and before initiating discussion of her short fiction a brief discussion of influences responsible for the making of the writer is necessary in order to understand her works particularly her short fiction.

Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad in Karnataka, India. She is the daughter of the renowned Kannada writer and Sanskrit Scholar Adya Rangachara, better known as Sriranga, the cerebral man who wrote plays of ideas. From her father nevertheless, Shashi Deshpande must have acquired an intellectual bent of mind and love for reading and scholarship, which have won for her degrees in Economics, Law and English and a diploma in Journalism.

She is a widely read person, though she has never identified herself with any particular group of writers, whether of India or abroad. Her love for Somerset Maugham was "just a passing phase". "I think Jane Austen had more lasting influence." She told to Vanamala Vishwanath. "I still read her regularly. But I don't think there have been any conscious influences on my writing as such". (9). She also

enjoyed reading Dickens and Tolstoy. A careful persual of her fiction would reveal some influences of the Bronte Sisters, Jane Austen, Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing and Erica Jong. Deshpande's writings are inspired at the same time by Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer. Deshpande told her interviewer, "When I read them, they stimulated me". But this happened pretty late in her life "Quite late much after I started writing, it helped me place my own confusions and put them in order" (9).

Shashi Deshpande approaches contemporary Indian novelists with an open mind. She has respect for their merits but is not over awed by their popularity. She considers Anita Desai's *Clear Light of the Day* and Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* to be excellent books but she does not like Desai's vision of India. She praises Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. She, however, calls Rushdie a pathbreaker. According to her, "a novel which changed everything for Indian's writing in English". But she would not approve of Rushdie's theory of marginalisation propounded by Rushdie in the *Moor's Last Sigh* and *Imaginary Homeland* - similarly, she criticizes Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* for its superficiality.

Deshpande occupies a unique position among contemporary Indian novelists in English. According to Meena Shirwadkar, "Writers appear not to have paid much attention to the recent phenomenon of the educated earning wife and her adjustment or maladjustment in the family". Deshpande deals with the middle-class Indian woman who represents the overwhelming majority of Indian women and is struggling to adjust in it rather than get free from the traditional world.

She has till date published seven novels: *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *If I Die Today* (1982), *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983) *That Long Silence* (1988), *The Binding Vine* (1992) and *A Matter of Time* (1996) She has also written four books for

children - *A Sum Adventure*, *The Only Witness* and *The Hidden Treasure* and *The Narayanpur Incident* (based on the Quit India Movement and role of Children in it) Deshpande's reputation, however, rests on her mature novels but she is also known as Short Fiction writer. Infact She has started her literary career as a short story writer. Initially her stories were published in several well-known magazines *Femina*, *Eve's Weekly*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, and *The Deccan Herald*. These stories were later on published in the form of collections. "The Legacy" was written in 1972 and its her first published story. Her first collection of short stories published in 1978 was called *The Legacy and Other Stories*. Her other collections of short stories are: *It Was Dark*, *The Miracle*, *It was the Nightingale*. *The Intrusion and Other Stories* and *Collected Stories* Vol. I and Vol. II. Some of these stories were later developed into novels such as "A Liberated Woman" developed as *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Shashi Deshpande says in the preface of *Collected Stories* Vol. 1 "There is A Liberated Woman", dissatisfaction with which drove me into writing a novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. She is not one of those writers who have sported with this genre (short story) in order to relieve themselves from ennui and boredom of a tense and restive time. She is instead one of those who have taken to this form seriously and with bonafide intentions. She has already earned a number of gold medals, prizes and awards for her creative writings, and her novels are just a detailed exposition of the theme and situation so dear to her heart and so concisely articulated in her short fiction.

Thematically and technically, Shashi Deshpande's short fiction is, in many ways, identical to her novels, and it would be worthwhile to trace a common thread running through both of them. Her short fiction deals with women-in-transition (middle-class highly educated women and they are divided between the two worlds

one i.e. traditional and other modern, they are in a dilemma, whether they think of themselves as a new woman or not, between an old paternalistic order in which their roles are extremely limited and officially proclaimed freedom). Deshpande makes gender central to her short fiction. As Amrita Bhalla remarks:

Deshpande makes gender central to her writings. Her works deals not only with ordinary women in ordinary urban situations but stem from a firm belief that our lives are to a great extent governed by gender. Women, she feels, have not participated in the process of wordmaking, the stories, myths and legends in our Puranas, epics and Kathas have been written by men. However, women have been conditioned to a great extent by myth: To be as pure as Sita, as loyal as Draupadi, as beautiful as Laxmi, as bountiful a provider as Annapoorna, as dogged in devotion as Savitri, as strong as Durga - these are ultimately the role models we cannot entirely dismiss ("The Indian Woman - Myths, Stereotypes and the Reality", 1977, private papers). Deshpande feels that women never start with a picture of themselves on a clean state, their self-image loved by hegemonic influences of myths, movies and current day soap operas. (ix – x)

Shashi Deshpande's stories are expression of long suppressed feelings of women and their peculiar experiences. She sees herself as a writer whose writing comes out of, she says:

My own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, it comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing the different" roles enjoyed on me by society, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and something different

from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of a consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that a society has of me as a woman. (Deshpande 33)

Although the corpus of Shashi Deshpande's short fiction is massive, yet only representative stories have been chosen for a detailed analysis. Her stories give a perspective on women in their complex and real relationships. They are about mothers and daughters, grandmothers and wives, women working outside the home, negotiating a balance between tradition and modernity, women analysing or just expressing their insecurities and fears and desires. As Deshpande says about the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. "What we want to reach at finally is the telling, the breaking of Silence (240). Deshpande dwells on desperation and frustration, misunderstanding and incompatibility, sense of guilt and loss of faith, loneliness and alienation, pain and anguish, tormented and tortured self of a sensitive woman pitted against an ill-mated marriage and hostile circumstances around her. Her stories are about the woman's struggle in contemporary society, society that governed by strict rules laid down by patriarchal social order. As G. S. Amur remarks:

woman's struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all as human being in Shashi Deshpande's major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all her important stories. (12)

She attempts to intimately analyse man-woman relationships within the family and society, and usually accentuates on the experiences gained in life, her approach is like Jane Austen. She is primarily concerned with the intriguing problems and the suffocating environs of her female protagonists, who struggle hard in their cruel and

callous male dominated world to discover their true identity as daughter, wife, mother and above all as human beings.

The last period of the '70s and beginning decade of the '80s is the golden evolutionary period of short fiction writers and Shashi Deshpande is one of them. "A Liberated Woman" (appeared in Femina Weekly, 1977), the first short story of Shashi Deshpande is a totally different in the sense that it explores the stereotypical virtues of Indian woman, like patience, tolerance, devotion and abject acceptance of whatever is meted out to her - it questions the male superiority and female's position as a secondary sex. It is based on the problems faced by a career-woman or woman-in-transition, (who is playing dual role in the society one as a traditional woman in the family and other as an educated modern woman outside the family as a working woman), a new outlook in Indian English short story. Dieter Riemenschneider praises on Deshpande's understanding of female psyche and says, "Shashi Deshpande ... takes us into the realms of the female psyche which no writer of the previous generation had dared put into words as candidly" (312).

"A Liberated Woman" is a feminist short story not only on the basis of its central female character. It focuses on woman's *fin de siecle* stage and highlights the beginning of post-modern ideology in Indian English writing by women writers. It shows awareness of woman's predicament, her desire to be recognized as a person then as a woman and her desire to be an independent identity in the society.

The nameless central character in the story symbolises that there is no identity of female in an orthodox patriarchal society. So she is searching her identity. Her dilemma symbolises predicament of woman-in-transition / career woman in the conventional society where gender based discrimination is a common phenomenon. Her sexist discrimination and sexual torment reveals inner tortured self. "And at the

night he attacks like an animal. Then the next ... (CS 42). Her plight actually symbolises who are born girls. The fault is not in them but in the social construct which is man made. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature - which is described as feminine" (295).

The character's decision to marry a man of her own choice and its opposition at the family level. She breaks all bonds and leaves home. This is her first resistance to male dominated power system. Her open resistance is further expressed, when she becomes economically independent. Her family was hindrance in her growth and affecting her individuality, identity and rights. The rejection of home and family actually is her first foot towards independence. She sarcastically remarks on her marriage, 'A romantic, runaway marriage' (37). She falls in love with a lecturer and in spite of family opposition marries him. Her marriage is means to get away from mother and her home. Her departure from her mother and home is the first step towards autonomy.

She is disappointed with her married life. Marriage is the ultimate career for a woman in traditional Indian society. It hinders autonomy and self realization. There is no room of her own, neither in her parental home nor in husband's house. Here the in-between situation symbolises quest for identity. She becomes a famous doctor and he turn out to be a simple lecturer. This made her socially and economically his superior. This subversion of equation give rise to ego clash because marginal comes on the centre and it hurts the male ego of her husband. The change of vertical equation into horizontal equation destroys their marriage:

'It was all right for some time. Until our second kid was born. Since then we've been getting on I've built a very good practice. I earn a

good sum. I've earned a good reputation, too. Patients are now coming to me from far. In a few years, I've no doubt I'll be at the top. She said all this in a detached remote voice, as if she was speaking of someone else. But he - he's still teaching in that second rate college. Earning not much more than what he did when we met. We were so sure he'd succeed with his writing, We were so sure he'd succeed with his writing, give up teaching ...' (39-40)

She realises the actual condition of marriage and also false notion of equality.

She sarcastically comments on the reality of married life:

Her eyes were bleak as she spoke 'Listen, have you seen really old-fashioned couples walking together? Have you noticed that the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? I think that's symbolic, you know. The ideal Hindu wife always walks a few steps behind her husband. If he earns 500, she earns 400. If he earns 1000, she earns 999-or less. If he ...' (40)

She wants to run away from the physical and the psychological torment but she finds herself helpless:

'You see, till then - to close the bedroom door, to shut out the world had been such a joy - no, not that, Bliss. And that next morning when I woke up, all bruised and sore and aching, my first thought was that it was a nightmare I'd dreamt too vividly. but there werethe bruises all over me.'

Spare me all this, I wanted to say. Instead, I repeated duly. 'Bruises'.

'So it could'nt have been a nightmare, could it? And then I waited for him to say something. Anything. Apologize. Explain. But he said

nothing. Not a word. And I could'nt speak, either. It was too ghastly. It was shameful. Humiliating ...' (41)

Although Shashi Deshpande has presented this character as a rebellious character she is a committed writer too. Her social commitment is reflected in the character's commitment towards her children. "... I can't scream, because the kids in the next room may hear. I can't cry, the kids may hear" (42).

She is bearing physical and mental torment but at the same time not revealing it to anyone, it changes her into a complex character. She is consumed by self hatred, which acts out by staying married to wife beater, Rebellion and advancement both lead to guilt and to a kind of emotional stalemate in which a woman wants out and hate herself for wanting out. And stays. The same condition re-occurs again and again in her short stories.

The physical and mental torment changes her into a complex character. The narrator comments upon her personality:

... I studied her covertly, when she came. she'd changed. She looked very smart, almost chic. But I had an impression that her look of composed elegance was a carefully cultivated one. That it was brittle and could shatter at a touch. Her eyes, I thought, looked like cracks in the glaze of her poise. Her hands, too, with their jerky movements belied her apparent composure. Drugs? I wondered. (37)

This is a real portrayal of the middle-class married life, and it is a bitter comment on the hypocrisy of married life. What she wanted is the atmosphere conducive to free thinking where mind is without any fear so that she can enjoy her natural being but she only gets suffering; her inner self remain trapped in her own family. She is silent against the sexual sadism of her husband. It reveals dilemma of a

woman-in-transition of knowing the psychological nature of the problem but hesitant to talk in public. It means a liberated woman by profession but fettered in conventional norms of the middle-class society by temperament. The narrator comments on her helplessness:

But what really astonishes me is her feebleness, her attitude of despairing in difference. Surely she, an educated, earning competent woman, has no right to behave this way to plug all her escape routes herself and act like a rat in a trap. (44)

Again the narrator comments sarcastically:

All this was months ago. Since then I've tried to forget her. The other day, however, by an odd chance I came across the magazine in which she had been interviewed. I was idly turning over the pages and suddenly, there she was her cool, poised faced staring back at me, almost arrogantly. It gave me a little shock. I got a bigger one, though, when I saw the title of the piece. It was 'A Liberated Woman'. (44)

She enters in the institution of marriage with excitement in order to achieve freedom but this sublime beginning result into psychological tormentation. She thought that this institution will be alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. She rejects the rule of traditional daughter to achieve freedom. She looks forward to the role of wife but again she is deceived. Her husband turns out to be a failed lecturer. Although he may not be absolute bread winner, he is still dominant force and authority. Man becomes frustrated when he doesn't get the job. He finds himself impotent to protect his family from harsh and hostile forces he turnout to be a tormentor at home and the central character becomes victim of his frustration. 'You tell me', she said, startling me, her voice rising from a monotone to an alarming

fierceness. “You tell me what to say about a marriage where love making has become an exercise in sadism” (39). This actually symbolises the predicament of career woman/woman-in-transition who is still in search of her identity. In this short story, the woman’s predicament is similar to that of Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* where Manohar behaves in the same abnormal fashion.

Like “A Liberated Woman” and *The Dark Holds To Terrors*, “A Wall is Safer” deals with the predicament of the protagonist, Hema, a professionally qualified and practising lawyer, who has to give up her career in order to save her marriage. Her husband, Vasanth, wants her to give up her career and supports him in his agricultural project that he has undertaken as an agricultural research scientist. Hema’s friend, Sushma, is also a lawyer working for constitutional and social awareness among women. Sushma resents being called a feminist, considering it as a vague term, because what she has been doing is something concrete. She does not like the idea of Hema wasting her law education in a remote place playing a good housewife’s role for the advancement of her husband’s successful agricultural research oriented ambition. She is very much concerned about Hema’s career. She asks Vasanth: “But if you go there, what about Hema? What can she do there in the middle of nowhere” (IOS 118). But Vasantha bluntly replies without any hesitation that Hema can take up teaching, Sushma says that Hema is a lawyer not a teacher. Through the character of Sushma Deshpande presents the predicament of career woman in traditional society and she also makes well grounded point, challenges most men’s attitude towards the career of their wives. In maximum cases, the wife is expected to give up her career for the betterment of the family and for the safety of the marriage. The female protagonist of this story does the same. She willingly

relinquishes her career and accepts the role of a devoted traditional housewife, but later on she laments:

Suppose you go on effacing until you're wholly blotted out? For some reason, I think of the cry of the new born. A triumphant assertion of being existing. And I also think of how there is no difference between the cry of a female baby and a male one. when does it became a virtue to stifle that cry? (126)

She develops a feeling of bitter envy for husband in her heart. She is often overcome by a fierce longing to be "one of those women who carry their work about with them - a writer, a painter, a musician ..." (121). She suppresses her cry and feelings for the sake of her family and marriage.

This story depicts the dilemma of contemporary highly educated, middle class woman who is playing dual role in the society one as a traditional woman and the other as a modern woman. She is caught between two moral orders - one is traditional and the other is modern. She carries the burden of two roles and it changes her into woman-in-transition.

The story ends with a clear message, i.e. a wall is safer than barbed fence. One can't see what is on the other side of the wall; "But suppose the dangers are inside? What do you do then?" (121). The dangers can be on this side of the wall as well. But be the dangers from within or without, situation's depairing or destabilizing, suffering physical or psychic, Deshpande does not let the family disintegrate. None of her protagonists walk out like Ibsen's Nora. Whatever be the cost, the family ties are not severed. Though the bridge is broken, it is not demolished she hints at the missing links and the need for mending them.

“The First Lady” deals with the theme of boredom and peculiar feeling of a woman. It revolves around the fatty, old woman coming from a rich family. The protagonist falls headlong in love with a young Gandhian patriot lecturing in public meetings. She marries him against her father’s wishes, giving up silk sarees for simple Khadi wear. She adapts herself to the family milieu of her in-laws, where even asking “for a cup of tea, particularly during pregnancies would have been blasphemy” (6). Swept away by the frenzy of the struggle for independence the husband has been frequently in and out of jail, leaving the household and other responsibilities to her shoulders. It takes her a pretty long time to realize the truth that “the passionate and dedicated face she had fallen in love with, was incapable of loving another human being” (6). After the birth of the third child, her husband shocks her his intention of practising celibacy. Thus, starts the spell of ‘hysterical urge’ for self denial.

At this juncture another man, the husband’s devoted disciple, makes his entry in the house. Her deprivation makes her sensitive to his admiration of her beauty “though surreptitious looks and nebulous signs”. In the hearts of her heart she desires him “to touch her, hold her [and] have her” (7). He dies, however, in a police firing. In her old age she laughs at her lusting for him. Like Keats’ bold lover in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn", he lives in her mind externally young and always loving her and she can have the satisfaction that he did not live long enough to see her aged and fat.

She finds her life, quite boring and meaningless, though she is the wife of a Gandhian with three children and all the comforts of modern life. The ennui and boredom is so prominent that the character is unable to feel any happiness. Even the Independence Day function does not arouse any interest or zeal in her. She blurts out: “yes I love my comforts. But for these comforts we’ve bartered away our immortal souls. And the whole price has not yet been paid” (6). The loneliness of Deshpande’s

characters feel arises not just because they are alone. It is a loneliness deep rooted in their souls. It is a result of being honest with oneself.

“The First Lady” is a story that will be recognized - if they are honest to themselves - by all those who fought for the independence of India. Her forgetting that the party she is attending is being hosted to celebrate the Independence day of the country, the first lady attests to a life that has gone sour because of the too heavy a mask that must be constantly worn, a life in which freedom has no place, in which disillusionment is the ruling force. For her, this is all the more tragic because the same life was once spontaneous and was lived to the full.

“The Alien” highlights the predicament of a young, married Indian woman now shifted to England, the land of shopkeepers. Her man is out for most of the time, and she is left to watch her TV and look after her baby. She cannot understand even the type of English the Britishers use. She feels totally lonely and dejected. “The color, she thought bleakly, of hopelessness and despair. Even a fog would be better than this nothingness” (IWD 55). Through the images of ‘bleak colour’ and ‘fog’, the woman’s great disquietude, alienation and frustration and beautifully suggested in this story. Here Deshpande suggesting double displacement in a symbolic manner. One displacement is cultural while the other displacement is emotional in this story.

The racial differences are creating communication gap, and her husband due to his busy schedule unable to provide company and emotional support. This develops feeling of loneliness in the character and person changes into an alienated being. Deshpande is suggesting that women are alien in their family, homeland and in alien country. Symbolically this story suggests that they are searching their identity. It highlights the existential problem of a woman.

This sense of loneliness and boredom, frustration with monotonous life and the wish of the central woman character to seek pleasure and fulfilment constitute the thematic texture of Deshpande's story "An Antidote to Boredom." A sense of boredom and dissatisfaction grips the young married woman who is the protagonist in this story meets a young widower at her son's school and is excited by the discovery that life can be lived on an intense and spontaneous level. She is dissatisfied with her dull existence as a wife. She is so much fed up with her dull routine of a life with a cold, insensitive husband and an undemanding child so she seeks an antidote to boredom: "I would feel the sulky furrows coming back into my forehead, the little droop returning to my mouth. A long, dull evening would loom ahead of me, full of dull barren silences" (IOS 66).

She has all material comforts but her husband is insensitive and indifferent that is why she laments the lack of warmth and affection in her husband: "If only my husband had been more demonstrative of his affection, I often thought ... But what is there is no affection at all, the only thing holding us together being habit and a child?" (64).

The arrival of young widower brings happiness and excitement in her life. This man shows liking in her and their meetings develop into loving relationship and his admiration and appreciation fascinates her and she reveals her peculiar experience in the following words: "His frank admiration was as refreshing to me as cold water on a hot day" (64). She gets closer to this man and enjoys the spiritual and physical company of this man. "Now for the first time I found that a kiss could contain in itself as much pleasure and excitement as anything between a man and a woman" (67). Her husband is very much absorbed in his work and fails to take any notice of this new relationship. This indifferent attitude of husband disturbed her greatly. She feels that

if he comes to know it he would not mind it and this very thought humiliates her. Consequently she feels no guilt against her husband:

But I felt no guilt towards my husband, because I would be depriving him of nothing, nothing he wanted. How often had I felt in myself a boundless capacity for loving, for giving? But I had felt in him incapacity to receive and for that I hated him at times. (66)

She is, however, troubled by feelings of guilt towards her son, though not towards her husband and is also nagged by the doubt whether in her new relationship. She is not merely seeking an antidote to her boredom:

Sometimes terrible thoughts plagued me. I wondered whether it was only the demon of discontent which had brought me to such a strange situation, sitting with a strange man in his car, exchanging pleasurable glances with him and hiding my face guiltily at the sight of any familiar person. And at times there was the even more shaming thought, that it could have been any man; if not this, then another. Because this was for me, perhaps, only an antidote to boredom, something I enjoyed because of the excitement it brought into the dull routine of my days, the unchanging pattern of my life. (66)

The husband of the woman plans to go Delhi and she fixes a programme with other man. But at the eleventh hour, her husband invites her to accompany him. She somehow becomes ready to visit Delhi. However, she realises the authenticity and the value of her experiences with the other man, when she lets the opportunity go: "... and now I realised, when it was too late, the most piercing thought of all, that it had been no more antidote to boredom but the best part of my life. And I let it go" (68 – 69).

The story is an overt portrayal of the changes taking place in respect of the temperament of Indian woman. Although the married woman is unable to rebel against her dull existence with her husband, she does not hesitate from going out of her house with her new lover and mixes up with him freely in defiance of the traditional ethos and her conventional role of a faithful wife. This story presents the predicament of a woman-in-transition.

The mother in “Death of a Child”, who decides to get her pregnancy terminated, is haunted by the phantom child Deshpande focuses on “the woman’s experience of grief, guilt and shame caused by an abortion for which the responsibility is entirely hers” (Amur 10). The narrator of the story is a lonely woman, a woman with two children and a husband who regards children as something for her to manage. When she conceives for the third time, her husband takes it lightly and rather casually:

The third time in less than four years. It’s not fair. I try to explain. I stumble over the words, then, stop. So uncomprehendingly does he look at me that there seems to be no link between us. And this is the father of my child: Panic surges into me. “But if it has happened,” he says at last, “why not accept it?” His very reasonableness infuriates me. I am all on edge. Raw, as if the skin has been hacked off me, and I’m open to every minute sensation, every pain. (IOS 44)

She is not willing to have a third child in less than four year’s time. She says, “I feel like an animal. The third time in less than four years. It isn’t fair” (44). She feels that the sole purpose of her life is not to breed like a bitch or a cow. She says: “I cannot imagine that the main purpose of my life is to breed. Simple? Yes, any cow, any bitch can breed” (44 - 45).

The narrator feels that motherhood excludes a woman from participating and contributing in different fields and other walks of life. “Children stifle your personality. You become just a mother-nothing more ...” (45). She is not satisfied with the fixed role of a wife and mother. She wants to search and save her identity as an individual in her own way. But her husband fails to understand her feelings. She says : “I want to reserve some part of myself, my life. But I say none of this to him I know he will not understand” (47). Deshpande focuses on peculiar psychological feelings of a woman. In this way, this story can be compared with Judith Wright’s poem “Woman to Man” where the female persona is apprehensive about her husband’s behaviour after the birth of a child.

The narrator develops feeling of resentment and hostility against her husband which has become embedded in her. That is why she insists on an abortion mainly as an act of self assertion against a blandly tyrannical husband. After the abortion has taken place, she begins to feel the dead foetus as a real child as if a limb of her body has been amputated. She says:

I am conscious of a piercing pain in the place he had filled. Grief becomes real. I swing like a monstrous pendulum, between grief, guilt and shame. Guilt conquers. I welcome it and shoulder the burden with a masochist fervour. If not for me, my child would have lived. I try to delude myself into thinking it’s fate. But I do not believe in Fate. Only in inevitability. But, yes, it was. I could have done no other thing, acted in no other way. The thought clams me for a while. (50)

“Death of a Child” is a psychological and sensitive portrayal of a woman who is, as G.S. Amur puts it, “trying desperately to salvage something of herself from the social and biological onslaught of marriage” (10).

The protagonist does not want to be confined to the role of being a mere mother. She views abortion as a way out of being absorbed physically and mentally into a life of mere motherhood. Her resentment and rebellion is as much against the fixed role of motherhood as against the male attitude of looking at woman as a breeder of children alone.

Woman's consciousness and palpable struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find a distinct identity, finds artistic expression in Shashi Deshpande's short story "The Intrusion". It records a newly married woman's experiences and her privacy is violated to reconcile with anyone, may be her own husband who is not even acquainted with her: "I was conscious of an unreasonable pang of irritation against him. As though conscious of my discomfort, he held my arm to help me, but awkwardly, too tight, and I longed to protest" (34).

She doesn't know what to talk about. However, her husband tries to break the ice by telling her how fortunate he has been to get that place for their honeymoon. But she doesn't feel at ease. Being full of lassitude, she feels tired and embarrassed. So, she proposed to go down to the sea to get rid of the embarrassment. Her husband too feels disturbed: "What's this? Why are you behaving like this? His voice was almost shrill with a note of hysteria in it" (39).

This story tends to bring out the humiliation experienced by the newly wedded bride at the violation of her privacy by a stranger who happens to be her husband. This story focuses on the peculiar feeling of a young woman that before entering into a physical relationship with her husband, she wants to have some acquaintance with this new man in her life. In her words:

I want to know all about you. I wanted to say what do you feel and why you agreed to marry me? ... and do you like the things I do. I

wanted to tell him how shy and frightened I was about exposing the mysterious of my body to him ... But I could say none of these things to him. Even if I did, I thought, looking at his face, he would not hear me. (40)

And when the husband touches and glances her body, she again feels irritated, though she wishes to avoid humiliation. It is again because of her feeling that her privacy is being intruded upon by a stranger, although he happens to be her own husband. But when her husband tries to approach her physically she recoils herself from his embrace and this attitude of the bride irritates the husband. She says: “But how can I, with a man I scarcely know? It’s not fair ... it’s indecent. He should have given me some time” (41). The honeymoon proves to be a very unpleasant experience and it develops feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment in the bride because she feels that her privacy has been intruded upon by a stranger who happens to be her husband:

And it was not the sea that was pounding my body but he, my husband, who was forcing his body on mine. I was too frightened to speak ... I could not move away his movements had the same rythm, the same violence as the movements of the sea; yet I could have borne the battering of sea better, for that would hurt but not humiliate like this. (41)

The honeymoon for her is a prolonged psychological rape which culminates in a physical one. According to Andera Dworkins:

Male domination of the female body is the basic material reality of women’s lives, and all struggle for dignity and self-determination is

rooted in the struggle for actual control of one's body, especially control over physical access to one's own body. (84-85)

The story leaves an unforgettable impression on the reader's mind. Written in a Kaliedoscopic style, it does not fall in achieving what it aims at. It is remarkable for recording the temper of the modern woman in India that has undergone a revolutionary change during the last few decades. The mode of irony used by the writer enhances the beauty of the story. As G. S. Amur has noted:

“The Intrusion”, a powerful story and one of her most successful attempts, records a newly married woman's experience of alienation and horror at the violation of her privacy by a stranger who happens to be her own husband. Shashi Deshpande can handle irony with devastating effect”: “And at present we are not friends, not acquaintances even but a husband and wife,” says the protagonist of the story. (10)

“It was Dark” depicts the plight of an unmarried girl having been physically molested (raped) by an unknown young man, resulting in her illegal pregnancy and leading to a great shock. In this tale, the ‘man’ is identified with ‘the dark’ or ‘the evil’, though the girl thinks that both of them are engines of tyranny and forced submission. “There was no enemy but the dark, no fear but the fear of being alone” (31).

This story captures the psychology and inner tormentation of a rape victim i.e. fourteen year old school girl. It not only presents the pain and anguish of rape victim but it also brings out the despair, the torment and anguish experienced by the parents of the victim. The mother in particular is deeply anguished and overwhelmed by a feeling of guilt for having never cautioned her daughter on the dangers that might

befall upon her. But the mother has her own reasons for not doing so of the past. Her reasons are revealed in her retrospective thinking:

I had asked myself why hadn't I warned her? I had been warned enough as a girl. Don't - don't - don't you're female". They had taught me to build a wall around myself with negatives from childhood. And then suddenly when I got married, they had told me to break the wall down. To behave as if it had never been. And my husband too how complete his disregard of that wall had been; I had felt totally vulnerable, wholly defenceless. I won't let my daughter live behind walls, I had thought. (31)

This story recalls the rational thinking of a contemporary woman although she is living in conventional system but her inner conflicts raises certain questions. Her mental anguish and retrospective thinking presents a critique of society. Her thinking shows that woman are not born but made. She wants to break that traditional system. Deshpande breaks the silence of Indian woman living in conventional society.

"My Beloved Charioteer" brings out the trauma of two women-mother and daughter, both are widows and living together. The story revolves around the mother and daughter. After the death of her husband Aarti (daughter) comes, along with her daughter Preeti to live in her mother's house. Her mother is an old woman who has been living all alone since the death of her husband. The arrival of her daughter and great daughter brings happiness in house new life in old woman but the daughter is always lost in her thoughts. She lost all zest of life and her mother always consoles her and provides solace and comfort. Although mother consoles her but she has lost happiness and forgotten her talks even she is unable to sleep. She says: "I haven't slept well since Madhav died. I will never sleep well again all my life"(53).

The mother notices changes in her daughter. Earlier she was close to her father and after his death she never shared anything with his mother. She tries to console her but she never revealed her feelings with her mother. The old woman laments at this pathetic condition of her daughter: “She has never shared anything with me and now she hides her sorrow like a dog its bone. She guards it jealously and will not let me approach” (56).

Arti’s attachment towards her father and estrangement from her mother fills the old woman with a deep mental anguish she says: “For Arti, it was always her father ... Even after his death, he can give her something I can’t. The thought hurts hurts? It’s like having salt rubbed into a raw wound” (57). But one day old woman reveals her past. The tortured and tormented self of a woman is revealed by her. She reveals her relationship that she shared with her father. She tells Aarti that her father was callous hearted and insensitive husband. She tells Aarti that her married life continued for twenty five years but she could only know him was that ‘he didn’t like unstringed beans and hated grit in his rice’ that he liked tea boiling hot and his bath water lukewarm’, that he hated tears’, that he didn’t like to see women with untidy loosend hairs’ (58). He never showed any care and attention and never cared for his wife’s likes and dislikes. Recalling her past and the inner torment and humiliation that she received from her husband she tells her daughter:

At night, I scarcely dared to breath, I was so terrified of disturbing him ... I slept there, afraid to get up for a glass of water, scared even to cough. When he wanted me, he said, “come here”. And I went. And when he finished, if I didn’t get out of his bed fast enough, he said, “you can go”. And I got out. (59)

After revealing her past, the humiliation and the torment she experienced as a wife, the burden that she was carrying for such a long time revealed by her to her daughter and it provides a cathartic relief. It shows that Deshpande is voicing the long silence of Indian woman through her characters.

“Why a Robin?” presents the hostility of a twelve-year old daughter towards her less educated mother. Asked to write a composition on a robin, she seeks in vain help from the mother who can offer information on any bird except a robin. Disgusted at her obtuseness the girl turns to her father with a sense of surity. Her tone lacerates the mother and leaves her as if with “bleeding nicks” all over. The mother says:

I didn't have the key to open up this beautiful child, though she is mine. I don't have the key to her father either. It is as if I am in my own house, confronted with two closed rooms. I am condemned to sit outside and gaze helplessly at the closed rooms. (11)

The situation is nothing less than an insoluble puzzle for her: “Have they locked me out or have I locked myself in?” (12). Her efforts to partake in the husband's means of enjoyment (music, etc.) are withdrawn by the apprehensive and unanswerable retort: “What do you want?” Food, shelter, clothing, a daughter!. Like Marango in Wesker's *Kitchen*, he doesn't ask, “What more do you want”? The woman is alienated from her daughter and husband, while the daughter and the father share perfect understanding. She consider herself as an outsider, an intruder in her complex, for instance, she laments: “... but with my husband and child I am foolish, stupid, inarticulate. When I am with them, I become dull and brown - no not even that. I lose colour completely (11). But sleeping under the same roof she feels as if the two single beds are two islands that neither the child nor the passion can bridge. She is, however, of the view that “bridges have to be built. They do not come out of

nothing. They have to be created” (14). Rapt in these thoughts she bears the sobs of her daughter from the adjacent rooms, who, having attained the age of puberty, has her first periods. Sudden flush of blood and abdominal pain frighten the woeful girl who has suddenly grown to womanhood. This time it is the mother she wants to comfort and nurse her. The womanhood brings them closer. The mother is happy to have found one key atleast to open one door. The bridge is built between the two and she may now give up the thought of self-abnegation.

The texture of the story “It was the Nightingale” is quite different from the preceeding ones. Sex is not just fumbling in dark “His hand, groping, unsure, often missing the mark”, (85) but an activity “whether we really find each other. We don’t have to search. Each goes out to the other and we are merged in a oneness that is absolute. I give all of me until I am a hollow ecstasy” (90). The wife, who is lovingly called Jayu by her husband, an ambitious careerist, is often late home apologizing to the tolerant husband. She is to leave the next morning for a two year foreign assignment. This separation of two year is very painful for her as well as for her husband. She develops feeling of guilt and apprehensions about her marriage that whether her marriage could survive or bear this separation of two years. She says:

I’m putting two years between us. A fearsome period. Two years of experience we will not share. And each one a brick that can ultimately become a wall between us. It isn’t quarrels that shatter a marriage, its doing things part. Can we stand two years of separation? Confronted with their thought, the link between us seems tenous. (89-90)

But no quarrels - no exaggerated emotions, on the contrary, unlike the other women’s usual complaint, she resents why he didn’t refuse to let her go, asserting his malehood to let her ambition play a second fiddle:

How I have longed to give ambition and success they go by and stay with him, throttled by his love, no, not throttled, that's not fair. It's a soporific his love and mine, which makes me long to lie down in lethargic bliss. (90)

Even she wishes that her husband had refused to let her go. But she realizes that if once she will renounce this opportunity then she would end up as a traditional woman - playing role of an ideal mother and wife. She overcomes her feeling of guilt and finally decides to go. She justifies her own decision, she says:

To me, our lives are intertwined, yet they are two distinct strands. They are like two lights that shine more brightly together but to keep my light burning is my responsibility and mine alone. (92)

But she is aware of the inner pain of her husband. The sad face of her husband hurt her and she feels that the memories of this final parting will always accompany her. She takes this bold decision from her intellect but at heart she wants to be with him. She wants to say that it doesn't mean that she cares less for him. But she becomes speechless and at final moment she is unable to express herself. In her words: "Even as he holds me close, I feel the reproach in him. And perhaps he can feel the guilt in me" (94)" and she wonders: "Will they always come between us?" (94).

This story is written in contrast to "A Wall is Safer". The protagonist of the story has reversed the role of woman in contemporary society but she has feeling of guilt at heart that she is unable to perform the role assigned to her i.e. as a traditional woman. Deshpande suggesting that contemporary educated middle-class Indian woman has established her new identity and now she has redefined her role. The man-woman relationship appears to have reversed in this story.

In “A Man and a Woman”, a woman comes into physical contact with a boy of seventeen after her husband has been long dead. The boy is actually the younger brother of her dead husband, Jayanta. She is thirty years old, and yet she is full of beaming beauty and youth. Nature seems to have created her for “the joy of life, a body made for a man’s hands” (IWTN 32). For quite sometime, she has been overwhelmed by the questions of morality, conventionality and social taboos but now becomes very restless and uneasy. Her family rebukes her buying “a red and blue saree” (37) even after becoming a widow. But for her loving son, Ramesh, she would have killed herself. She is beset and existential problems she is a mere B.A. and will not be able to secure a suitable job. Then, where should she go? “Where to? Where shall I go, Manu? My parents are dead. My brothers ... no, I can’t live with them. And I have become incapable of living by myself” (38).

A similar question was raised by Sita in Anita Desai’s novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1995) when she got completely bored and disgusted with her Bombay life and its sickening surroundings. The answer to this question is to be found within oneself, not in external sources. Didn’t Socrates say, ‘Trust thyself’? *The Gita* also exhorts not to conduct oneself against one’s ownself. If one transgresses one’s self, one will experience “a living death” (39) as Lalitha of Deshpande’s story does. The story becomes suggestive enough when it forwards the idea that an effective ‘antidote’ to the life of boredom, joylessness and alienation is the remarriage of a young widow. It is thoughtfully executed Manu the crippled classmate and bosom friend of Jayanta, comes forward with his proposal to marry Lalitha, whose initial resistance to his proposal is nothing but the dread of a tabooed society and false sense of prestige for the members of the Jayanta’s family.

“Lucid Moments” deals with the pain, agony and helplessness of an old woman who is on her death bed and her daughter and husband give up their hope. They watch her die. The old woman is more tormented by the thought that she doesn’t know anything about her mother than by physical pain. The old woman has no information about her mother even she doesn’t have any photograph of her mother and her father never spoke about her mother. Even she doesn’t know the name of her mother. She recalls her mother’s name who died long ago. She asks her daughter Sujata, “Suja ... what is my mother’s name? ...” They always said ... your mother ... no one ... I never heard ... What her name was?” (71). Sujata tries to find out her maternal grandmother’s name but she fails in her attempt. She asks her father:

“Baba, do you know it?”

“What?”

Akka’s mother’s name?

Irritably, he says, “No, how could I” It sounds as if he is saying “Why should I”. (73)

The old woman recalls her pre-wedding rituals in which a priest calls out the names of the couple’s ancestors (father, grandfather and great grandfather). So, she complains, ‘Mothers name ... why don’t they? ’ ... (74). She asks so many questions when she is close to her death. Her daughter is surprised with this attitude of her mother because earlier her mother was very quiet and unthinking person. But the final moment arises and old woman dies with a heavy weight of guilt on her heart that she doesn’t know the name of her mother. Sujata falls in mental agony and guilt of her mother that she never knew her mother’s name.

Sujata tries to trace her grandmother’s name and determined that what had happened in past it will not happen again her mother’s name will be out of curse of

oblivity. She puts up an enlarged photograph of her mother and says: "There! its done. She doesn't need any flowers or kumkum. It's enough she is here" (79). When the story ends Sujata picks up Tiny (daughter of Sujata's younger sister Shilpa) and makes her look at the photograph she says: "She is your grandmother ... Her name was Sumati" (79). The little girl then points a finger towards her own self and says: "And I am Karuna" (79). Sujata and Shilpa join this little girl and they also imitate the gesture of this girl. The story ends on this happy note that the tragedy that occurred with Sujata's mother it will not occur again. Through this story Deshpande gives emphasis on selfhood of woman. This story also shows protest against the lack of identity in patriarchal society.

The sense of loneliness can be a problem in one's native place but it is worse in an alien land. This double displacement is depicted in the story "Ghosts". This story revolves around the woman who is alienated from her husband and she is yearning for a sense of belonging and companionship in the alien land. The woman is in England with her husband in the connection with his job. Her husband is having very busy schedule and often comes late at nights. The only company that she have it is of her own child. She feels herself alienated whether it is the self-service departmental stores or streets, people just walk around her, without looking at her. The experience is same at the doctor's clinic. She feels that she is like a brown ghost and walking among the alien people and nobody taking notice of her even people are not aware of her existence.

She is frightened by the way people look at her "people looked past her, through her, over her, beyond her ... so many eyes that never seemed to rest on her, or if they did, registered blankness" (85). She wants emotional support from her husband but he fails to provide that, whatever brief contacts she has with him in the form of

physical relationships develops feeling of bitterness and disappointment. The physical relationship is mechanical activity and it makes protagonist an alienated being:

And then when it was over, they turned their backs on each other in project unison, as if they had practised this earlier. He went off to sleep she could hear his soft steady snores but she lay in the dark trying to burrow through the silence.(85)

The protagonist of the story develops a habit of talking to herself. At home with her husband dead tired after the days work, her frantic overtures are often ignored. She would pass her hands over her own body initially softly and later fiercely for reassurance that she was real and alive. It is the T.V. the faces on the screen-a woman smiling - a man working-“that appears ore real than those walking - that appears more real than those walking like ghosts on the streets. The music and the dancing, singing boys and girls on the screen keep ‘the sepulchral silence’ away and she does not feel alone. It not only highlights the plight of a woman but it also highlights that this sense of loneliness is not individual or particular but it has now become the culture of the cities of the world. Instead, of getting emotional support from the human beings one is getting it from the artificial object - T.V., Deshpande in an ironical way commented on this flaw of modern society that world is filled with crowd and this consumerist crowd have all material comforts but lacks emotional and spiritual support.

“The Cruelty Game” narrates the plight of the recently widowed mother (Pramila) and the fatherless daughter, Sharu, who is teased to tears by her cousins in the joint family. Instead of sympathy for the widow the mother-in-law has torture in reserve for her. The worst shock to the daughter comes when it is announced that her mother is to remarry her father’s old friend (Jagdish). Throughout the story the widow

is a silent sufferer and listener - hardly speaking a sentence in her defence - a passive participant in the general drama of pain. The widowed mother becomes an embodiment of pain, humiliation and suffering.

The relationship between a widowed mother and her daughter (Sharu) is again analysed in the story. With the husband dead and the son settled away, now it is the daughter who announces her decision of going abroad.

On her first day in school, the sobbing daughter had entreated: "Amma don't go away, don't go away, don't leave me here and go, take me with you, I want to go home with you"(150). Now it is the mother's turn to plead pathetically: "... don't go away, don't leave me alone and go away, don't leave me alone here. I'm frightened" (150). The mother remembers her grandmother with eight children who had never stopped working. But the daughter behaves in an entirely different way:

But I'd rather be selfish than become like you. Amma, would you really like me to sacrifice myself for you. And become bitter and hate you and myself for it? No Amma, I can't. I won't do that. And its my life after all. Let me live it the way I want.(151)

For whatever reason, generational gap or personal ambition, the daughter goes away leaving the mother behind. The widowed mother Pramila is a pathetic character she suffers humiliation and tortures at her in-laws' house for her children but her children have also forgotten for their personal ambition and she remains a lonely being. This story symbolises plight of widows in Indian society.

"The Stone Women" deals with the theme of self-realization. This story revolves around a young woman. She visits temple with her husband both of them are impressed by the beautiful carving of women in the courtyard of the temple. The woman particularly fascinated by the beauty of these carved women but suddenly she

is amazed by the joyous, playful, narcissistic existence of these women. She is surprised by the poses of stone women: “could any women ever have been like this?” (143). She suddenly realises that these women are beautiful but they are not the real selves. They are the manifestation of man’s imagination. She realises that she is also becoming one of those stone women because she is trying to mould her personality according to her husband’s wish. She recalls her husband’s disapproval of wearing the silver bracelet and humming Hindi film song when she wears a dress and her husband shows his dislike. She compares herself and stone women how their creator have looked upon them but boldly she asserts her individuality and declares: “It is comfortable”. The unexpected reply of woman puzzled husband. It shows emergence of a new woman from the dead orthodox patriarchal system (which is symbolised through stone women) and her bold assertion to preserve her identity.

But in “A Day Like Another”, the protagonist does not revolt for the sake of the family. The story revolves around the wife who is aware of her husband’s infidelity but in order to save the harmony of the family she decides not to revolt. It will only shatter the existing peace and harmony of the family and it will upset the relationship which has taken a long time to build. Deshpande has presented this character as a symbol of inner suffering, humiliation and agony. Through this character she has presented the position of woman in Indian society. It also highlights the predicament of those women who are playing role of traditional women in contemporary society. This story reveals the stereotypical virtues of Indian women like patience, tolerance, devotion, sacrifice and acceptance of whatever is done to her. In this way, this story questions male dominance and female's position in Indian society. It reveals exploitation of a woman by the patriarchy in Indian society.

In three of the stories Shashi Deshpande has gone back to the *Mahabharata*, one of the greatest epics of the world's literature, tells innumerable stories. But in many of these stories, women, though very much present have no voice, Deshpande has let voices in "Hear me, Sanjaya" to Kunti and in "The Inner Rooms" to Amba and allows them, finally, to explain their actions. All these stories have echoes from the greatest epic the *Mahabharata*. But they have contemporary, contextual and problematic dimensions. Polygamy being the accepted custom in the monarchical set-up of good old days, Kunti is said to have welcomed Madri, King Pandu's second wife, as her younger sister without any jealousy or complex. But "Hear me Sanjaya ..." expresses Kunti's modernized mental agony - beauty dethroned by the other woman. Even Madri's leaving Nakul and Sahadev behind is resented: "Take my sons, look after them, she said. I was angry. She is escaping, I thought she is taking away all the glory, leaving the struggle, the drudgery for me"(135).

Bringing up five children, two of other women, is more than a domestic drudgery today. As the writer, political journalist Nayantara Sahgal says, it is very essential that our epics are re-examined by women. "Through such re-writing ... new Sitas and Savitris will arise, stripped of false sanctity and crowned with the human virtue of courage. Then at last we will know why they did what they did ..." (15).

Deshpande has done just this in this very moving story, "Hear me Sanjaya" Kunti, the eternally silent mother of the Pandava brothers in the epic *Mahabharata*. She has finally revealed her feelings, the reasons behind her actions. This happens on a walk she takes with Sanjaya, chrioteer to the blind King Dhritrashtra. The epic war is over Pandavas have won the war. Dhritrashtra and Gandhari, who are devastated by the loss of their hundred odd sons, have decided to leave the royal court and to seek peace in the forest. Kunti for whom her son's victory has not brought much Joy,

decides to follow the old king and queen. They are accompanied by Vidura and Sanjaya. Vidura has gone away on his own way. Sanjaya who had talked a lot during the war of Mahabharata, reporting to the blind King Dhritarashtra all the happenings of the war, has fallen eerily silent, once the war is over. The talkative one has lost his tongue and is condemned to listen, the silent one has suddenly found her tongue. In this monologue, just before her death in a forest fire, we know finally what moves this woman, a woman who had to bear a multitude of disasters in her life, very silently. In other words marginal is at the centre and those who were at the centre now they are at periphery - Gayatri Spivak raises this question - Can the Subaltern Speak? The answer is yes, Subaltern can speak. It is evident from the portrayal of Kunti's character in this story.

In the *Mahabharata* Kunti has a very significant role to play. Her actions are important. But no reasons are given for these actions. The person behind these actions is never revealed. Till readers read the story of Kunti by Deshpande, they do not understand though they often would have wondered, what kind of a person Kunti was? What did Kunti feel when she had to take care of the five young children when they had to face the enmity of Duryodhana who saw in Pandavas rivals to the throne and to his popularity? Why did Kunti make Draupadi marry all the five Pandavas? Kunti's life was an unenviable one. As a young child, she is given away in adoption to King Kuntibhoja. As a result she loses her name Pritha and becomes Kunti. How did the little girl come to terms with this change in her life?

"The Inner Rooms" deals with the plight of 'Amba' who becomes the victim of social norms which are patriarchal in approach. Deshpande recreates a passage from Mahabharata and lent a voice to Amba who commits suicide due to frustration resulting from false patriarchal chauvanism and hostile values of society. She loves

Salva but can't marry him: "I can't marry you", Salva had said ... "Bhishma defeated me. You now belong to him. I will be dishonoured if I take you for my wife." (98). Amba loves another man due to this Vichitravirya refuses to marry her: "But I can't marry you. How can I when you have loved, when you still love, may be, another man?" (99) Bhishma is a confirmed bachelor (practicing celibacy) and so won't marry her. Although the story is mythical, Deshpande has given new meaning to this story. It has contemporary contextual relevance. It highlights the predicament of women in a male dominated society. According to G. S. Balrama Gupta, "Amba predicament is paradigmatic" woman is suppressed and oppressed; rebellion would mean ostracism; so the only way out is suicide (149). In "The Last Enemy" Deshpande looks into the heart of Duryodhana, the incomparable hero of Mahabharata and gives him a chance to articulate his own inner turmoil at the end of the great war.

Of course loneliness is not the only theme of the stories. There is "The Pawn", a delightful short story in which a young man steps in for a friend and agrees to show Bangalore to a family visiting the city for a day. At the beginning, the young man is disappointed because the daughter of the family is not even pretty. She is short and thin, nothing one can appreciate. But then, during the course of the day, the girl smiles at him, a smile that caught the corners of her mouth, curling and lifting it acquisitively. The young man falls for that wisp off a smile. At the end of the day he even manages to exchange addresses with the family, hoping for a continuation (or is it merely the start) of a relationship with the girl. Just a week later he realises that it had been a dream, and thinks what have dreams to do with reality. He tears up the paper with the address.

A different kind of love affair-romantic, filmi, villainous and gruesome - is portrayed in “Anatomy of a Murder”, where a young slum dweller working as an assistant in a grocery shop and being very fond of movies, catches a glimpse of a white skinned, well educated and middle aged woman and instantly becomes infatuated with her. He misinterprets her smiles and takes a bag of provisions to her flat, and, on being asked to close the door after him, pounces upon her in a sudden spurt of emotions and throttles her then and there. Then he sits beside her “still and motionless” (ITWN 58), without committing any act of robbery or rape. The story definitely demonstrates the disastrous impact of romantic and melodramatic movies on young minds.

“The Miracle” is more concerned with the miracle of worshipping a monkey called Raaja (who does not die even after getting a dose of poison by a research prone doctor) than with the question of self-searching. But we discover a fairly good deal of self-searching in “I want ...”, where a twenty seven year old woman named Alka is subjected to “the insolvent stores, [and] the impertinent questions” (TM 36) by the groom’s party. The young woman feels much uneasiness, consternation, and hopelessness, she ruminates: “The woman in me was outraged and protested. I crushed her. She had no place there. None at all” (37). She is terribly stirred within and remarks: “Sometimes I feel we are all doomed to be strangers to one another, forever sealed in separate glass jars we call “self” (36). What keeps Alka apart from the common women is a strong sense of ‘self’ that she wants to preserve at all costs. In a mood of self-preservation, she observes: “I had a shape and a form I had to preserve. A self I had to treasure” (37). She is clearly a woman of consciousness and wants to discover her integral identity. As regards marriage, she has little or no choice of her own; her parents are there to safeguard her interests. But Alka, being a thinking

woman, has her own desires to fulfil. Though she does not want a husband having a four figure salary or a car, she still desires a man who “hears my voice when I speak. Who understands men even when I don’t ...” (42). In the end, she accepts the reassurances of her Baba. The story “Madhu” narrates the wayward ways of a young girl of that name driving her mother to fury and irritation and her father to the hospital with a severe heart stroke. Her brother, Vinay, is away in Bombay doing his medical course. Towards the close of the story, Madhu realises that ‘sacrifice’ is a noble virtue in human beings, and in a mood of a remorse remarks: “I’ll sacrifice something I like very much and may be I’ll get the other things” (53). This is, of course, a vague realisation on her part, and a belated one, too.

In the same way, the theme of ignorance and sacrifice is present in the touching story “The Awakening”. The story deals with the young girl Alka, whose dreams and aspirations are shattered when her encounter takes place with the harsh realities of life. She always resents her father’s poverty till she doesn’t know the reality that how her father struggled and sacrificed for the sake of the family. She repents her ignorance and insensitivity and emerges as a mature character. She realises that life is a compromise at every step. So she takes the responsibilities of the family on her young shoulders: Tears rolled down. But they were not the tears of childhood. They were the first tears of adulthood, bitter, salty and painful” (IOS 18). Instead of freeing herself from the situation Alka grows into maturity. Sacrifice is the key note of this story.

Her short stories not only deal with exploitation of women, torment, suffering and isolation of women but also with bold issues, and subtle human behaviour particularly woman’s peculiar behaviour as in “The Duel” where a widow succumbs

to the seduction of male writer. Deshpande narrates the bold assertion of this woman's sexuality in this story.

Another story entitled "The Window" has a lesbian touch in it. The fatty landlady, whose husband is dead, is living all alone in her two storeyed house and she lets out two rooms to a newly married couple, and when the man goes out on his job, she opens the window with a fierce jerk and jumps into the young woman's room and pesters her with all sorts of odd questions. While going out of the room, the landlady says: "you're pretty, very pretty. Does he ever tell you that?" (50). She invites her upstairs and the young woman starts crying aloud.

Character occupies a pivotal position in Deshpande's short stories. Her characters are not wooden characters but flesh-and-blood characters. She has not created these characters due to some necessity or to serve any purpose but her characters are human beings one sees in the world. She pointed out to Stanley Carvelho, "My characters are all human beings one sees in the world around" and "No Superman" (17).

Her stories revolves around women characters and they take their own ways. Her short fiction has to do with women as they are Deshpande's women characters have a strength of their own and in spite of challenges and hostilities, remain uncrushed. As compared to Deshpande's women characters, her male characters are generally "thin" and "typed".

Deshpande has nevertheless created authentic female characters – flesh-and-blood characters with recognizable credentials. She has successfully delineated their problems and plights, yearning and aspirations, failures and foibles.

She portrays women in her short stories in different roles as wife, mother, daughter and as a human being in society where position is conditioned by man. Her

women are middle-class Indian women who are highly educated according to Indian standards and they are conscious about their individuality, personality and selfhood. They want to resist patriarchy and also want to change their specified roles allotted by the patriarchal society. They are achieving new world of their own but their achievement marked by fear, apprehension and anxiety. They are women in transition (divided between two worlds). Their striving towards new world of their own often leads to guilt because they are abandoning such roles or not performing adequately such roles or not performing adequately which are allotted by the traditional society. Hence in this way either they sacrifice their new identity or emerged as a silent sufferer as in “A Liberated Women”, “A Wall is Safer” and “The Stone Women” for the sake of familial relationship or Harmony of the family. As G. S. Balrama Gupta observes:

Shashi's depiction of her heroine operating in the frame-work of tradition-bound, male oriented Indian middle-class society is faithfully realistic and not romantically exaggerated. Shashi's women are conscious of their predicament; they are victims of inequity; they are creatures of conventional morality: they are the one who are unfairly abused. (149)

Her short stories are more or less a fictionalisation of personal experiences. Most of the stories present a typical middle class housewife's life. Deshpande's main concern is the urge to find oneself, to create space for oneself to grow on one's own. One striking thing about her short fiction is the recurrence of certain women - specially those who are educated and belong to the middle-class. They have been most prominently dealt with in most of the stories. Many of her characters are frustrated. Her short stories are generally centred on misused and ill used. But they believe in

confirmity and compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which might result in the disruption of familial concord (Balarama 149). Family relationships - particularly the relationship between husband and wife and the latter's dilemmas and conflicts as in "A Liberated Woman".

There is in Deshpande's short stories revulsion to normal physical functions such as menstruation, pregnancy and procreation as in "Death of a Child" women she feels, must not be reduced to the level of a breeding machine:

I have a very strong feeling that until very recently women in our society have been looked upon just as 'breeding animals'. They had no other role in life. I have a strong objection to treating any human being in that manner... The whole chronology of their life centres around childbirth ... the stress laid upon feminine functions ... May be too much thinking has made me express a sort of dislike for the purely physical aspects of feminine life, making it seem as if I am totally against all feminine functions, which is not the truth. (231)

Even if Deshpande seems to be little interested in the significance of woman's physical functions, her short stories redress the balance by highlighting the fact that a woman is not merely a conglomerate of such functions. She has to be judged as for with her male counter part on the basis of her potential. "A Wall is Safer" highlights this issue.

Her short stories deal with realism. She presents a plausible story of authentic characters and not shadowing abstractions. Realism as Engels says, implies "besides truth of detail, the truthful representation of typical characters under typical circumstances." Deshpande observes this kind of realism in her short stories. Her's is the India of the eighties. She believes in presenting life as it is and not as it should

be”, and such as Hema of “A Wall is Safer” and the female protagonist of “A Liberated Woman”, many Indian wives keep on “perennially groping about their fate, but unwilling to do anything that could result in their beings tossed out of their comfortable rugs and into the big, bad world of reality to fond for themselves” (Sheshadri 94).

She reflects social reality as it is. She does not didact or advice how it ought to be and gives no solutions to existing problems. She “writes about the middle class Indian women and their feelings not as their champion, but as their articulator” (Fatehally 24).

Deshpande’s short stories deal with the portrayal of the predicament of middle-class educated Indian women, their inner conflict and quest for identity, issues pertaining to parent-child relationship, marriage and sex, and their exploitation and disillusionment. In this way her short stories are feminist in approach.

In her short stories Deshpande has portrayed the new Indian woman and her dilemmas, her efforts to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all, as a human being in the tradition-bound male-dominated Indian society. The Indian woman’s plight is a part of general human predicament through her experiences is significantly more intense. Virginia Woolf points out the differences in male and female experiences and their expressions in literature are different. She says, “There is the obvious and enormous difference of experience in the first place; but the essential difference lies in the fact that men describes battles and women the birth of children but that each sex describes itself” (26). Deshpande’s short stories contain so much that can be regarded as the staple material of feminist thought: women’s sexuality, gender roles, self-discovery and so on so forth.

The strong point about Deshpande's short stories is her delineation of the woman's inner world. Her protagonists are women struggling to find their own voice and are continuously in search to define them. Her stories voicing the silence as in "It was Dark", mother of the unnamed fourteen year old rape victim says: "I won't let my daughter live behind walls, I had thought" (31), the protagonist of "Death of a Child" says, "The Third Time in less than four years" / "I feel like an animal ... I cannot imagine that the main purpose of my life is to breed" (44). So, against the half hearted attempts of her husband to convince her, she decides to have an abortion. The woman makes a choice that she is the master of her body and that the final word should be hers. And so, she decides to have control of her body, her life, and her destiny. The feeling of 'self' and search for identity is very prominent in her short fiction but sometimes characters undertake futile search for her "self", for example, protagonist of "Death of child" is confused and she portrays realistically the ambivalent feelings of the woman towards her own decision. They become shapeless, formless like water. But her protagonists are voicing the silence, for instance, Ajji in "My Beloved Charioteer" and the protagonist in "The Stone Women."

The search for 'self' is a recurrent theme in Shashi Deshpande's short stories and it is common to her novels also. It can be said that one is the extension of the other, for example, *The Dark Hotels No Terrors* is an extension of "A Liberated Woman". Women in Deshpande's short stories are usually sensitive and thoughtful creatures. They ruminate over their fate and position in conservative society. They endeavour to know what they are, how men folk behave with them, why they slump into inanity and desperation, and why they feel alienated. She has portrayed her women characters in dismissal and dreadful conditions. In this matter she reminds us

of the disquietude, frustration and helplessness of the female, frustration and helplessness of the female protagonists in Anita Desai's novels.

The search for 'self' is so insistent in Deshpande's novels as well as short fiction that one does not feel any difference at the level of thought. Her novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), for example, depicts Sarita as a person divided into two halves – a two-in-one-woman or woman-in-transition. Similar is the predicament of central character of "A Liberated Woman" who is also presented as a "woman-in-transition".

Her short stories as well as novels show relentless search for 'self'. She has largely confined herself to the problems and tortures of the female world. Nowhere does she encourage her female protagonists to rise in rebellion against the males in the family matters; instead, she wants to build a harmonious relationship between man and a woman in a spirit of give and take, in a mood of compromise and reconciliation. She maintains that man and woman are like the two wheels of a chariot, and that no chariot can race forward if either of the wheels goes out of order. A proper co-ordination, a reasonable mutual understanding between husband and wife is essential for a happy married life. This is the message of her short stories.

Matrimony is often regarded in India as the summum bonum of a woman's life but short stories of Deshpande present a realistic critique of marriage. In many cases, however, it serves as a weapon in the hands of patriarchy to coerce and silence. Marriage is no larger a sacrament, it is convenient arrangement always to the disadvantage of woman. The central character in "A Liberated Woman" and Aiji in "My Beloved Charioteer" summarises the common predicament. Her short stories are bitter commentary on marriage and married life which have lost their original sanctity and compatibility and are reduced to the level of a facade.

The writer is pained to notice ways of subordinating women by male members of society. Economic deprivation and rape are main instruments employed to curb the spontaneous growth of a woman. For example, "It was Dark", this evil act is an instrument to dominate woman in the same way marital rape in "The Intrusion" symbolises male power and male dominance. Her short stories show that the role of wife in the present times is nothing less than walking on the razor's edge. Her short stories are sad commentary on the incompatibility and hypocrisy of married life.

Deshpande's short stories present at times a lonely and somber world. Reviewing *The Intrusion and Other Stories*, Muriel Wasi points out that this collection reflects "unhappy realities of Indian life" and the woman's depressing, melancholic or claustrophobic world" ... it is time for Shashi Deshpande" she concludes "to open some of her windows and let the morning light fill her dark rooms" (18). The realistic treatment of human predicament in Deshpande's fiction alongwith the contemporary angst in an existential manner might appear to be depressing, but the final impression of her works is far from being gloomy or depressing. Significantly her women characters learn in due course how to arrive at a compromise and find a sense of balance in life. The behaviour on the part of central characters of "A Liberated Woman", "A Day Like Another" and "A Wall in Safer" is meaningfully different from that of Nora of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

Deshpande does not let the family disintegrate. None of her protagonists walks out like Ibsen's Nora, Whatever be the cost, the family ties are not severed. Though the bridges are broken, they are not demolished. In some of the stories she hints at the missing links and the need for mending them.

In many of Deshpande's stories there is an undercurrent of discontented sex for various reasons like the one-sided decision of celibacy 'uneven pitch of passion',

untimely urge, physical fatigue, indulgence as a dull habitual routine and treating the wife as property, depriving her of human dignity and respect, and so on. Therefore, instead of excitement leading to ecstasy, these short stories end up in disgust, sense of violation and intrusion. Love has to be a two-way affair not onesided game, requiring an appreciative understanding of the mental stress, patience to wait for the participation of the other partner rather than pouncing upon and battering the body.

In most of the short stories, Deshpande uses of the characters pronouns instead of the proper nouns. This causes difficulty in getting immediately to the person referred to and his/her role in the interaction. As many characters feature in one story, the use of merely a “he” or “she” is generally not enough. It causes confusion. The reader cannot identify the characters who appear at times as algebrical figures without names.

In her short stories, for example, “The Inner Rooms”, “Hear me Sanjaya” and “The Last Enemy” she has drawn upon her material from mythology in order to reinterpret it. She has use myth and folklore in a subtle and successful manner and they sustain and illuminate the narration. Her use of mythic material requires the reader to do his homework in order to get the most out of her short fiction. It is as if the writer is saying that she will present her material in all its depth and complexity and will take no short cuts. She creates the fictional world of her short stories with total fidelity to lived and felt experience. Such writing is so rare and fidelity so startling that it creates the effect of what the Russians call *Ostanenie*, to make strange. She has created a familiar world a new in which authentic experience of the interior landscape of Indian women is powerfully projected through the device of myths.

Like a naturalist slum photographer who would refuse to waste his plate on anything that is not sordid, at times she stays away from what is bright and happy in a

woman's life. There are families and situations where a woman plays a pivotal role. This she ignores or lets go by. She chooses to bring under her focus the weak, woeful woman. This she has done with compassion and commendable success in her short fiction.

She does not believe in offering ready made solutions. But the conviction that people can always hope that life has always to be made possible speaks of a genuinely positive attitude to life. Deshpande's protagonists finally try their best to conform to their roles, and most of the stories end with an optimistic note with the possibility of some positive action in future. The writer emerges in them as a bridge builder between the old and the new, between tradition and modernity. For this and for portraying the basic reality of Indian society and the place of women in it in a sensitive and authentic manner her short stories are of immense value. Laeeq Fatehally, in her review of *The Legacy*, observes:

For me, Shashi Deshpande's stories in 'The Legacy' represents something about which I feel that, if only I had been more perceptive, more gifted, more imaginative, in short, in only I had been a better writer, I would have been proud to write. (24)

To sum up, it can be said that Deshpande's short fiction articulates the condition of a woman as a victim, sexual being and as a new woman. She has presented problems, pains, frustrations, mental agonies and suffering of Indian women. Her short stories show that women are subjected to psychological and physical torture in the form of rape as in "The Intrusion" and "It was the Dark". She has not only presented the pain and suffering of women but also through her short fiction she has articulated the silence of marginals and presented the bold assertion of female sexuality as in "An Antidote to Boredom". Men in her short stories are

presented as hostile, uncaring, victimizer (as in “A Liberated Woman”), occasional prospective lover and in most of the cases they appear different species to women. Her short fiction deals with man-woman relationship and also highlights the problems of the institution of marriage. She shows that there is no harmony in marital sex (male domination is visible) and human bonding is absent. Women are suffering from boredom and guilt, they are alienated and need some emotional support, which is missing. Women are tortured even by women. Her short stories present bitter realities of women’s lives in Indian society. Her short stories are marked by an element of incommunicability. The bridges are broken, but there is an element of hope in it. She presents problems and realities of women’s lives but not offers any remedy directly. But sometimes she performs the role of a bridge builder. She doesn’t consider herself to be a feminist writer or supports particular kind of feminist ideology but her short stories are centered on women issues. On the basis of that, it can be said that her short stories are influenced by different phases of feminism. Her feminism is not the feminism of Ibsen’s Nora because she doesn’t believe in the disintegration of family. In fact, her feminism is Indian feminism. She has also exploited post-modernist techniques like re-interpretation of myths and open-ended plot structures in order to present a realistic picture of the socio-cultural realities of Indian society in which her short stories are set. The foregoing discussion goes on to establish that her short stories create awareness in society regarding position and predicament of woman. So her short fiction is “consciousness-raising” short fiction.

Other Indian English Women Writers of Short Fiction

The presence of the complexity, the beauty, the challenges, and the contradictions of short fiction by Indian English Women writers is not confined to the pre-eminent figures of Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande; rather, it penetrates the imaginative sensibility and consequently in the short fiction of the major and minor others namely Attia Hosain, Raji Narasimhan, Kamala Das, Nergis Dalal, Githa Hariharan, Anjana Appachana, Shalan Savur, Prema Ramakrishnan and Tara Deshpande. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, the short story is a literary barometer. Just as a barometer registers changes in the weather, short story by Indian English women writers captures the changing faces of women in Indian society. In Post-Independence era the winds of change have affected Indian women. They have broken the fetters of socio-cultural normativism and have become the exemplar of new feminine sensibility. In the '60s the movement of feminism was in full swing and it influenced the lives of Indian women and awakened them. However, they had to face a lot of problems. There were a lot of actions and reactions. Women began to realize the stereotyped roles imposed on them by society. Indian English women writers have captured this feminist sensibility in their short stories. The theme of feminism is present in so many post-independence Indian English women writers of short stories. Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Raji Narasimhan, Kamala Das, Nergis Dalal, Anjana Appachana, Githa Hariharan, Prema Ramakrishnan are prominent writers who have voiced the silence of women, and they have presented their problems, peculiar experiences and predicament of women in Indian society. Through their short stories, writers such as Anita Desai have tried to portray the stream-of-consciousness of the non-resident Indian.

Besides feminism, the other noticeable themes in Indian English short fiction by women include life, love and death. The writers such as Tara Deshpande, Shalan Savur, Githa Hariharan have explored and illuminated these themes in their short stories. Tara Deshpande and Shalan Savur have foregrounded the theme of love and values of life while Githa Hariharan's short stories revolve around the theme of death. The theme of feminism is common in almost all the Indian English women writers of short stories. They have presented women's issues in their short stories. For instance, Attia Hosain's short stories deal with socio-political issues in the post independence era, but she has given voice to the exploitation of the women in Indian society of the 50s in her short stories.

Attia Hosain

Widely known for her novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Attia Hosain began her literary career as a short story writer with her collection of short stories, titled *Phoenix Fled and Other Stories*, which was published in 1953. *Phoenix Fled* consists of twelve short stories. Praising the organic unity of her short stories John Cornell says that they are "little vignettes, precise, loving and exquisitely true, in spirit and in fact". Short Stories in this collection present the feudal society of pre-independent India. They are marked by an element of nostalgia. As Anita Desai also says in her Introduction to the volume of these short stories reprinted in 1988, these stories are nothing less than "monuments to the past":

To read them is as if one had parted a curtain, or opened a door, and strayed into the past. To read them is like wrapping oneself up in one's mother's wedding sari, lifting the family jewels out of a faded box and admiring their glitter, inhaling the musky perfume of old skills in a

camphor chest. Almost forgotten colours and scents; are wonders if one can endure in the light of what has come to pass. (viii)

Short stories in this collection provide information to the readers about feudalism in pre-independence India and manifestation of feudalism in the form of wealth of taluqadars, condition of peasants, how women lived in a secluded part of a house, jealously protected by menfolk, how deference shown to the ancestors and to the elders, to the aristocracy and to the priest and how doing and saying anything to established norms or conventions was unpardonable.

In Attia Hosain's short stories traditions and customs are acknowledged legislators of human life. She looks at the old world order with an understandable nostalgia. In "Phoenix Fled" she presents the "Changeless circumscribed world" of an old woman (PF 9). The past is always alive in the memories of Granny: "The live past was always happily with her, the present an irritating dying burden" (12). The world of her short stories is permeated by a sense of past as in "Gossamer Thread" she refers as "the secure remembered past" (148). Like Ahmad Ali's novels, her short stories and novels depict a phase of cultural decay. She critiques the culture of her origin from multiple perspectives. Short Stories in this collection cut across class, religion and gender. They are narrated in omniscient neutral voice, the voice of an observer, the unseen controlling author. A couple of them, for example, "Loss" and "White Leopard", however, work through negotiating self. "After the Storm" has a listener at the other end. Most of them are fully encapsulated, complete in themselves and only two of them "The First Party" and "Time is Unredeemable" are about cultural encounters, and they portray middle class people. "The Street of the Moon" and "The Daughter-in-law" are about the nature of sexuality and the lower class. "The

Gossamer Thread” is about politics, while “This was all the Harvest” about the short memory of politicians and the nature of power. These short stories are about relationships and how they are moulded by tradition, need, economic considerations and power.

“Phoenix Fled” is the most intense story in this collection as it works on several metaphorical levels. Here is an archetypal grandmother, now great grandmother, relating to her great grandchildren. The old woman is identified with the existence of the village; she is both history and connecting link and through her past lives in. The writer has given her graphic details:

She used her withered hands for feeble grasping, her crooked fingers for uneasy touching, her bent legs for unsteady shuffling, and not her eyes but time’s familiarity for seeing and recognizing her changeless, circumscribed world .(9)

Here grandmother’s life has not changed even through the passage of time like the grandmother in R. K. Narayan’s *A Grandmother’s Tale* and the grandmother of *Kanthapura*. There are other grandmothers in fiction and short fiction, lovable, adorable and changing possessive and tenacious in their hold on power.

But the grandmother in this short story is older than them all and works through simultaneity with history. It is a gender narrative. Her world is static but outside her world everything has changed. Her world is alienated in the world of change. There are several intruders in her life, like the grown up children, visitors from the city, technology and space but these are tentative and momentary. The young great grand children are spontaneous in their responses to her. Children ask questions and she replies. It is like the question answer session between the world-grandmother and Red Riding Hood. Her responses are like trapping a victim:

“Can you see us, Granny?”

“Of course, of course. An elephant has a tiny eyes, but it can pick a needle off the ground”.

“Can it, can it really? Tell us the story of the Elephant and the Needle, Granny.”

When she walked, her back a broken spring, bent to the ground, they laughed.

“What are you looking for, Granny?”

“Looking at the ground into which I must go one day to look for treasure that is buried there”.

“Tell us the buried treasure, Granny. Tell us a story”. (11)

Attia Hosain has adopted the fairy tale model. Her narrative simultaneously distances itself from the present and pushes it into the realm of cultural narrative. There is an embedded structure within the larger framework of the neutral narrator. This technique is used as a contrastive structure, a world within a world, the expatriate's personal world, shared by other expatriates. The cultural code establishes an eternal private code of communication.

This short story functions at so many levels – historical, allegorical and mythical. The meeting of two cultures and cultural conflict, the reversal of a relationship with the symbols of power, the collapse of the code of community culture and neighbourhood, they all add up to the life of an exile which begins to reconstruct life once again from its ashes. Commenting upon Attia Hosain's short stories, Anita Desai highlights the presence of the past, the sense of honour and its counterpoint-dishonour- and the reconstruction of the feudal society. “Phoenix Fled” and some other stories reflect the writer's pride in ancestry and heredity as well as dismay and

disenchantment at the frequency with which they are tarnished or shattered by some heedless action. Short stories also show her sense of honour and dishonour. In "The Loss", an old maidservant robbed of her whole life's savings. "What am I, robbed of my possessions." She cries. "I am a destitute, a beggar, I am at the mercy of the lowest. What am I now that I should live?" (125-126). All the belongings are taken away by the old woman's son who is a gambler and womanizer. The loss of family honour is greater than the loss of material things. As the narrator rightly realizes, "What need have you to steal?" God has given you enough. And if any son were to steal from me I would that he were dead, and I with him (133). "White Leopard" also deals with an acute sense of honour. Shiv Prasad, a dacoit gives up his life of crime and lives as a servant. He says, "My honour is not cheap" (178). He is not happy with his sons because according to him, they are weak, credulous and with no judgement, "They cannot support a job; a job must support them" (182). When one of his sons is accused of theft by his employer, he feels outraged and says, "My son sells his service, not his honour" (189). Through these characters the writer is trying to show that people value their personal and family honour more than their own life. As Naseera in "The Street of the Moon", asks, "will you bring shame on my grey head?" (31) and Hasina is threatened by her mother "be beaten if she were shameless". Her mother says, "Do what you like tomorrow when you are married woman but spare me shame today" (35).

Attia Hosain not only talks about honour, dishonour and feudal society but she also has a social conscience as well as an observant eye. "The Street of the Moon" and "The Daughter-in-law" deal with the theme of exploitation. The servants are paid less but they stay on as they learn to extract more money from their employers. On some special occasions the employers show their generosity and participate in their

celebration and ceremonies and human relationship is not affected by money. Short stories highlight the theme of sexuality also. As servants are not taken as asexual or robots, they have families and their desires are recognized by their employers. As Kalloo in “The Street of the Moon” with the cook’s help becomes a full fledged cook, who has not only learnt art of cooking but also an addiction for opium from him. But he has affections for his family and feels his responsibilities as an elder brother of the family. He cannot afford second marriage because of his grown-up vagabond son. But situation changes with the arrival of Naseera’s daughter. Again passions are aroused in Kalloo. So he starts visiting brothel which affects his work. Seeing this other elderly women servants arrange his marriage with Haseena. But this marriage is the marriage of unequals. As Haseena is more interested in Kalloo’s son or her own stepson. Her desires are not fulfilled so she becomes disloyal and eloped with Husnool. But Husnool abandon’s her after some months and one night Kalloo encounters her at a brothel. At deeper level this short story deals with so many social issues. The writer is trying to show that sexuality and betrayal of the marriage can only end in this way. One narrative is the narrative of Kalloo, opium eater, and other is the narrative of Haseena, a young and beautiful woman who is trapped in the code of marriage. She is taken as an object whose fate will be decided by others.

She cannot decide anything for herself and cannot enjoy her desires because of limited choices. She cannot fulfil her desires. The governing fact of both lives is not lack of freedom or individuality but economic need. The economic structure governs their lives and creates opium addicts like Kalloo and prostitutes as Haseena. They become victim of social and economic structures. So this short story can be analysed at the level of unequal marriage and class, though unequal and unsuitable marriage

takes place everywhere. Haseena's character can be compared with that of Nandi and Aunt Abida in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*.

The social narrative in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a counterpart of the social narrative present in "The Street of the Moon". In case of Haseena, sexual desires become a medium through which she expresses herself and experience some freedom. In this way, she controls the male as well as becomes a subject to male assault. This short story can be compared with Lalithambika Antherjanam's "The Goddess of Revenge" and Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*.

This short story also deals with the projection of emotions and passions of the lower section of society, and it is an early example of women's writings and treatment of sex and sexual desires in such a bold manner in Indian English Writing. Thus, women writers have treated this theme obliquely and have seen it as a middle-class and the upper-class desire but Attia Hosain has treated this theme in a very bold manner and has shown her social awareness.

Another significant thing about this story is that here the women are shown as dominant characters and they are handling affairs of others whether they belong to the upper section or the lower section of society. While men are marginalized in Attia Hosain's short stories, they appear only as clothes givers and pay money for wedding or some other occasion. The men belonging to the lower section or working class, for example, Kalloo, his son Husnoo they are trapped in their bodies and income. Marriage is seen as a social necessity, freedom from restriction and temporary release from tension. The subtext of this short story also deals with the deeper level of man-woman relationship.

The nameless character in "The Daughter-in-law" is a contrast to Haseena's character. At the end of the story, one discovers that she is called Munni. She is a little

girl; flat chested, young child is trapped in a role of daughter-in-law. She is not fit to be a wife or mother. When Nasiban, her mother-in-law, brought her from village in Begum's house as an ayah, things mysteriously appear and disappear after her entry in Begum's house. Suspicion centres on her. The little girl is closely watched, locked up and persecuted with hidden fears. It is also suspected that she is possessed by spirits because "she does not cry when she is beaten; they never do if they are possessed" (99).

She becomes an exhibit piece for the servants in the Neighbourhood. It is the Begum Sahiba who frees her and asks her, what her name is? Thus, endowing her with a sense of identity. Munni does not remember anything or any acts for which she is accused. She is scared of her loneliness and insecurity. The little girl is a victim of circumstances and there is a lack of love in her life. Her mother crashed off her hands and her mother-in-law treat her like an object. She is too young to be used as an object to satisfy sexual appetite of Nasiban's son. The girl child is haunted by a dream which symbolises the fear of sexual assault. This fear is with her ever since when she and her sister sent to fetch wood from mango grove. She accepts her fate like Munni. Both these characters do not show any struggle for their identity. Munni's subconscious mind rebels but Bibi doesn't show this element. These two characters show that on the one hand women don't have any self and identity, on the other hand struggle of Haseena shows that it results into a tragic fate because of patriarchy.

"Ramu" and "A Woman and a Child" deal with the theme of attachment and possession. "Ramu" presents the contrast between a child's love for a dog with the materialistic concern of Pandit problematises several issues – a woman's perception of herself as being justified only through motherhood, and the nature of love which can be possessive, jealous and self-centred.

“White Leopard” and “The Loss” are about sense of honour, about thefts and the employer-employee relationships. The sense of honour is to deal to both rich and poor. Being rich does not give one the right to insult others. Shiv Prasad in “White Leopard” symbolises the contrast between the present and the past. He is a connecting link between the old and the new world order. This short story also deals with religious harmony and shows possibility of two religions living side by side. Shiv Prasad practices his own religion and join practices of other religion. “White Leopard” also deals with religious conversion. Attia Hosain shows that one can be like Shiv Prasad, or one can be like Mr. Bela Ram who becomes Mr. Bell for economic reasons.

Attia Hosain’s short stories present, the contrast between old and new values. This contrast is accompanied by individuals’ struggle in the cultural encounter with the West. Women are specifically vulnerable because on the one hand they are brought up in a traditional environment, are protected and sheltered in purdahs, on the other hand they are expected to change and respond to the changed mindset of their husbands who have been abroad. This cultural encounter not only affects the social relationship or the external world but it also affects the personal relationships and marriage and disrupts domestic life. In “The First Party” a woman is protected and brought up in purdah, to avoid male touches, when she is thrust into the Western style party which centres around dance and drink where purdah, female modesty has no significance. This party becomes a kind of traumatic experience for the woman. She feels a sense of anger when her husband goes on drinking and finds it against religious training. Hosain’s view is that hybridity does not come into being when two cultures are segregated. When two cultures meet, the dominant aspects of cultures are not affected and remain unchanged. Like certain areas of personal relationships, one’s

attitude to physical touch and the body which are culturally internalized are unaffected. The writer also shows that women are expected either to change drastically or to live splited lives.

The impact of Western culture is also visible in “Time is Unredeemable” Here husband is different from the husband of “The First Party”. He is not proud of his wife. He made his mind that there is no likelihood of continuing the relationship but his wife during his absence bridging the gap between her upbringing and her husband’s lifestyle. She learns English and tries to be modern and goes through long bridal wait hoping to get rewarded by her husband’s love but everything goes wrong. In the same way husband in “Gossamer Thread” being abroad for a longtime altered his outlook focuses on struggle for power and conflict of ideologies and process of individuation. He responds irritably to the queries of his wife and their relationships present two approaches of life – human and personal, one sensitive and the other personal. The woman in “Time is Unredeemable” is submissive and timid and The Woman in “Gossamer Thread” too but being sensitive she shows her human concern and ask Arun to stay at home.

“This was all the Harvest” offers a critique of political struggles. In this short story the young man deceived by a politician. The young man had not gone to his sister’s deathbed because of what he believed to be his duty. The candidate he was canvassing for does not even remember him. The first part of the young man’s story deals with the conflict between his responsibility towards his family and his faith in a particular ideology. The second part of his story deals with the subtle form of corruption. The headman sold his vote for the sake of land. But when death takes place in headman’s house he takes it as a sign of punishment and retracts from his stand.

The sub-narrative of chaprasi is about how a busload of people kept away from voting. The ideology, faith and missionary zeal of the young man contrasted with the Chaprasi's story and later with the fact of de-recognition. Attia Hosain gives description of fatality of sacrifice for greedy people and also ugliness of politics. She criticises the contemporary politics or system of governance.

In her short stories, Attia Hosain has depicted life and woman's position during feudal era, evils such as theft, prostitution, illness and exploitation which were present in social structure. Her short stories are marked by an element of realism like those of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas and compassion of Bhabani Bhattacharya. According to her, poverty is the main cause of these problems. She has also presented the horrors of partition and negative aspects of politics in her short stories. She is deeply rooted in her culture which is visible in her short stories and that has given authenticity to her short stories. But she has not thrashed the question of identity. She is aware of its challenges. For example, the transformed character of Bela Ram is despised both for his origins and duplicity. Shiv Prasad asks: "That Bell Sahib, how can he tell the difference between lies and truth when he lies even about his name and origin?" (187-88). Attia Hosain is suggesting that if a person loses contact with his roots, he becomes alienated as the progressive pseudo-intellectual in "Gossamer Thread".

After Partition she moved to England but she never lost touch with her roots. Born and brought up in the undivided India, she presents India's capacity of assimilation and synthesis of several cultures and advocates Hindu Muslim unity as in "White Leopard". The other ideals which are present in her short stories are: simplicity, faith, trust, brotherhood and harmony. Her short stories contain gems of world wisdom.

Being a female writer, she presents women issues. Her short stories contain significant flashes on position and problems of women in Indian society of that time. Their condition was much more pitiable than present time. The life of women belonging to the lower and the lower middle-class section of society was more harsh. The women in her short stories are not same; some of them are worthy of respect, others of pity, and still others are of shame. Their physical and mental conditions are not so good.

Most of them are constrained to live on edge and, like Naseera of “The Street of the Moon”, is hardly better than “a humble ugly shadow moving and working as others ordered” (27). Their behaviour is represented by ‘Nasiban’s whimpering self-pity, Bashiran’s monotonous grumbling, sullenness of the mother of Nathoo, and the stupid gloom of Sufia” of the story “The Daughter-in-law”. Hasina, Munni and Bano they represent younger ones. A wife is expected to press husband’s feet and tired body. Talking to men particularly strange men forbidden women lived in secluded part of the house observing purdah. Marriages are supposed to be settled in Heaven. Some of these arranged marriages are incompatible like marriage of Kalloo an elderly widower and an opium addict, Naseema’s son with a minor girl. The girls forcibly enter into adulthood, without entering in childhood, such as, Munni and Sufia. The women are submissive and timid but sensible in “The First Party” and “Time is Unredeemable”. Some marriages are hurriedly arranged and husband and wife both behave as strangers, for example, in “Time is Unredeemable.” But women are adjusting themselves according to the need of husbands.

Attia Hosain presents the plight of a woman in Indian society of the ‘50s. She also presents this view that women are vulnerable and they have to suffer more. They easily became victim of society because of rules which only favour men. Even they

suffer because of cultural encounter. Their upbringing is different and they have to cope with new ideology and in this way burden is laid more on them. Sometimes they become splited selves.

The portrayal of these women does not mean that Attia Hosain has negative attitude. She has displayed immense faith, pride and confidence in the womanhood and recommends simplicity and modesty on the one hand and courage and confidence on the other hand. Her upbringing and influence of great personalities like Sarojini Naidu has influenced her writings. Her short stories voice protest against incompatible marriages male dominance, liking for a male child, barrenness treated as a sin and credited to women, economic exploitation, lack of identity and discrimination of women at the level of family and society. She praises faith, sacrificing nature, humility and genial acceptance through her short stories. According to K.R. S. Iyengar, “Life is placid enough, human beings are prosaic enough, yet now and then there is a spark, a touch of poetry, a cry of pain and these are inspiration behind her works” (462).

The strength of her short stories lies in three things – graphic descriptions, the character sketches and the language. She has presented background details with great care – Kitchen scene in “The Street of Moon” the great grandmother’s dolls house in “Phoenix Fled”, Bano’s shopping spree in “Time is Unredeemable”, the electioneering in “This was all the Harvest” the household activities in “The Daughter-in-law.” The character sketches, particularly of Shiv Prasad in the “White Leopard” are portrayed with minute details.

The characters are not cardboard characters and they become alive when their past is resurrected gradually through memories, symbols and detailed description. As

far as her language is concerned, she has also translated Indian proverbs like Raja Rao.

The preceding analysis shows that her short stories engage with both social and political issues. She comments on evils of society from the point of view of a woman and also on horrors of partition. She also shows that individual is affected by cultural encounter with the West in India and women are more pathetic and vulnerable creatures in this context because they are doubly displaced. As a female writer she presents a critique of women exploitation in society dominated by patriarchy and she voices protest against female discrimination. Her short stories present women as marginals, alienated beings and also show loneliness of woman but she doesn't have negative attitude regarding the womanhood. She has immense pride faith and confidence in it. Through her short stories she suggests simplicity and modesty on the one hand and courage and confidence on the other. The strength of short stories lies in the graphic description, the character sketches and the language. Different shades of life presented in a poetic way. Her upbringing and a great sense of two cultures made the description livelier. Her short stories are a blend of pain and happiness. According to Farwell, "the superb imagination, understanding and poignancy of the human drama impart a universal touch to her stories" (153), which makes her short stories more interesting, authentic and sensible than her novel.

Raji Narasimhan

Whereas Attia Hosain's short stories deal with position and exploitation of women in Indian society in the '50s, Raji Narasimhan's short stories deal with the woman - in - transition in the '70s. Narasimhan is also a representative of the English educated urban, upper middle-class of India. She tends to write about people, mostly women, like herself. Her short stories are marked by suffering, small disasters, careful

observations and ironic endings. By profession she was a reporter and feature writer but left her job in the early '70s to take up fulltime creative writing. So the impact of her earlier profession is visible in her writing. She has written four novels: *The Heart of Standing is You Cannot Fly* (1973), *Forever Free* (1979); *Drifting to a Dawn* (1983), and *The Sky Changes* (1991). She has also written critical articles and reviewed books for *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Literature*. *The Marriage of Bela and Other Stories*, a collection of short stories, was published in 1978. The short stories in this collection deal with women's issues. She also highlights the problems of educated middle-class Indian woman. Through her short fiction she presents the predicament of women in the Indian context. Like those of Deshpande, her short stories revolve around woman-in-transition. Her short stories show a conflict between old paternalistic order in which roles are extremely limited, and on officially proclaimed freedom.

In "End of Probation", for example, a young woman is driven out of her brothers home by his inability to believe that she can work and be promoted i.e. earn as much as he does without becoming a whore. Her alternative: a squalid working Woman's Hostel and the greasy attention of her boss, who pursues her with speeches about the new freedom.

Through this story she highlights the predicament of career woman Narasimhan is showing this that there is no place for women in patriarchal society. Whether they are educated / employed or not but they are exploited at every step. In ironical way she proves this fact that there is no identity of woman, her identity is always in relation to man (father, brother, husband, sons and employer). This short story also highlights woman's relationship with family members and employer.

In “Their Woman Colleague” a woman bureaucrat, unmarried and running to fat, receives a small promotion and the right to be paid by cheque:

It meant that now she was a woman earning Rs. 500 a month, and with a house in her name. Of course, she would have to pay the toll. She waited for her male colleagues to break into her room with their congratulations. (TMOB 29)

Her colleagues take her to her favourite restaurant in order to watch that she eats too much. They take her home to pry into her unfinished life and humiliate her by letting her serve them tea and she is sure about their behaviour and psychology. She also knows this fact about them, though they are engaging an excuse to skip work. This short story is marked by the element of humiliation. Narasimhan is trying to show that whether woman is educated or not, she is humiliated in male dominated society.

“A Toast to Herself” was first published in *Indian Literature* in 1986. It is about a woman writer Priya. Her fifth book has been published and she is expecting a review of it in the newspaper but she is anxious and nervous. Like every writer she also wants to be read and recognized. Books are like her children, stripping away from the full set of her books, she sees them huddled like children separated from their mother. Drinking a toast means wishing happiness, success etc. to somebody or something while raising a glass of wine. Here the central character wishes herself success and happiness drinking lemonade in the company of her mother and Dr. Kesavan. But her writings bring pebbles. Her mother tries very hard and persistently to make Priya realize that writing is for those who are economically sound and for her it should only be a hobby. But she refuses to understand this bitter reality. Her books are more precious than any money she may get and writing alone can sustain her now.

Economics, however, plays a vital role in today's life. Her mother is waiting for pension and Priya is also conscious about her worldly possessions and what it may mean in a moment of crises. This short story focuses on economic condition of women in Indian society.

This short story also deals with the problem of divorce and mother-daughter relationship. Narasimhan has also stressed on the generation gap. Priya is a divorcee and her mother hates her for that, instead of sympathizing with her or supporting her. She hates Priya may be for her guts, may be for the refusal to show the traditional line and accepts her destiny. Priya is jobless too and that is why her mother hates her for it actively and openly. She has to repeatedly assure her mother that she doesn't need her pension and she can find for herself. According to her mother, Priya's second marriage is the only solution to the problem. If she somehow agrees to marry Dr. Kesavan at the age of fifty, her economic hardships will end and she can also pursue her passion for writing. Even Priya might have married Dr. Kesavan and happily settled down in life, if he had proposed to her.

Narasimhan has highlighted the attitude of Indian society that marriage is the ultimate goal and solution to every problem of women. Here Priya is depicted as a woman, as a woman writer and as a writer transcending, if only temporarily, all the pulls and pressures of society.

This short story revolves around three major characters: Priya, Priya's mother and Dr. Kesavan. Mother and Dr. Kesavan are on the whole conventional. They represent conventional world order.

Mother's concern for her divorced jobless daughter is natural. Today she is there to support her look after her but what will happen when she is there no more? But Priya's mother unable to understand her obsession for writing, but like every

mother she also wants her daughter to be happily married and settled in life. She represents typical Indian mother caring for her daughter and trying to ensure a secure future in her own way.

Narasimhan portrays Dr. Kesavan as a typical Indian male. He is attracted to Priya but something in her holds back. It may be Priya is a divorcee and divorced women are seen as aggressive, assertive and offbeat. He is not sure she will make a good wife or he would be a good husband.

Priya is presented as a new woman and unconventional character. She is a divorcee but doesn't have any regrets for her divorced status. She wishes to live on her own terms and also knows that this may be hard. She knows that she has to pay a heavy price for her choice but she is mentally prepared for it. She has her moments of weakness and fatigue and anxiety. She needs and is craving for male's physical and emotional love. She is divided between two worlds. She is a new woman divided between her new found freedom and her natural urges on the other hand. She is a courageous woman who knows the goals of her life and how to get it. She is celebrating her today without worrying about tomorrow.

This short story draws the attention of readers to the status of the female child in Indian society and the blatant preference for a male child. Here Narasimhan has also shown the world of a woman writer at home and outside. But the protagonist in the short story is a woman of substance, of firm determination and grit. This new woman who defies the social code and convention and she shapes her own destiny. She has a purpose in life – to establish her worth and value as a human being and she achieves it. Her life is hard and arduous but it is satisfying and fulfilling. She takes her own decision and sets her own priorities. Priya is representative of so many other women passing through the same phase.

Like those of Shashi Deshpande, Nanasimhan's short stories show conflict with the traditional social order. Her short stories articulate the silence of women-in-transition. Her women belong to middle-class section of India society. Generally they belong to small towns or away from power centres. But women protagonists are highly educated according to their social standards which create problem for them. Their position becomes conflicting position in the family and society and that is why they suffer. So she uses these new women as mouthpiece to present her vision. They act as a motion picture camera and present the picture of society. They show how women are exploited in the family and society. She also presents this view that women are exploited whether they are educated/employed or not. Patriarchy dominates everywhere and methods of exploitation changes according to the context. But her women characters are not passive they emerge as achievers and celebrate their freedom and being. To sum up, Narasimhan's short stories deal with middle-class Indian life and the burdens of living through a time of complex transition in an immense troubling society.

Nergis Dalal

Nergis Dalal is a versatile writer. She is known for articles, novels, middles and short stories. Her debut collection entitled *The Nude and Other Stories*, 1977 followed by Children's Short Fiction *The Birthday Present*, (1977) show her journalistic skills of narration and for this reason they are branded journalistic. Her style shows a blend of scientific precision of journalism and emotiveness of literature. This uniqueness of style makes her short stories fascinating and at the same time her short stories are socially relevant thematically. Her short stories criticise follies and foibles of society. She offers a critique of cultural norms and condemns deleterious prejudices of civilized society. *The Nude* consists of sixteen short stories and most of

them are set in foot hills of Himalayas or in small towns of Garhwal region except “Once for the Asking” which is set in London. Short stories in this collection revolve around the themes of love, sex, unhappy marriages, the foreigner in India, women writers, environment and wild life etc. Her short stories are informative, interesting as well as reveals her human side.

The title of “The Nude” looks like a pornographic painting of a beautiful nude girl but it actually attacks the follies and artificiality of society which ignores the original scene and beauty of nature and teaches to enjoy the beauty of lifeless painting. Robie De Silva paints the picture of Mrs. Oliver who has posed for him in “The Nude”. As a competent painter he discovers a fit model for his painting in her and as a virile man he enjoys the beauty of Mrs. Oliver. Dalal gives an erotic description as the passion experienced by Robie:

Under his hand her skin was warm and glowing, gently burning and enveloping him in its warmth. She lifted one arm lazily and wrapped it about him. He was aware of nothing now but the steady beating of his own blood, and the softness, the warmth, into which he was plunging; disappearing into dark recesses which he had not known existed.
(NOS 47)

The painting brought fame and fortune for him and Mrs. Oliver receives a brochure with an imprint of painting on it. She takes out a hundred rupee note, put the brochure on the table and when her husband looks at the painting and as “he raised his eyes he caught sight of his wife, standing at the sink, her enormous waist wrapped around with a dirty apron, her head bundled in a scarf, her dress unven baggy”(49). He does’nt know that the woman who is posed in the painting is his own wife. He was unable to recognize and discover, unlike the artist, he failed to discover beauty in her.

Instead, of enjoying the beauty of painting on the brochure he discovers the ugliness in his wife and is filled with revulsion:

He felt furious and frustrated. He slammed his hand hard on the table. “Now there’s a woman if you like. Something to come have to. Not a bag of old clothes like you”. He glanced again at the picture and he felt the injustice sharpening, graving, persecuting him, filling him with a brooding shame for being married to a woman with fat legs and a body like a tub of lard. Blindly in this anger and frustration he felt his food and slammed cut of the house. Inside him was the rising urgency of sex which he would ease somewhere with same woman he had bought, or in drink. (49-50)

Mrs. Oliver is familiar with the ignorance and impulsive behaviour of her husband and secretly smiles on herself. The attitude of the husband shows how people are unable to appreciate the original beauty as they are conditioned by the culture for aesthetic sense and understanding. They indulge in various other activities and try to get pleasure from other sources but they don’t enjoy the real beauty. This beauty can only be perceived by the artist who tries to make us understand through his work. This story also shows the general outlook of male in society regarding women. Being a woman Dalal is conscious of this bitter fact which she presents through these characters in “The Nude”.

“The Beautiful One” deals with the theme of love outside the institution of marriage and its negative consequences. The story revolves around Nina, who marries Dr. Chander, a professor of history. Nina can be compared to R. K. Narayan’s Rosy of *The Guide*. She married for the emotion of love but unfortunately she gets the opposite of it. The Professor thinks that she will be as happy as he is. He is always

absorbed in his research of medieval history and ignores his wife. She couldn't bear it longer and develops friendship with Suresh, a scholar. The Professor doesn't take notice of it. But his senior colleague warns him and asks him to advise his wife in this matter. Accordingly, he conveys her everything very calmly but she feels enraged and burst out on him:

I will go out with whoever I please and do exactly what I want to do. Just because I don't exist for you, doesn't mean other men don't find me desirable. You are not a man you are just a machine, dry and filled with straw instead of blood, I'm a woman, and I'm beautiful. Do you think I want to spend my life alone with neither passion nor friendship given to me? Why did you marry me? You are happy with your books and your work. You could have kept a housekeeper instead. You don't need a wife. (56)

His fugidity continues even after this. Disgusted and frustrated, Nina leaves him for Suresh with whom she elopes. However, this relationship, too not last long. Suresh too doesn't like her friendship with other men and keeps eye on her and checks her in her room. This relationship becomes bitter and Suresh commits suicide. She becomes a model of living and finds another husband but he is also very jealous of her and does not allow her to talk to any man. Now she realises her mistake of leaving the Professor. She says, "It's a pity one doesn't realise these things until it is too late. Nothing I could have done would have disturbed Chander. He was the ideal husband for me, if only I had realised it before" (60).

This story highlights the assertion of female identity. It shows a blend of feminist and female sensibility. Through the character of Nina, Dalal shows that when

a woman breaks conventional norms, she has to pay a heavy price for it. Though Nina achieved her identity suffered because of patriarchy.

“The Intruder” deals with the theme of disharmony in marriage which is caused by incompatibility of temperament between husband and wife. It results into unsuccessful marriages. Mr. Vale is a great research scholar and his first wife used to help him in all his academic works but after his death he marries a gymnasium instructor of a girls school. She tries to make him strong by taking him on long walks but he detests physical exercises as much as he lacks academic work. Gradually he feels that she is an intruder in his life and not a life partner. She also realises that she is not fit for him but tries to convince him to change himself but she fails to change him and her anger reveals in the following lines:

With sudden determination she went up and tugged furiously at the curtains. She tugged and tugged, shivering and numb with terror until at last they fell with a tearing rending sound, carrying her completely. She began to struggle but the thick slippery material was everywhere. She tried to scream but something cold and fleshless closed around her throat - she felt herself sinking into a black bottomless pit. (94)

Next morning she is found dead. She (the intruder) leaves Mr. Vale by committing suicide mysteriously. This story shows that all changes are expected from the female and not from the male. This is the general tendency in society. But institution of marriage flourishes on mutual consent and not on domination. Dalal's view is that it is not one-sided game but two-sided affair. It also brings out another aspect of society that it prefers mind to the body.

“Ranjit's wife” highlights the hypocrisy of our society. Ranjit and Lila love each other. For him there is no other beauty in the world and she says that for him she

can do anything to please him. She obeys him and gives up her own tastes. She wears conventional clothes and doesn't use make-up but gradually Ranjit loses interest in her and develops love for Vanita, who is modern girl. He wants to divorce Lila and to marry Vanita when he discloses this fact to Lila it shocked her but she requests him to give her two months he agrees. With the help of her friend Misra she changes her look and she gets new friend Kamal with the help of Anil, Mira's husband. She goes to the hotel and enjoys dance and dinner with him but Ranjit also comes to the same hotel with Vanita. He sees his wife dancing with another man and finds extraordinary beauty in her. This develops the jealousy in him. She returns home but she is not apologetic or scared this time. Her husband is present and she asks for the drink that he is having. He burst out on her:

How dare you go out looking like a painted strumpet" she retorts, 'Aren't you rather forgetting that you should concentrate your reforming efforts on the new girl friend? "Sighing with relief, she adds that she is now free to do whatever she likes. Being provoked, he accused her and says, you sound as though had kept you in purdah all these years. (22)

She asserts that she has been kept in purdah and not allowed to look beautiful and attractive. He said that she liked being simple. She replies that she has done so to please him. He realizes him his follics. Her husband realises his mistake and wishes to live with her but she teases him:

I'm sorry Ranjit. I don't think I want to forget about the divorce. I find it very enjoyable to do as I please, to dress as I please, to go out dancing and to find that others think I am beautiful. After all these

years, it's intoxicating. I don't want to come back to you and the same dreary old routine. (123)

He then agrees to allow her to live as she pleases (modern and fashionable). Considering his request, she asks for a period of two months to check the sincerity in Ranjit. This short story not only highlights the problem of marriage which is the result of male domination due to cultural restraint but also presents the remedy. Courage and confidence of a woman can teach a lesson to male like Ranjit. She is not like Ibsen's Nora; her approach and attitude show shades of Indian feminism. Dalal suggests that the divorce is not the solution to these types of domestic problem. They can be sorted out intelligently just Lila does. Through this short story she shows the conflict present within us internally, between the traditional culture and trends of the modern culture.

“One for the Asking” and “The Red Pavillion” deal with the theme of love and lose. They illustrate the predicament of the women who love and lose. The first story revolves around the two characters - an Indian who is working in a factory at Richmond in London and Eiko, who is born from Japanese mother and British father. They develop love for each other and continued live-in relationship for two years. Two years quickly passes and he has to leave for India. He can neither take her with himself nor can leave her behind but in this confusing moment his friend arrives at airport and gives him a book on Five Year Plan of India. He gets into the plane and Eiko disappears with his colleague in the darkness of night. In the same way, in “The Red Pavillion” when story unfolds the secrets of Miss Turner's life revealed to the reader that is a middle aged spinster's past. This revelation came out when Mr. Kapoor showed Miss Turner the book, *The Red Pavillion*. It is about the passionate love affair of a young Indian woman and middle aged Englishman, which ends unhappily as the Englishman returns to his own land. Mrs. Peter somehow discovers

the truth that the story of the book and life history of Miss Turner is same she asks her to keep it secret but Mrs. Peter expresses her inability to do so, she says that she has to leave this place.

These two stories show that men take advantage of patriarchal privilege and that result in suffering of women. A feminist voice is present in these two short stories. They show man as betrayer of love. Dalal is also suggesting that if a woman is stronger than man and if she takes advantage of her privileges than man feel suffocated and in such circumstances he resorts to violent action. She presents the predicament of woman in patriarchal society.

“The Alabaster Goddess” illustrates the vice-versa condition. Here in the story the husband kills his Meduca type wife in anger and becomes a sanyasi with his servant. He reveals his past to Police Officer as a monk of the temple. The old Monk is interested in Mughal Empire and he has written a book on it. He offers his manuscript to the police officer for publication and surrenders but the police officer takes the manuscript and leaves the place without arresting him. The officer said to himself - “who was I to disturb the place of a man’s heart, or the quiet of the hills” (43).

Dalal’s treatment of her characters is realistic and unbiased. She presents her characters as they are. In “The Sacrifice” she presents the character of Mr. Triana, a snobbish European tourist who looks down upon Indian culture. He has seen scenes of, hills, ruins and temples and now wants to see famine stricken areas. He is accompanied by Mr. Pritam Singh and when he finds that he failed to evoke Pritam Singh so he again tries to criticise India: “Floods, Famine, corruption, greed and overpopulation. And there is nothing you can do about it without foreign aid. And yet you have the nerve to call yourself independent” (26).

Pritam Singh tells him that the people of the area are more interesting than the old fort because they use to practice human sacrifice to please rain God but now they are not allowed to do so that is why attribute the famine to this.

Mr. Triana is interested in taking photographs of famine stricken people. In his enthusiasm he goes alone to the village and finds a half naked woman. With her skinny baby at her naked breast. He puts his hand on her bony shoulder to take her out of the shadow for taking picture but it brings the whole village there. He tries to pacify and offers money but villagers kill him and after that starts to rain heavily. Mr. Triana's arrogance kills him. Here she presents the theme of violence and superstition with remarkable perception.

Dalal commands the faith of innocent villagers in "The Temple Bells" and "The Silva Stallion" in both the stories somehow the faith of innocent people sustained. She has perfectly painted the Psyche of god fearing people but she is not supporter of superstition and artificiality and hypocrisy of modern day, Sadhus. She condemns faith in fake saints in "Roses, Roses, All the way ..." she highlights this bleak aspect of Indian society through the character of Miss Malik, a wealthy spinster who in search of solace moves from places to places and finally she found haven in Ashram at hill station. She is fond of tea and used to take several cups of tea daily but on the advise of Swamiji she give up tea but when she finds that Swamiji is taking premium brand of tea. This shatters her faith and she comes out from that halucination.

In this story the writer has depicted the commercialisation of religion and blind faith of people in this type of fake saints. This story is very realistic in treatment and highlights the shameful aspect of the society.

“Christmas Means Love” and “Happiness is a Box of Fudge” deal with childrens’ psychology, their likings and dislikings. The former one deals with the tender feeling of a boy for his father while the latter deals with the macabre feelings of two girls aged between 13 - 14 years. Her description of children in the two short stories shows her power of minute observation and deep understanding of child psychology.

In “The Connoisseur” Dalal condones the stealing habit for aesthetic taste. She illustrates the character of Miss Krishna, an old spinster who received a small house and a meager income after his mother’s death but she had fascination for beautiful things which she cannot afford. She says:

All my life I have been starved of beautiful things. My early life was one continuous struggle. Poverty is so ugly. All those thick coarse sheets are the beds, uncarpeted floors, pottery cups and plates and ugly discarded furniture. How ones soul craves for beautiful things! (151)

She picks up whatever looks beautiful and puts it in her handbag. Nobody discovers this till her death. She likes the narrator who appreciates her aesthetic sense and therefore she wills her property to her but she politely refuses that because she knows that they are all stolen and she takes her own clock among them by which she can remember Miss Krishna. Dalal’s stories show her deep understanding of human nature and offer critiques of follies and foibles of society. She has a very vast canvas; her stories not only deal with women issues but also focusing on problems of violence, superstition and child psychology. Whether Indian or foreigner, she portrays her characters without any bias. In “The Sacrifice” she portrays snobbish European character of Mr. Triana while in “The Exiles” Mr. and Mrs. Wain is also very realistic. This story unravels the myths of homeland and how one develops attachment

for an alien land. Mr. and Mrs. Wain after twenty five years of service and they are returning Mrs. Wain is too much excited about going to her native land. When asked how she will manage things these without servants and other facilities that she enjoyed here, she says:

I shall really enjoy the climate and I like to do my own work. It is not the same as this you know. Everything there is quite different. There is so little dust for one thing, and all the fruits and vegetables come cleaned and packaged. I shall manage very well I expect. (99-100)

She dislikes Indian manners and things but when time of departure comes nearer she develops strange feeling of nostalgia for India and Indians. Gradually she develops a longing for this land. She wonders why she detested them and condition revealed in the following lines:

Mrs. Wain looked with affection at the marigold which she would perhaps see for the last time flamboyantly yellow or orange, they now seemed to her a symbol of the colour and gaiety of this country. How could she ever have disliked them? She touched one curve petal with her finger and it was soft and velvety to the touch. (106-107)

In the words of Venugopal and Hegde, “However, in an array of formula stories it is heartening when one surprisingly comes across such a true piece of art like” “The Exile” (217).

Dalal’s short stories not only related to women’s issues or offer critiques of evils of society and human nature but they are also related to environmental concerns. One of the short stories in this collection deals with wild life. i.e. “A Taste of Blood” which deals with the hunting game and tragedy brought by this game in the family. Father killed by his own son but unfortunately this hunting game taught by the father

to his son. The irony is that it becomes cause of the death of father Dalal has shown in this story that women care for nature while men care for civilization. She has also shown her concern for wild life and animals. Her another children's classic *The Birthday Present*, a long short story, also deals with the theme of wild life and her concern for environment protection.

Critics of Indian English short story like Venugopal and Hegde criticised her short stories for sensational journalism but one should also try to understand that this journalistic style has given a new flavour to her short stories. It has in fact uploaded her short stories with full-blooded realism. "The Nude", "Ranjit's Wife" and "The Beautiful One" highlights the follies of society while "The Sacrifice" and "The Temple Bells" deal with the downfall of those who ridicule the faith of innocent people "Roses, Roses, All the Way ..." mocks at strict morality that suppresses desires and oppresses life as well as it satirises modern sadhus or fake saints.

She has presented a serious theme in lucid language and her style is graphic and close to poetry. Her short fiction is known for diversity of themes and techniques. Generally her themes revolve around, love, sex, marriage and foreigners in India. Her women characters are of strong personalities and through them she presents the picture of society in realistic manner.

Kamala Das

Kamala Das is known for her poetry and fictional autobiography but it is unfortunate that less number of readers are aware of her short fiction. She is bi-lingual writer and she has eleven volumes of short stories in English - *A Doll For the Child Prostitute* and *Padmavati, The Harlot and other Stories* (1992).

A striking feature of Das's short stories is that they capture life in the raw form and present the crude realities of life. Her short stories are preoccupied with the theme of pain in one form or the other. According to T. N. Geeta:

Pain resulting from loveless living, aches dulled by routine, jobs stifled by unfeeling society, life blighted by disease and death, goodness soured into harshness by callous necessity - such are the theme of her stories which have the effect of disturbing the reader's complacency and heightening his awareness of the misery around him. (18-19)

The title story "A Doll for the Child Prostitute" deals with the problem of juvenile prostitution and presents the horror and ghastliness of red-light areas particularly focusing on the exploitation of women. This short story deals with the pathetic condition of the life of child prostitutes. Das shows their pain and poverty, disease and darkness and misery and helplessness.

Das presents her characters in an ironical form. The inmates of the brothel are named after the goddesses, Radha, Rukmani, Sita, Saraswati and Mira. They live in the hell like situation and every inmate of this hell has a poignant tale to tell. For example, Mira fails to realise that she being prostitute cannot indulge in the institution of marriage and emotion of love is not for her. She is forced to return to the brothel. The story of Rukmani who is ignorant of the horrors of this profession, is also painful. The conversation between Sita, a little older brothel-mate, and Rukmani reveals the horror of this:

"I cannot sleep in the day", said Rukmani. Sita laughed loudly and held on to her stomach as though it was about to burst. "You are so innocent. Do you think we can sleep at night in this house? We shall all be so busy entertaining the visitors". "Visitors at night?" asked

Rukmani “who will come at night?” Sita could not control her laughter. “Oho ho”. She laughed ...

Rukmani kept her satchel of books on the mat meant for her and Sita.

Men come to do things here, said Sita. “What things?” asked Rukmani.

She was thinking of her stepfather and the pain she had experienced ...

(ADCP 13)

The sexual cruelty and brutality that these innocent young women face are evident from what Sita says: “Men are real dogs”. Mira, being a prostitute, cannot enter in the institution of marriage and emotion of love is not for her but she is in deep love with Krishna, a college student who equally loves her, she dreams: “Yes, he is my husband. He is called Krishna ... Is it not strange that I am Mira and he is Krishna? (32-33). She doesn’t realise the harshness of society and norms of society. This relationship proves to be just short happiness and circumstances forced her return to the brothel. For women like Mira the bliss of love and happiness of marriage is a dream which can never change into reality.

Das brings out the horror of this bleak place when she shows that Rukmani is reluctant to please the Inspector of Police because as a child she is playing with her dolls. Ayee’s harsh words reveal the horror of this place : “Get up this minute. You cannot afford to displease the Inspector Sahib ... If he wants you now you must go and please him. I do not want disobedience from you” (41).

Her short stories deal with sexual and economic exploitation and deceiving of women by men. She shows through her short stories that men exploit women sexually and deceive by leaving the legal wife, and daughter and having a keep, by seducing women through their sugar coated pills or sweet language, by female companionship before marriage, in order to boast of having woman before marriage and by giving

wrong information regarding their income, age and occupation. Kamala Das shows through her women characters that men are exploiting economically by neglecting their mother, wife and daughter. As in “A Doll for the Child Prostitute” “Krishna tells Mira that he is twenty four years old and has a job at a mill”. By lying about his age and job Krishna has deceived and exploited Mira. She comes to know the reality when Ayee asks him: “How old are you son?”... “I am nineteen”, said the boy ... Mira winced at the words ... He told me that he was twenty four and that he had found a job at mill. A liar. A stinking liar (55)

In “That Woman” the man (who is unnamed) in the story deceive and exploits his wife and daughter by leaving them and living with another young woman. The daughter is the narrator of the story. In the opening line she says: “Three years ago, he had left us to live with a young woman” (PHOS 12). He neither divorced nor did he make alternative arrangements for his wife and daughter. This deception affects them socially and emotionally. In this way, he exploited the weakness of his wife and daughter. He not only exploited his legal wife and daughter but also exploited the ‘kept’ woman by not marrying her. The situation becomes more critical when he dies. The daughter gets the news of his death from the local barber. She reaches other woman’s house with the intention to find out whether her father had written any will or left any legacy for the other woman. She observes: “I found the woman seated on the floor, her face burrowed in father’s bosom” (14). The daughter asks her to leave the place because in half an hour’s time, their relatives will reach at this place and she doesn’t want to spoil her father’s reputation. For the other woman the problem is that property goes to the legal wife according to law. The other woman cannot claim on dead man’s property in this she is being exploited and cheated. Das also presents another aspect of female’s personality when she shows that these deceived women

have not lost respect for dead man even then what he did to them. Both women are exploited and cheated. The woman involved in illicit relationship insulted by the wife and the daughter.

“The Princess of Avanti” set in the past, the exact period is not known. It is about an old woman - unmarried princess and three men - the King of Vangarajya, the king of Kerala and the King of Kalinga. The age of men has not been mentioned in the story only what readers know that they are ‘young’. The old woman is happy as well as sad, happy because of her marriage and sad because her wedding is too late. These three Kings ask her to select one of them as her husband. Infact they are not interested in marrying her but they only want to modest her. Finally, she struggles to free herself from their grip, but it resulted into a gang-rape. Thus, men exploit and cheat an old woman.

Through the character of an old woman Das is trying to show that women enter in the institute of marriage with so many romantic ideals but ends into shocking experience. Another thing is that the short story is set in the past and it symbolises that the situation for a woman is same, the situation of a woman is no better than what it was in the past? She also gives this message that the lust has to be controlled so that human values could be restored and preserved.

In “The Sea Launge”, a man, named Satyavrata exploits and cheats a woman. After enjoying her company i.e. by exploiting her physically refuses to marry her and the woman has to marry the man whom she had no intention of marrying. Thus, in this short story also a man deceives and exploits a woman.

The tile of the story “The Tattered Blanket” highlights the theme of this story. In this short story an old woman of eighty five years of age, who is living with her widowed daughter name Kamlam, has been deserted by his son Gopi. Gopi is living

with his wife Vimla, a collector's daughter in Delhi and he is not fulfilling his duties and responsibilities. Gopi is reluctant towards his mother and widowed sister. One day he visits Trivandrum after five years but not to fulfill his duties as a son but for his selfishness. He has to maintain his status in Delhi and for this reason he wants to sell his share of property while the old mother is expecting a new blanket from him to keep her warm. In this short story one can find the economic exploitation of a woman.

Her short stories have not only the theme of economic and sexual exploitation but different interrelated themes present in them. The "Tattered Blanket" also presents the comparison and the contrast between mother's deep love and son's selfishness and heartless ingratitude. In the same way "Iqbal" deals with the theme of homosexuality, "Sanatan Choudhari's Wife" presents the problem of a wife's infidelity, "Leukemia" with the busy aristocratic mother's uncaring attitude towards her own child. "A Little Kitten" deals with the husband wife relationship and how love changes into mutual perfidy, "Darjeeling" presents the loveless relationship of a husband and a wife and "The Sign of the Lion" offers the picture of a woman in conventional Indian society, who cannot desert her husband even though she knows that he is a philanderer.

Generally Kamala Das's short stories deal with the exploitation of women in the male dominated society. She is showing that women want love but they get sex. Their emotions are unfulfilled and they are physically, economically, mentally tortured and exploited. She is presenting this view that patriarchy controls everything. All principles of society only favour men. There is dual method of criticism in society - one for the man and another for the woman. She presents the harsh realities of women's life particularly of the fallen women and women belonging to the lower middle-class. Her short stories offer a realistic picture of women in Indian society.

As is clear from the preceding discussion, Kamala Das's short stories deal with man-woman relationship and the various discordant notes that are struck in familial relations and problems of the fallen women in Indian society. Her short stories show element of protest and also generate awareness regarding predicament of women in society. So her short fiction is "consciousness-raising" short fiction. In this way her contribution to Indian English short story is great.

Anjana Appachana

Like Kamala Das, Anjana Appachana's short stories also deal with women issues but her treatment is different. *Incantation and Other Stories* Appachana's maiden book - a collection of eight short stories is another gem of contemporary Indian English Literature. Appachana is South Indian who grew up in Delhi, which she has chosen as the backdrop for the dramas of the lives. She portrays brilliantly in this little book. She is an eminent writer who is equally acclaimed in India and abroad and her collection of short stories translated into German Language also. Her short story "Sharmaji" included by Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West in the collection known as *Mirror Work: 50 years of Indian Writing*. She received a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship and she is also the recipient of O' Henry Festival Prize.

The short stories in her collection, *Incantations and Other Stories* deal with different kinds of theme: politics, the inimitable Indian bureaucracy, psychology, young children behaving (being forced to behave) like adults, youth which has tasted adulthood all too soon, adults behaving like vicious, selfish children, north vs. south and its gullibility and prejudices; all these are treated here in an unforgettable manner.

Being a woman, writer the basic aim of Appachana is to portray women in several roles in her short stories. Her short stories offer a connecting link between a

modern woman and a traditional woman. Her short stories show that there is a need for greater consciousness and awareness in women and this is the time that they should realize what is happening to them. According to Mary Wollstonecraft:

It's time to bring about a revolution in female manners - time to restore to them their lost identity and make them as a part of the human species labour, by reforming themselves to reform the world.

The recurring themes in her short stories are trials and tribulations of women's lives. Her short stories offer a critique of gender politics. A woman has no room in her in-laws' home. Nevertheless, she must be a silent sufferer and accept everything as it is without raising any question and assert her right or voice her protest against the dissatisfaction because she is only made for others and she has left everything for the sake of others. The woman is only for performing duties; she cannot claim her rights, made her career and have her own likings and dislikings. The woman is supposed to be an active listener but she is merely a passive speaker.

Appachana not only presents silent sufferer but she also represents the new woman through her short stories who cannot be dominated by her in-laws in particular and patriarchy in general. She shows that this new woman is not ready to accept conventional roles and doesn't want to live a monotonous life and simply die. In her short stories the author also presents a contrast between traditional and modern woman. The traditional woman doesn't exercise her power or the choices available to her while the new woman is bold enough to exercise her power and exercise choices available to her. Sometimes her new woman breaks all the bonds of society and she doesn't even bother about the institution of marriage. She leaves it for the sake of her identity and freedom. But this breaking of bond and leaving of institutions come after a great dilemma. Her new woman shows two kinds of conflict: one is external and

the other is internal. The external conflict with patriarchy while the internal conflict with her own self, which is also sometimes patriarchal in nature upto some extent.

“Bahu” which means daughter-in-law tells the story of the life of a young woman who has married for love and has moved into Siddharth’s, her husband’s family home with so many dreams and expectations but she meets an unexpectedly harsh atmosphere. Siddhartha’s mother rules the household and does not welcome the new member into her household happily. In the beginning, the pin pricks are very subtle. Later they grow more open and more daring Siddhartha closes his eyes to what is happening around him. The bahu (it is all the more poignant that she does not have a name in this story), again a modern woman, tried at first to adjust to the demands. But later on she realises that she is losing her personality and is sacrificing all her principles for the sake of her marriage where she has felt as lonely as never before in her life. The story ends with the bahu (daughter-in-law) walking out. The nameless character here emerges as Nora of Ibsen. This story has an open-ended plot which forces readers to reflect on this issue. It also signifies two things – one, it shows uncertainty of a woman’s life or those who are in a phase of transition. This character can also be compared to Raji Narasimhan’s and Shashi Deshpande’s female protagonists. She breaks all chains of society and its Institutions. Symbolically it offers a contrast between traditional and modern woman who think that marriage is not the only choice in life.

This comparison also exists in “Incantations” Appachana has portrayed three types of women in this short story: traditional, modern and woman-in-transition. The mother in this short story is a typical traditional the middle-class woman who believes in the institution of marriage and has traditional outlook regarding life. Her daughter, Geeti, describes her:

Who had marriage and babies and was fat, comforting, unexciting, exacting, loving, practical, oozing security and discontent. And every woman I saw around me who was married was like my mother - totally, completely unromantic. (IS 100)

Another character, Mala Mousie, is the opposite of her sister. She is unmarried and by profession she is a Gynaecologist and she proud of this fact that she has not spoiled her education for domestic activities, not disapproves idea of marriage but she is against exploitation of woman and her silent suffering. She believes that woman now voice her silence. She doesn't believe in God, Heaven or Hell and loves her freedom and she is satisfied with her freedom. For her work is worship. According to Geeti, "serious, contemplative, silent" (99). Geeti who is the narrator as well as the protagonists of this short story neither completely satisfied neither with the attitude of her mother nor with Mala Mousie. She is in a state of in between and her question, "was there no in between?" (100), reveals her mental condition. She likes objectivity and independence of Mala Mousie and hates the exploitation of woman. She does not want to leave everything to the will and wish of God and at the hands of fate. The story of Lord Rama abandoning Sita and the tragic condition of Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* stir her very deeply.

She is full of romantic ideas about life but only for two days before the wedding of Sangeeta, her only sister. The night Sangeeta confides in her young sister that a couple of days earlier she was raped by Abhinay, the younger brother of Nikhil, whom she is to marry. After marriage, Abhinay moves into the house of his brother. Sangeeta tells Geeti during one of her visits to the parent's home that she is systematically raped by Abhinay during the day and by Nikhil during the night. Geeti is not supposed to tell anybody about this.

Naturally the young girl suffers. The parents notice it but they do not understand what is happening and so do nothing directly. Instead, the mother brings her own sister, a psychologist to talk to Geeti. Mala Mousie finds out what is bothering her young niece. Though she acts immediately, it is too late to save Sangeeta, who has at last killed her brother-in-law and has hanged herself. Her aunt thinks that instead of telling her younger sister if she had told everything to her parents, they would have ended her suffering. Here at this point, Geeti was unable to understand but later on she realises the situation and appreciates her aunt's independent outlook regarding life. "Where did she get her optimism she remarks" (108).

Here multiple voices are approving voicing the silence against suffering of a woman. The author obliquely says that it is the time to rethink Indian myths, custom, tradition, moth eaten morality. Although Sangeeta has ruined her life but the message she gives: she is not a Draupadi of ancient period but a new emerging woman who can take her own decision independently. It symbolises that now Geetis and Sangeetas will not suffer. It also symbolises the empowerment of woman in Indian Society.

The short story titled "Sharmaji" deals with a career-oriented woman. Appachana shows that now career oriented women are becoming more professional. She is conscious about her professional status and thinking about her future. She is not simply confined to the four walls of the house and her desires are not revolving around romantic aspect of marriage. Instead, she is craving for the goal and wants to become a role model for others. Miss Dass as the personal officer, discreet and smart, doesn't bring emotions in professional matters; thinking for the betterment of the company. She doesn't bring her emotional and family matters in professional matters. The approach of Miss Dass symbolises liberal thinking, independent thinking and

liberation of Indian woman who is not confined to orthodox system. She is not a stereotype but an individual.

In “When Anklets Twinkle”, Namita thinks that marriage is not a compulsion for girls, and she believes that a girl should not marry only because a boy loves her. she says:

Yes, Rao wanted to marry her, he wanted to marry her, he wanted to marry her. What about her? Did none of them care how she felt? What about her wanting to marry him? What about that? (84)

Namita represents the new woman of contemporary society for whom the freedom and desire of a woman are more important than lifeless institutions of society. For her, having a physical relationship is a different thing and an emotional relationship is a different thing, and, marrying a person with whom a person has a physical relationship is not a necessity. One school of Indian feminism accepts it, while the other discards it. She may be wrong in her view but she represents new woman of Indian society who has thrown away old values and broken all boundaries that confined her. This may also be taken as an impact of Western Culture and can also be taken as an empowerment of woman in society and literature who is asserting her own identity, making her own rules, forming new values and giving a new yardstick for life. The new woman is celebrating her freedom.

Like Shashi Deshpande, she has also treated mother-daughter relationships in a couple of short stories. This theme is exclusively presented in “My Only Gods” and “Her Mother”. The attention, care, love and warmth of mother which covers a child like a protective shield or armour, symbol of security and comfort are portrayed in a very realistic manner, which moves the heart of readers.

“Her mother” portrays the endless waiting of a mother. It shows another concern and love for her daughter. The mother shows her love and concern through letters to her daughter who is in America and her endless waiting continues till the end. She also believes that her daughter will certainly come back if she writes to her about her illness or heart attack. The author is suggesting that too much pampering and emotional upbringing spoils the child and tinge of reason should be added to upbringing. The author also shows that there are certain situations in which child needs her mother only and no one else as in “Incantations” the conversation between Mala Mousie and mother shows.

Anjana Appachana’s collection of short stories can be regarded as a verbal icon of society and it represents views of many feminists. Like other feminist writers and theorists, she also wants a change in social order. Society’s structure is gender based and people are not willing to change that structure, not ready to accept changes or roles assigned to other gender. Stereotyped / traditional image of woman: devoted, kind, chaste, beautiful and delicate is still admired.

Appachana wants a change in this traditional image i.e. society must come out of that orthodox thinking. Her short fiction is a plea in favour of the freedom of woman and it is against the patriarchal setup that confined woman to family and home. If one analyses ancient paintings and sculptures, women have been presented as dancers, as charmers and as courtesans and its aim is to exhibit their charms and sensuousness:

The image of woman as displaying physical charm emerged predominant with the eclipse of her mental accomplishments, creativity and her forced seclusion and consequent isolation from the productive process of the contemporary society. (Vashishtha 111)

She presents her ironical view for male in particular and society in general in a very witty manner. For example, the word ‘good’ is used for the Bahu (daughter-in-law) in the “Bahu”:

Siddhartha would tell me, it’s just for another few days. I was a good bahu those days. I wore my heaviest silk sarees and jewellery and touched everyone’s feet every morning. (15)

Appachana’s views about marriage are also revealed through her short stories. Her views are revealed through the thoughts of Sangeeta:

The man who would be my friend, my companion, my lover, mine would not be one of ‘those’ marriages. I saw them all around me, marriages where neither shared. The other’s dreams, speaking to each other only of their children, rising prices, the cost of vegetables and fruits - they never spoke of each other. (14)

She presents the ironies of women’s life. They want love, friendship, companionship and emotional support but they only get sex and most of the husbands fail to realise the emotions of their wives. The domestic aspect of marriage and its responsibilities of marriage and its responsibilities suppress the romantic aspect of marriage.

She presents a disinterested criticism of society. She feels that men alone are not responsible for the exploitations of women but women themselves are responsible for their suffering also. Women are also patriarchal in nature, for example, mother-in-law in the “Bahu” and she believes in suppression of woman. According to Appachana, this damage to woman is very dangerous and cannot be fruitful for the society. She presents her arguments in the form of her short stories and believes that unless and untill women do not understand each other and not become conscious of

their own identity and status in society, the exploitation of women will continue and thinking will not change in society. The author has very successfully conveyed the idea of the new woman through her short fiction. According to her, the new woman need not be a blind follower of Western ideals and models or completely ignoring Eastern ideals of family, marriage custom and tradition but she does not hate male, neither overt nor covert. She does not need worship as goddesses but need equal treatment as men get. She requires her treatment as human beings. She is modern in this sense that she is aware of her own rights, identity and status in society and thinks for herself, her future in addition to thinking about her family and home. The chief quality of modern/new woman is her self-awareness. She is not a silent sufferer but asserts her identity and wants harmonious relationship between man and woman in society because both of them are now getting equal opportunities. She is now capable of making her own choices and selection.

She has explored life and place of woman in Indian society but not supported radical feminism. Rather she believes in harmonious relationship of man and woman. She thinks that both are complementary to each other and their harmonious relationship and emotional bonding will lead towards progress of both and obliquely it will contribute to the progress of society and humanity as a whole.

Like those of Deshpande, her short stories also present an artistic vision of feminism. Like Deshpande's characters, her characters also present the predicament of middle-class women who are highly educated than her standards. Women are central characters in her short stories and major and minor characters in them present the cross-section of society. Her characters' range starts from housewives to career-oriented ambitious women.

Through her characters like Sangeeta, Amrita, Rani, she presents the trials and tribulations of women. Sangeeta's exploitation by her brother-in-law and her silent suffering symbolically presents the suffering of so many Sangeetas who are suffering uncomplainingly till end or when pain becomes unbearable.

On the contrary her new women break all bonds of moth-eaten morality and offer a contrast between traditional and modern women. They have new outlook regarding different institutions of society, for example, Namita in "When Anklets Twinkle" and Miss Dass in the "Sharmaji". In other words, her characters represent class. Sharmaji represents armchair philosopher, Amrita, Sangeeta and Rani represent oppressed women, Namita and Miss Dass represent the emerging new woman who is career oriented and is professional.

Her characters are warm, gullible, arrogant and bigoted and represent the contradictions, superstitions, dreams and double standards of society and they ultimately usurp their landscape and idiosyncratic vision of life.

All the complexities of life, society and character she has presented in easy-going style. Her style shows variation depending upon the subject of short-stories. She captures the colloquial touch of Indian idioms in certain stories like "Sharmaji", "Diwali Sweets" while her style attains heights in "Her Mother" to present the feelings of the mother. There is an element of experimentation at the level of the language and she has used devices like satire and irony to present her view point. Humour is also present in some short stories but this never regenerates into the boisterous horseplay.

Prema Ramakrishnan

The simplicity of Appachana is present in Prema Krishnan's short fiction also. Her maiden collection *The Homemaker and Other Stories* symbolises the theme of her

short stories. A homemaker, a person, a thing or a place is present in every short story that turns 'a house' into 'a home'. In most of the short stories a woman is present who makes a home. She not only do is all domestic activities but her love and warmth which binds everyone together and that is why no body leaves the home.

In her short stories whether a woman is traditional or a modern, her first preference is the home. Shankari in "The Homemaker" forgets all her dreams and aspirations that she had as a student in household activities but again she realises and completes her education of law. Even then she does not neglect her responsibilities and duties of home. The same theme is present in "Mother Goes to Work".

"Old Faithful" shows an old lady's attachment for her home. The element of nostalgia is present in this short story. Memories of her husband and ups and downs that she has seen in her life are related to this home. That is why she doesn't want to leave it or stay with her son. She agrees once to go with her son but the next night she passes away. That shows her attachment for the home.

In some short stories hobbies and places make life worth living, for example, "The Garden" that makes Ramnath's house a home and in the same manner Mr. Verma's hobby as well as obsession is the roses in "Mr. Verma's Roses". Jaya in "The Courtyard" believes that courtyard brings everybody together and makes a real home. Her courtyard joins family together again, which had almost been scattered and divided.

Prema Krishnan's focus is on belongingness. In one's life one needs a place, a person or a thing or a corner with which one can identify oneself, where one can feel love and warmth and belongingness. That is why she has presented her short stories in such a manner that every short story revolves around the aforesaid elements.

In her short stories she portrays woman as the force that binds different members of house and make a home. In most of the short stories women are generally protagonists and they are homemaker. Her protagonists are new women, career-oriented, working women but they are to their household duties. According to the author, this attitude turns a house into a home. Her characters, for example, Shankari, Nagratna, Mildred and Tara represent her vision and they are devoted women.

All her female protagonists in the short stories are in some conflicting situations and their reaction to that situation develops perceptions, insights, personality in them and opens new doors which did not exist earlier.

Her characters show a blend of two things - love for their homes and quest to maintain integrity and unity of the family. Thus, her characters suffer acute mental agony, face dilemmas and struggles but they don't leave their families and home. They emerge as a connecting force which changes worst situation into happier moment.

She has used the 'third person, authorial, omniscient narration' to present her view point. She has also used the stream - of - consciousness technique to present the inner conflict, process of cerebration, inner agony and traits of characters. The simplicity of style and use of language can be compared to Appachana's style. She uses similes, metaphors and sometimes ornamental language in her lucid prose that makes her prose poetry. In other words, it can be said that her short stories sometimes become lyric in prose. But the impact of day-to-day language is visible in her writing. The structure of her short stories is terse. In her lucid prose, she has presented her view point and philosophy. Her short fiction is an example of simple, lucid, compact prose which presents a cross section of Indian society and can be regarded as a specimen of Indian feminism.

Githa Hariharan

Githa Hariharan is a post-modernist fiction writer and her debut novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, was published in 1992. She has published several short stories in journals and magazines and edited *A Southern Harvest*, a collection of stories translated from four South Indian Languages. *The Art of Dying and Other Stories* (1993), a collection of twenty short stories, deals with contemporary Indian life. In this collection she has projected the postmodernist ethos of difference with perfection. The main text seems to run smoothly well within the orthodox order, as if upholding the traditional power equations, but very subtly she lets us feel the simmering ferment just below the surface. The muted subtext the “unsaid” seven-eight of the story speaks louder than the voiced narrative. The title short story, “The Art of dying” deals with the accepted terror of woman’s life “wifing”, “child bearing” ... “bleed”, dry up, expand with life, contract with completion’. For a male woman’s domestic life is peaceful and gentle existence but for a woman and from the point of view of a woman it is a “contraption” which moves only in one direction - negation of the self, leading to ‘yawning emptiness’. It is in such a casual way that men think about women’s life. Women in their seemingly unconditional surrender they yearn for change, pain, whose “shooting clarity would help them to define themselves. Though they are living apparently full lives “dedicated to the housekeeping of the body”, their minds and hearts demand much more. They are tired of “smoothing a great deal off their faces”, “sniggers of contempt”, “norts of disbelief”, even genuine amazement or “outrage,” which have been impeded by the “mundanities” of womanly etiquette. They are framed in one-dimensional roles of posterity, the “do-goodess” holding merely “listening posts” and they want to break this trauma. Women, reads the sub-text of the story, do not live straight clear lives as men are won’t to believe, they too

have an untidy nest of unacknowledged needs, impulses, drives and instincts that lie hidden deep down within, which they have a right to give vent to. One cannot tie them up with the 'worn out seat belts' forever all the pent up emotions are bound to pelt out. Even an extinct volcano should not be taken for a dead one.

The "Untitled Poem" is about husband-wife relationship. The narrator in the story is a man, a retired salesman, an aspiring creative writer. He and his wife Sarla have now shifted to a new house which is built out of his life-savings. This house (accommodation), satisfies her because it contains a small garden. All her life she had to content herself with "minute", self contained garden in pots. She use to live on the seventh floor and in her "pretend gardens" on the seventh floor balcony she could not plant anything that could dig its roots deep into the soil. This little information symbolically presents Sarla's dissatisfaction. She was unable to establish roots. In fact she has all her life being unable to do so. A feeling of belongingness is absent. They had thought 'marriage meant doing things together' but nothing being in common there is nothing to share. The connecting link is absent i.e. children. There are no children who could strengthen the bond between the two. He is busy with his sheet of paper and she is busy with her garden. This garden is the only habit in her life - her fans are luminous green, her pale pink athuriums luxurious, everything hardy "that thrives despite changes in weather," not like human relationships. She is devoid of natural companionship and she transfers her urge to her old gardener. They form a good team. She is the navigator and he is the oarsman. But unfortunately a rodent creeps into her garden of Eden to destroy her paradise. He tears and uproots everything. "He does not eat any of it." It is a song of pure destruction. Hariharan is suggesting that every woman has to suffer - being torn apart, uprooted, shredded and stalked but yet asked to live on. Hariharan says that do not think that she is weak, for

come the right moment she can striket her enemy dead when rubbed too far woman is Kali, the destroyer of evil. The post-feminist belief of the writer is that a woman might live a non-existent life but not like a lotus only “thick skinned Yam” because now she has the power to strike most effectively when the time is ripe.

Woman’s desires cannot be curbed for a long period because there is a limit of suffering. This is the theme which is present in “The Remains of the Feast”. The short story is about a ninety year old dying grandmother, Hariharan in a very subtle way presents the suppressed desire of an old woman. The suffering had taught her a lesson and now she has learned to laugh at life’s grotesque ways. The strange desires which were not fulfilled or not allowed to be fulfilled now they except at odd times. Her condition is critical and she is now in her last days of her life - the body licked away by a cancerous goiter, hads punctured by needles and tied to the I.V. pole, legs outstretched on a raised bed but she could not resist the temptation of her heart, the yearnings of the mind and craving of the tongue for spicy food and junk food. In the name of domestic peace and familial harmony, these three organs have to be muted but a week before she died she even broke all the conventions of a brahmin widow and conspired with her granddaughter to smuggle her cakes, biscuits, samosas and ice creams made from non brahmin hands. In this short span of time she tasted lemon tarts, garlic, three types of aerated drinks, fruit cakes, bhelpuri and peanuts with red-chilli powder, deep fried in oil and the next thing she wanted was to be wrapped in a red silk saree with a wide border of gold. She had desired all these trival things all her life but her desires were not fulfilled. She had suppressed natural desires so long that now they had taken very horrifying shapes. Through this character Hariharan is able to articulate woman’s destiny.

“Forefathers” deals with the fate of women’s lives. In this story a daughter waits for her father’s death. The father is paralysed but still he commands domination and treats her daughters like slaves who can be summoned and dismissed at any moment. One daughter asks the crow about her oracle, to tell her how long the tyranny of the father continue and when this slavery will come to an end. She flings a stone and if it hits the crow, the father would die next week; a second attempt means the delay of a month and if the crow flies away, it would mean another six months she will have to suffer and survive as her mother did. But she doesn’t want to be ‘like a pastel shaded, grimy, badly-doubled wall-hanging’. The narrator is moaning the lack of privacy in the father’s house which is like a confined circumference of a kingdom. There is not even a specific corner in the house which they can call their own. They are longing for a room of one’s own but they have learnt to survive in these circumstances, they have learnt art of shyly dressing in public then they put on some of their clothes in the narrow net bathroom and then rush to kitchen to finish dressing behind the doors of iron cupboard and sleeping for them is a communal activity. Here in this short story Hariharan is suggesting that women have to suffer and they have hide their suffering and pain behind the mask of humility and dutifulness.

In “The Closed Room” the wife helps her husband in the act of creation but her contribution is not recognized. Hariharan is here suggesting that women have potential to create but they are not given the role of creator due to male chauvinism and male prerogative. Women have to remain in the background. This theme of unrecognition is also present in “The Republic”. The proud husband who is enjoying obvious authority, power of hierarchy but least concerned about his wife who was actually running the household machinery of thirty members, oiling this machinery, removing the friction, not bothering him at all and not letting him feel any problem of

this domestic machinery. Her contributions never recognized, husband thought about himself, his discomfort even he did not remember what he and his wife talked about and he didn't bothered about her comforts and feelings. She had been tutored to assume as the mistress of the house. Hariharan is suggesting that women are always in the background and their handling of household problems never noticed at all and regarded as trivial activities, in short their contribution never recognized. Through the character of Mangla she is suggesting that women forget their joys, dreams and feelings and it is a woman to whom men come for solace, peace and completion. Through the character of Mangla Hariharan is pointing out that men never bother about women's feelings and emotions but women care for them and they come to men when they require.

Hariharan's collection pre-occupied with the theme of death. The titles of her short stories reflect the theme of short stories. In her short stories she has presented life as a journey and death as a destination. Death is not merely an event but a shadow looming over life. She is not only showing death but also its place in life. It is portrayed as a phenomenon which is inevitable but sometimes dreaded and welcome. She has described the process of dying and her characters gradually embrace a slow and sure death. Her characters are aware with this fact that it is sure and unavoidable. She has presented death in her short stories not as an end point of life but as an act which require strength, courage and understanding. She has not only described the process of dying but attitude of modern generation towards it. The traditional structure of Indian society and family completely shattered, joint family disintegrated into nuclear family and now nuclear family is moving towards the individualism. The contemporary generation has very realistic view regarding death and this generation reacts in a very realistic manner to death rather than in emotional way. The children of

this generations are not caring for their parents. They don't remember love and sacrifices made by their parents for them as in "Voices in the Twilight" which deals with the indifferences of the two sisters and their brother but also towards their widowed mother who had brought them so lovingly. After her death they feel free because now the connecting link has gone from this world and there is no compulsion for them. She was the only reason who joints them in a single bond. The children have no time for rituals after death. This callousness is also present in "Forefathers." In this short story the daughter is playing a game to guess the father's death who is on his deathbed. Hariharan is showing that professionalism has changed the attitude of contemporary generation towards the death of their near and dear ones as a casual event. Thus, her short stories deal with the death and its place in life, however, her short stories also show her interest and understanding of artistic process as in "Untitled Poems", "Love Poem", "Repeat Performance" and "The Close-up" Hariharan has shown her keen interest in various types of arts and expression.

Her sensibility pierces in the mind of her characters like an x-ray and presents the inner state of characters. Her portrayal of characters is not physical but she is actually presenting the inner character. Her characterization is as such because it suits the theme of her short stories. She has wide range of characters - urban, rural, old and young. The old characters are representing traditional conventional society while young characters are representing modern generation. Self-centeredness, individualism of modern generations resulted into callousness and they are responsible for coldness in relationship. Through her characters she is presenting the picture of modern generation and the cross section of society. Her portrayal of characters is in the method of comparison and contrast - comparison of old with young, modern women with traditional women brings out the realistic aspect of

contemporary society because her portrayal is not physical but focuses on inner aspects of human nature.

She has adopted first person narration to make her short stories more realistic and sometimes two or three narrators are present in one short story. So one 'I' is different from the other. This method adopted by her to present multiple voices. Her discourse become polyphonic in nature and marked by an element of heteroglossia.

Thus, in her short stories death occupies a quintessential position and the artistic process is a *liet* motif. Her short stories are shells of a story. They are fragile containers of composed meaning. They are metonymic structures of under statement which help in stating the suppression of women. Her short stories are generally everyday happenings, established norms about woman's life and behaviour and they are based on the pattern of nothing-is-happening but the figurative pattern present in her short stories which symbolises the universal condition of woman and her capacity. Her short stories are links between the particular and the universal, the part and the whole, the trivial and the significant. They show what appears to be trivial that is also equally important.

They are moments excerpted from a longer implied story and their figurative design signifies part of a whole experience and in a metaphorical sense they contain universal knowledge in essence. The structure of her short stories signifies the deep knowledge of what it meant to be a 'woman' in the context of India.

Her short stories are ironical, ambiguous, open-ended and have multiple perspectives and they focus on some hidden meaning or underlying truth which is generally not described in them or often it is absent like other postmodernist writers. Her short stories contain so many empty spaces and readers have a chance to decipher meaning from them. They actually show how woman can be misrepresented but the

reader has to read the subtext for correction and correct interpretation. She presents what appear to be trivial matters. In short story external details signifies something else. In the same manner Hariharan's short stories are based on this principles, her short stories suggest that there is more to the stories than the external details. A first hand reading of her short stories suggests that internally they are disjointed, disconnected, there is no connection between the beginning and the end but there is always an internal design some oblique reference which combines external details and internal disjointed and disconnected ideas into a single trope - a pattern of feminist meaning which is marked by traditional symbolic structure.

Hariharan's short fiction is a blend of postmodernist and feminist perspectives. She has presented different strategies which women adopt to assert their identity. She has also documented the consequences of the strong winds of change that have brought upheavels in women's lives in India. Hariharan's short stories deal with opportunities as well as problems of Indian women. The stereotyped images of Indian woman as an object of pity and submissive beings have changed, as people do not find concrete examples because awareness of personal rights is also present at lower level. The stereotype image of Indian woman exists only for those who are distant onlookers and underlines the politics of representation.

She demonstrates through her short stories that the pressure of tradition still dominates society and this is major cause of silence, inner ferment and torment. The pressure of cultural politics in the form of gender ideology is also a dominant factor and in literary works which forces creative women writers to stick to traditional roles instead of achieving freedom of spirit which is the right of creative writers.

Post-modernist feminist theory is non-universalist. When its focus is cross cultural, it supports changes and contrasts instead of "covering laws" and

universalization. It supports plurality and complex constructed conceptions. So the women in Hariharan's short fiction can be taken as one factor in that paradigm. The postmodern feminist theory is pragmatic in nature and it discards the metaphysical comfort of a single 'feminist method, in this way Hariharan's text can be taken as one of the threads in tapestry of diverse colours. But her short fiction obliquely counterpart of multi-layered and complex feminist solidarity which is essential to overcome the oppression of women in Indian society and it is also essential to assert female identity in patriarchal setup.

Shalan Savur

Shalan Savur's collection of short stories, *Renaissance Daughter* (1993) is set in a metropolitan environment. Her short stories range from the thrill of a detective cliffhanger to the sublimity of the first romance.

Her canvas is wide and she deals with a vast range of emotions but her main focus is on the parent-child relationship in her short stories. The treatment of parent-child relationship is very delicate and at the same time strongly portrayed. Most of her women are working women / self-dependent or those who cannot be confined in the four walls of house but like Prema Ramkrishnan's protagonists her women's first priority is their children, family and household works. Shruti, for instance, in "Woman of the Mountains" does mountaineering to overcome the depression after her husband's death but she is worried about her daughter and feels guilty of leaving her. This short story focuses on mother-daughter relationship as well as love of mother for her daughter.

In "A Taste of Sunshine" Ketki is also concerned about her daughter who has become bitter because of her parents' unhealthy relationship which often results into quarrels. But like Prema Krishnan's characters, Ketki and Shruti at last bring their

family and household together and make their daughter realize that they love and care for them.

This theme is very prominent and it is also present in “Renaissance Daughter.” The daughter realises the love of the mother who adopted her and compares her love with her own real mother who devoted all her life to make her own life while the other one devoted her whole life to make life of the adopted daughter. This element of selflessness or unselfish love of mother is also present in Shashi Deshpande’s “The Legacy” where a Maharashtrian woman, maid comes and serves her adopted daughter till her death. Shalan Savur tries to show that the motherhood is a great quality of woman and it not only lies in blood relationship but also exists outside blood relationship.

In “The Assassination” the millionaire businessman leaves his business and dramatizes his murder to live peacefully with her wife and daughter from the hustle and bustle of city. This short story also revolves around the theme of devotion and commitment.

Thus, all short stories in this collection revolve around the theme of relationship amongst family members. Savur shows that moment of despair and disappointment arises but it is overcome by the power of love, affection and hope. She has given this message that it is an element of love and affection that joins different members of the family not the wealth. She has especially emphasised the parent child relationship and her short stories also contain an element of optimism which changes moment of despair into hope.

The characters portrayed in her short fiction are very devoted to their families and they can sacrifice their lives for its sake. She accentuates on women characters who are devoted to their duties and responsibilities. Even if they are working women,

they perform their duties at home. They show their concern for home and family more than their job. Her characters show strength as well as weakness and in this way they are very close to real life. Their strength and weakness make them appealing and vulnerable. They are more human and they develop and grow with the development of plot. Her characters, particularly the protagonists are round characters. The daughters portrayed in her short stories are sensitive and immature, for example, Payal, Aarti and Sanjana but they realise the real situation and appreciate the sacrifices of their mothers and finally at the end of the story they emerged as mature characters. But this development is positive as well as negative. For instance, Laila in the story "Laila" inclines towards the worst position and meets her doom. The same negative inclination is visible in "Deep Waters" where Mallya first becomes a life force but later on plans her husband's murder in order to save her father's business. Thus, her characters are three dimensional. Development in her characters is gradual but sometimes they surprise or give 'agro-effect' to readers.

She has used the third person narration in order to present her view point. She is actually advocating Indian feminism through her short fiction. She has used the stream-of-consciousness technique in order to present the inner self of a woman. Her writing shows a kind of experimentation. This experimentation is basically meant to present her vision and different aspects of a woman's life.

Tara Deshpande

Experimentation with the form of short fiction is a common trend in post-independence Indian English short fiction by women writers and Tara Deshpande is not an exception in this context. Her collection of short stories, *Fifty and Done*, shows this element of experimentation. On the one hand, writers like Githa Hariharan whose collection of short stories is preoccupied with the theme of death. On the other hand,

writers like Tara Deshpande whose collection of short stories deals with the values of life, emotions and joys. Her short stories can be compared to Shalan Savur and Prema Ramkrishnan. Tara Deshpande's short stories deal with contemporary Indian life and they reveal her multi faceted personality. Variety of themes present in her short stories and her collection is divided into five sections. Each section consists of short stories and verse and each section has a title and a couple of themes.

The first section 'Secrets' deals with the secrets of life revealed to children who are in their innocence of childhood. In "Wicked" children fail to realise cause of harsh behaviour and bitterness of a woman whose longing for love and emotional support results into alienation and loneliness that made her harsh and bitter.

In "The Miracle" hard core realities of life revealed. A small boy, Ravi after his mother's death exposed to harsh realities of life and that make him mature at an early age. She is suggesting that innocence of childhood vanished when harshness of life is revealed and understood.

The second section, 'Portrait of a Woman' deals with the picture of a modern woman who is strong but constantly craving for love and care. She portrays woman as a sensitive creature who wants attention, love and care and cannot tolerate negligence of husband as in "Merry Christmas, Mrs. Banerjee". The protagonist becomes a murderess because of constant negligence by her husband although she was good and caring house wife. In "To Get Away From You", a very successful actress commits suicide because of her husband's frailty.

The section titled "Everything for Sale" contains only one short story with the same title. This story highlights the pathetic condition of an old man and his family. Tara Deshpande has presented a sympathetic portrayal of an old man and his

condition and shows the bitterness of society where everything is valued in terms of money.

The section titled “Remembering” deals with the poignant memories of the protagonists. Miss Mona protagonist in “Miss Mona Goes to Movies” can never forget the young man with whom she enters in physicality for only one time. In “Helen Eleven” Seema cannot forget her illicit relationship with Rafiq although he is no more. She misses his touch habits and emotional appeal.

Thus, short stories in this collection deal with love and loss like “Fifty and Done” depicts Tara Deshpande’s attachment to her father and her sudden demise at the age of fifty.

The preceding analysis shows that her short stories highlight the real picture of contemporary Indian society and its complexities. In her short stories she has depicted emotion of love, element of loss, success and failure of life and peculiar feelings of women. So like other feminist writers, she is aware of emotional, psychological and social status of women. Certain short stories of Tara Deshpande come under the heading of female phase of writing although stories on varied themes, also present in them.

This consciousness is revealed through her characters. She has portrayed her characters, particularly women characters, in such a way that they present deep emotions of women, and she presents psyche of women through the stream-of-consciousness technique. She has portrayed peculiar emotions and sensations of women in a very minute way. Her women characters show women’s understanding of life. She has also a deep understanding of child psychology and her creative sharpness penetrates into the surface behaviour of people and society and can decipher the psychological forces behind it.

In the third person, omniscient, authorial narration, she has presented the picture of society in general and woman in particular. She has exploited smiles, metaphors and the element of personification to get the desired effect. She peeps into the conscious and sub-conscious minds of her characters and presents their inner and outer reality. In her specific style, which is also sometimes marked by humour and shock she has presented her point of view.

It is clear from the preceding discussion of various Indian English short stories by women writers that their short stories are marked by variety of themes and that they relate themselves to the contemporary social milieu. Attia Hosain's short stories deal with socio-political issues of the post-independence Indian society. She comments on the horrors of partition and evils of society; her short stories offer a critique of exploitation of women in Indian society of the '50s. Raji Narasimhan's short stories are like middle-class emancipatory narratives of Shashi Deshpande. They deal with the exploitation of women in Indian society, her women are women-in-transition belonging to the lower middle-class of society and usually away from power centres. She uses them as mouthpiece to propagate her philosophy and vision. Her short stories present society of the late '70s and the '80s and struggle of women in that society of turmoil. Nergis Dalal's short stories revolve around a variety of themes such as love, sex, unhappy marriage, the foreigner in India women writers, environment, wild life, superstition and fake saints. She offers a critique of society. In certain short stories, women issues are very prominent, that is why her women are strong personalities. Her short stories are informative and journalistic in nature, interesting and revealing her human side. While short stories of Kamala Das present life in the crude form. She presents exploitation of women particularly the middle-class women and the fallen women. Her tone is harsh, and she shows a voice of

protest against patriarchy and advocates for a change in existing moral codes. Anjana Appachana's short stories deal with three generations of women: traditional, women-in-transition and modern / new women, for example, in "Incantations." Feminist issues are prominent in her short stories. Besides feminism, other important themes in her short stories are the following: politics, psychology, children behaving like adults, adults behaving like vicious, selfish children and North vs South. She has used post modern techniques in order to show sincerity in her short stories. Some women writers like Githa Hariharan, Prema Ramakrishnan, Shalan Savur and Tara Deshpande have presented universal themes like love, life, and death. Githa Hariharan's short stories are pre-occupied with the theme of death. She presents life as a journey and death as a destination. The subtext of her short stories is loud enough then the voiced narrative. She has presented postmodernist non-universalist feminist view that challenges universalist view about women and society. Her short stories are a blend of postmodernism and feminism. Prema Ramakrishnan's collection of short stories, *The Homemaker and Other Stories*, symbolises the themes of her short stories. In her every short story there is a person, a place or a thing that turns a house into a home. In her every short story whether the woman is traditional or modern but her first preference is a home. She portrays woman as a force that binds different members of the family and changes a house into a home. Like Prema Ramakrishnan, Shalan Savur's short stories also deal with the relationship amongst different members of the family. She shows that moment of despair and disappointment arises but they are overcome by the power of affection, love and hope. She suggests that love, affection and sacrifice join different members of the family, not the wealth. Her women are devoted women and show their concern for their responsibilities and duties rather than their job. Like other women writers, Tara Deshpande's short stories are known for

experimentation with techniques of short fiction. Her collection, *Fifty and Done* is known for the themes of love, life and joys. She has divided her collection of short stories into five sections and each section highlights a specific theme. Whereas Githa Hariharan's short stories are pre-occupied with the theme of death, Tara Deshpande's stories are pre-occupied with the theme of life. In conclusion, then, despite the fact of their thematic-formal diversity, the short stories discussed in this chapter do have a common denominator: feminist consciousness and the assertion of female identity.

Conclusion

Indian English short fiction by contemporary women writers is full of variety, both thematic and technical. It is not easy to find a consistent pattern of themes and perspectives in it but short stories by Indian English women writers are marked by a common denominator: feminist consciousness. This is but natural in a genre that is prolifically exploited and which is at once flexible and open. What stands out, however, in a study of this vast body of material is its contemporaneity and immediacy. The short story by contemporary Indian English women writers relates itself to contemporary social milieu. In fact, the changing faces of women and Indian society are captured artistically in the short story form by women writers. They have used it as a literary barometer and presented social and psychological reality of women. The short story by Indian English women writers from the pre-independence era down to the present has come a long way, evolving into a separate genre. Now numerous women writers are continuously contributing to this genre. Some women writers like Neelam Sharan Gaur have developed it as *Moffusil* fiction.

That Indian English short story by women writers relates itself to contemporary social reality with immediacy is fully established in Chapters II, III and IV. Attia Hosain's collection of short stories, *Phoenix Fled and Other Stories*, presents the post Independence society of the 'fifties. Her short stories present contemporary socio-political condition and place of women in that society. Society-in-transition and women-in-transition of the late seventies and the early eighties are present in Anita Desai's "The Roof Top Dwellers", Raji Narasimhan's "The End of Probation", "A Toast to Herself" and "Their Woman Colleague", Shashi Deshpande's "A Liberated Woman". The post-modern assertion of female identity and sexuality are present in Shashi Deshpande's "An Antidote to Boredom" and "The Stone

Women". The short stories of Githa Hariharan, Anjana Appachana and Tara Deshpande are known for their portrayal of post-modern society. They also highlight the predicament of women in contemporary society. The analysis of short stories in the preceding chapters shows how they deal with contemporary society and place of women in that. Through their short stories women writers have presented their views about the contemporary socio-political condition and predicament of women in society.

However, short fiction by Indian English women writers as a genre has received inadequate critical attention. The critical corpus surrounding it is still sparse when compared with the richness of critical body surrounding such genres as novel and poetry. The reasons are explored during present research work and after going through theories given by various critics, theorists, short fiction writers and specially by contemporary theorists, according to M. M. Bakhtin and many other theorists of short fiction regarding short fiction's elements (Plot, Character, Action, Situation and Structure) of short fiction and novel are the same but their treatment in the short fiction makes the genre (short story) different. The compression of the various elements makes it complex and symbolic in nature. According to some critics, the length of the genre does affect the treatment of reality in short fiction. This could be one reason for its lesser popularity in comparison to novel.

But this fact cannot be ignored that after the last part of the decade of the '70s there has been an abundance of women short fiction writers whether they are major or minor and they have made significant contributions and are still seriously contributing to this genre. Since it suits their personality, things which appear to be mundane to qualify as subject fit for literary creation, have been sublimated such subjects into

short stories. The lyric quality of this genre is also responsible for its development. They can handle issues concerning women in this genre in a better way.

It is an assumption that literary texts not only deal with (individuals) writers experience but also reveal the truth of the world and provide an understanding of human nature. Women's writings particularly short stories are transparent authentic literary document of their peculiar experiences. The problems faced by women in society and their predicament are presented in short stories. Their short stories also present the resolution of the problems which arise when a middle-class woman who is highly educated by her standards uncovers the orthodox society and its ideology that excludes her from the mainstream or doesn't allow her to live as a human being.

The aim of these women writers is to arouse an urgent awareness in society regarding the conflicting position of women and injustices done to them. Their short fiction concerns itself with the social inequalities and exploitation of women. They are generally committed writers and they are writing in this genre with a purpose. The purpose of their writing is an endeavour to make society free from the inhuman treatment which is given to women and its replacement with humanistic and tender attitude for women. Short fiction by women writers can be taken as an effort to gain space by fighting moral and intellectual leadership in society where they are denied any space.

Major themes that emerge in the short stories of the women writers due to the presence of feminist consciousness in them are-gender consciousness, bitterness, pessimism, revenge, sensuality, marriage, divorce, love and lust, sarcasm, de-mythologization, women-in-transition, search for identity, emergence of new women, theme of violence and suffering and triumph of their survival. Among the short stories that deal with the above mentioned themes, mention may be made of "A Liberated

Woman”, “Bahu”, and “A Doll for the Child Prostitute”, “The Intrusion”, “A Toast to Herself”, “It was a Nightingale”, “Diamond Dust” “A Devoted Son”, “The End of Probation”, “Winterscape”, “Royalty”, “The Roof Top Dwellers”. For example, the theme of violence and suffering in “The Intrusion”, “A Liberated Woman”, “A Doll for the Child Prostitute”, the theme of pessimism in “Royalty”, “Diamond Dust”, “Winterscape” and “The Roof Top Dwellers”, the theme of gender – consciousness in “Private Tuition by Mr. Bose”, “A Liberated Woman”, “A Doll for the Child Prostitute”, the theme of marriage in “The Intrusion”, “The Marriage of Bela”, “A Toast to Herself” and “Bahu”, the theme of divorce in “A Toast to Herself”, the theme of woman-in-transition in “The End of Probation”, “A Liberated Woman” and “Ghost”, the theme of new woman in “It was a Nightingale”, “The Stone Women”, the theme of search for identity in “Games at Twilight”, “A Wall is Safer”, “The Roof Top Dwellers” and the theme of triumph of their survival in “It was a Nightingale”, “The Stone Women” and “Ranjit’s Wife”

Their themes are influenced by contemporary milieu: in the pre-independence era themes in their short fiction were sociological in nature like those of Cornelia Sorabji. In the post-independence era, the focus has shifted and there is an element of disillusionment in their short fiction; in the ‘70s, there is voice of protest; in the ‘80s, the beginning of a new era and the focus is shifted to inner realities as in the stories of Shashi Deshpande, and in the ‘90s the birth of fulfilled women in their short fiction.

Short stories by women also focus on the social orientation of women and their relationship with men-as father, brother, son, husband, friend and employer. It shows that they don’t have any individuality of their own. They also show that women are tuned according to what others think about them. They further show through their short stories that men hurt women, and that they are overdemanding.

Women writers have viewed society objectively. That is why they sometimes present men as passive characters in their short stories. They also present a true picture of women in Indian society. Contemporary Indian women are exposed to Western culture and style of living. They have also presented serious issues like old age, illness and death from the point of view of a woman. Their short stories also present generations of women- sometimes three or four generations are present in a particular short story, which symbolise status of women at different period of time. Their short stories articulate the silence of women and show overt and covert resistance to marginalization.

The analysis of contemporary Indian English women writers' short stories reveals that they form an integral part of Indian English Writing and present the life of Indian women in a realistic manner specifically their social rejection and suppression. Their short stories also reveal that a woman is not born but made (a social and cultural construct). These writers not only talking about suppression and exploitation but also voicing their anger against this suppression and exploitation. As mentioned elsewhere, they are writing their stories with a purpose. In this way, they are presenting their ideology in the form of Feminism. Their short stories are marked by the common note of feminism.

Thus, contemporary Indian English women writers' short stories depict the inner torment, mental agony and suppression of women's identity by the patriarchy but the ray of hope also oozes out from the gloominess of isolation and marginalization when they break their silence or assert their identity. This pattern is common in Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Anjana Appachana, Kamala Das, Raji Narasimhan, Juliette Bannerjee and Prema Ramakrishnan, Shalan Savur and Tara Deshpande.

The analysis of Anita Desai's short stories in Chapter II of the thesis reveals that her short stories offer a plurality of interpretations. Her short stories are pessimistic as well as feminist in nature. The short stories in her first collection, *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* are based on the Kafkaian model and deal with existential problems. They are psychological in nature. Desai has peeped inside the mind of her characters and presented their inner problems. Most of the short stories figuring in this collection are pessimistic in nature, pessimism pervades in almost all short stories. Her short stories are a blend of self and society. Anita Desai was a lecturer in English at Delhi University, Delhi, she had seen that contemporary middle-class society and that is why she has presented that society-in-transition. Pessimism oozes out in her short stories from illness and this illness is sometimes responsible for disharmony in relationship as in "A Devoted Son" and "Pigeons at Daybreak". She has also commented on the fragmentation of society, which is an outcome of coldness in relationships. She shows that this phenomenon is common everywhere from Delhi to Canada, for example, in "Winterscape".

Desai's short stories reflect the Kaleidoscope of urban life, a blend of 'self' and society and contain element of social documentation. As a social historian she presents inner and outer picture (self and society) in a very artistic way. Her short stories deal with complex themes which are manifested through her characters. That is why her characters are not normal human beings but alienated outlandish belonging to some kafkaian world. In order to present the complexities of life and characters the style that she has adopted directly delves deep into the mind of characters and through this style she has presented the hidden world which is one-tenth visible and nine-tenth submerged in the water of mystery.

The analysis of Deshpande's and Githa Hariharan's short stories in the Chapter III and Chapter IV on Other Indian English Women Writers of Short Fiction respectively shows that their short stories belong to the middle-class emancipatory narratives. The texts by these two writers frame 'women's expressive aesthetics'. In 1980s and 1990s when other women writers were using the confessional method, they tried to introduce 'open-endedness' in their short stories, 'open-endedness' is a radical choice in the rejection of neat closures and resolutions. Deshpande and Hariharan have subtly encapsulated the effect of the strong winds of change that have brought about far reaching upheavals in women's lives in India. In order to break the pressures of cultural politics in the form of the dominance of gender ideology, these writers have deconstructed the past and thereby reconstructed a meaningful present. They have used subtle postmodern strategies in their short stories in order to expose the misrepresentation of women in the patriarchal set-up, thereby generating accurate representation for the present. Deshpande and Hariharan in their short stories erode the age-old wisdom contained in sayings, proverbs, myths and beliefs. Their anger expresses itself through the medium of satire, irony and sarcasm. Their vision encompasses the whole history of woman's role and edifies the emergence of a new woman who is true to her own self. The struggle for self remains vital for women as an ideal to be achieved. Deshpande's views on marriage are also revealed through her short stories. Her view is different from what most of the Western feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer and Kate Millet say. Beauvoir views man-woman relationship in terms of self/other or subject / object model and argues that man's subjectivity is established only through opposition to and dependence upon woman's absolute and eternal otherness. Deshpande's views are different and she argues for relational autonomy. In her essay "Why I am Feminist" she makes it clear

that to be a feminist does not necessarily mean to want to be like a man but to accept one's womanhood as a positive gift and not a "lack", to affirm that one is "different", not "inferior". At the same time, Deshpande challenges the definition of woman as a biological mechanism suited for the reproduction of the race as well as the related definition of woman as one of the self abnegation. She points out the instability that characterizes the paradigm of gender (because of its entanglements with caste, class or religion) thereby uncovering the fact that a woman in varying situations may move between positions of powerlessness and power. This is an issue that remains somewhat unresolved in Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha's critical agenda which they elaborate on the project of reading women's texts "in a new way – to read them not for the moments in which they collude with or reinforce the dominant ideologies of gender, class, nation, or empire but for the gesture of defiance implicit in them" (35). Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha acknowledge woman's interpellation in ideology but they also suggest that difference and implicit resistance are necessary features of writings by women because "women articulate" and respond to ideologies from complexly constituted and decentred positions within them. Deshpande and Hariharan's short stories belong to this category. The resistance of their protagonists lies in those moments / conjectures isolated or incremental when the tight knit of patriarchy is torn loose. As part of revisionist myth making, old stories are retold from gynocentric perspectives by these two women writers. They demolish the cultural stereotypes popularized and patronized by the patriarchal set-up. Both excel in the art of revisionist myth making and thereby forge a gynocentric heritage. They create a new sacred space within the old discourse and recreate in words a world wherein they would willingly be responsible for their own survival.

Deshpande's short stories invoke Hindu philosophy and ethics. She uses stories of the *Mahabharata* in some of her short stories, as in, "Hear me Sanjaya?", "The Inner Rooms" and "The Last Enemy". She has used myths and folklore in a subtle and successful manner. She has derived material from mythology to reinterpret it. Through mythical characters she has articulated the silence of the marginals. Those who cannot speak she has provided a tongue to them, for example, Kunti in "Hear me Sanjaya?" In other words, Deshpande's short stories are based on Indian myths and show that the subaltern can speak. She has created a familiar world a new in which authentic experience of the interior landscape of Indian women is powerfully projected through the device of myths.

Deshpande and Hariharan, while deploying postmodern strategies in their short stories, primarily concern themselves with the theme of female subjectivity. In short, their short fiction can be regarded as 'consciousness-raising' short fiction.

The analysis of short stories by various women writers in Chapter IV shows that they are marked by variety of themes and their short stories relate themselves to contemporary social milieu. Attia Hosain's short stories deal with social and political issues. She comments on the evils of society and horrors of partition in her short stories from the point of view of a woman. Her short stories present women as marginals, alienated beings and offer a critique of exploitation of women in Indian society of the fifties. Through her short stories she has shown immense faith in the womanhood and she suggests simplicity and modesty for woman on the one hand and courage and confidence on the other. Raji Narasimhan's short stories are like emancipatory narratives of Shashi Deshpande. Her short stories present society of the late '70s and the '80s. She is breaking the silence of middle-class educated women who are highly educated according to their social standards. Her women protagonists

are generally women-in-transition and they belong to small towns and are usually away from power centres, for example, the protagonists of “The End of Probation”, “Their Woman Colleague” and “A Toast to Herself” and use them as mouthpiece to present her philosophy and vision. Her short stories deal with middle-class Indian women and burdens of living through a time of complex transition in a society in turmoil.

Nergis Dalal’s short stories are marked by a wide variety of themes such as love, sex, problems of the institution of marriage, the foreigner in India, women writers, environment, wild life, superstition and fake saints. Her short stories offer a critique of follies and foibles of society. In “The Nude”, “The Beautiful One”, “The Intruder” and “Ranjit’s Wife” women’s issues are prominent and that is why women characters are strong personalities in her short stories. Her short stories are informative, journalistic in nature, interesting as well as revealing her human side.

Kamala Das’s short stories show the feminist phase of Indian English short story. A striking feature of her short stories is that they offer life in the raw or in the crude form. They deal with the exploitation of women in the male-dominated society. Through her women characters and protagonists she shows that women want love but what they get is sex. They are further more physically, mentally, economically and emotionally tortured and exploited. She presents harsh realities of women’s life particularly the fallen women and women belonging to the lower middle-class as in “A Doll for the Child Prostitute”, “The Tattered Blanket” and “The Sea Lounge”. Her short stories show an element of protest against patriarchy and passionately prescribe change in existing social order. Like Kamala Das, Anjana Appachana’s short stories also deal with women’s issues but her treatment is different. She has employed post-modern techniques in her short stories to present her point of view. Her women are

not only silent sufferers but they have also emerged as new women who cannot be dominated by patriarchy as in “Incantation”. Some of the recurring themes in her short stories are trials and tribulations of women’s lives. Her short stories offer a critique of gender politics. Besides feminism, her short stories also deal with the themes of politics, imitable Indian bureaucracy, psychology, young children behaving (being forced to behave) like adults, selfish children and North vs South. Her short stories offer a realistic picture of women and society and in this way they are the verbal icons of Indian women and society. Prema Ramakrishnan’s short stories are known for the simplicity of style. The title of her collection, *The Homemaker and Other Stories* symbolises the theme of her short stories. In her every short story there is a home maker, a person, a place or a thing that turns a house into a home. In her short stories whether a woman is traditional or modern, her first preference is home. She portrays woman as a force that binds different members of the family and makes it a home. Her protagonists are career-oriented new women but they are dedicated to their household duties and this attitude turns a house into a home. Like Prema Ramakrishnan’s, Shalan Savur’s short stories also deal with the theme of relationship amongst family members. She shows that moment of despair and disappointment arises but it is overcome by the power of love, affection and hope. Her short stories give this message that it is the elements of love, affection and sacrifice that join different members of the family and not the wealth. Her short stories lay emphasis on parent-child relationship, for example, “A Taste of Sunshine” and “The Assassination”. Her protagonists are devoted to their families and show their concern for their responsibilities and duties more than for their job. As Githa Hariharan is known for employing postmodernist elements and experimentation with technique, in the same way Tara Deshpande is also known for the same. But Githa Hariharan’s

short stories are pre-occupied with the theme of death while Tara Deshpande's short stories deal with the values of life, emotions and joys. Her collection of short stories, *Fifty and Done* is divided into five sections. Every section deals with the specific theme, for example, the first section 'Secrets' deals with the secrets of life, 'Portrait of a Woman' deals with the picture of a modern woman, 'Everything for Sale' deals with the pathetic condition of an old man, 'Remembering' deals with the memories of the protagonists. Thus, her short stories deal with love and loss as in "Fifty and Done" which also depicts Tara Deshpande's attachment to her father and his sudden demise at the age of fifty. Despite the fact of their thematic-formal diversity, the short stories analysed in the Chapter IV do have a common denominator: feminist consciousness.

Short fiction by contemporary Indian English women writers is a vehicle of pervasive feminist consciousness. Women writers speak of consciousness-raising in the form of narration, treatment of themes and characters etc. Feminist consciousness is present in women writers right from Cornelia Sorabji down to the present time. The evolution of the genre shows a constant development of this consciousness from a mere sociological approach to the socialist approach of the '50s, the protest of the '70s, focus on self and peculiar experiences in the 80s, and finally emergence of post-modernist approach of the '90s. The genre has undergone changes, and on the basis of this it can be categorized into several phases. Its historical study shows its development in a particular time period but this division is tentative. It can be categorized as the short fiction of the early phase, the progressive phase, the regressive phase and the assertive phase.

Diaspora women writers have also contributed to this form, presenting the struggle of women in the alien land. The short fiction by women writers blends compassion and humanism with feminist consciousness and challenges the societal

precincts. It contains the crux of Indian condition, the local colour, the everyday experiences, articulating silence against marginalization, negotiation with power and challenges deep-rooted androcentricism. Through their short fiction they are fighting against customs and conventions pronounced or unpronounced and bold account of self and voice recovered by women successfully. Their short fiction is reflective of women's liberation movement.

Besides feminism, writers like Tara Deshpande and Shalan Savur have dealt with the theme of love, life and its values, while Githa Hariharan has treated the theme of death in her collection, *The Art of Dying*. She has presented the feelings and emotions of people who are approaching death. Her short stories are also known for post-modernist elements. Thus, contemporary Indian English women writers of short stories reveal their vision, philosophy of life, outlook for death and outlook and news for contemporary society through their short stories.

Since their short stories are marked by the theme of Feminism, in their short stories characters particularly the protagonists are women and if male characters are present, they are either weak or secondary, for example, Raja in Desai's "The Royalty". The focus is on women characters who are dominant characters such as the women characters in Desai's short stories. Though women protagonists are living in the patriarchal set-up, they are trying to assert their identity. They are in search of room that they can call their own, a voice so that they can express their feelings and desires, and their wish to exploit their talents, and to live as human beings. Generally female protagonists are at the centre and evaluate the relationship by making a contrast with the present and the past.

Women are portrayed in their various roles as mother, daughter, sister, wife and beloved and they are fulfilling their duties. In their short stories women characters

are set in the Indian background. So they are actually depicting the norms of traditional, conventional and contemporary society and the condition of woman in contemporary society. Their short stories also present the development of woman, woman-in-transition, modern emancipated woman, new woman and “newly born woman”. Women characters are shown as struggling with the patriarchal society for their rights and not only struggling with society but also setting a platform for emancipation and progress. Most of these women characters are highly educated by their social standards and so they are economically independent and capable of taking care of themselves and family members. This element sometimes becomes a disadvantage for them.

These women characters also show this bitter fact of society whether the woman is educated, emancipated or not but she is exploited at various levels because of the patriarchal bent of mind. Women characters / protagonists also show that it is not only male who is responsible for this pathetic condition of female but woman is also responsible for the pathetic condition of a woman. Sometimes a woman becomes a victim because of a woman. Through these women characters they (Indian English women writers of short fiction) have presented the real women of Indian society. The thematic evolution of their short fiction shows that glorified woman is now replaced by ‘real’ woman. At the hands of contemporary Indian English women writers, the ideal image of woman gives way to the real image of woman, woman with wishes, wants, and desires. These writers seize upon such issues as purity and virtue in relation to marriage, the celebration of female individualism contra the societal obligations of women. Women writers have shown keen appreciation of women’s responses to their dilemmas such as (i) traditional woman's suffering (ii) woman's

protest against exploitation (rebel), questioning traditional image (iii) assertion of 'self', accepting themselves not as an appendages to men.

Women writers generally peep into the mind of these women characters to delve into the psyche of their characters. In this way, they present their emotions, feelings, sensibility and sensitivity. Characters are depicted as their stream-of-consciousness rather than outer appearances or through their external action. The characters are trapped in a dual conflict: the conflict with the social circumstances and the conflict with their own selves. They don't break down even in harsh circumstances and emerge as over-reachers which make them different from ordinary women.

Thus, the characters in the short stories by contemporary Indian English women writers are placed in Indian situation. They are struggling with the conventional norms of the orthodox society and setting a path. The protagonists of these short stories are women; they are performing their traditional roles or duties assigned to them as mother, daughter, wife or sister and, at the same time, they are establishing their own identity according to the requirements of contemporary modern society. Through these characters, women writers have presented their peculiar sensibility before readers.

In contemporary Indian English women writers' short stories, one doesn't find conventional techniques of narration. They have adopted innovative techniques to narrate the stories. They have generally adopted the "stream-of-consciousness" technique or 'interior monologue' and through this method they have peeped inside the minds of the characters. It enables readers to have a glimpse of woman's thinking. It also gives readers a chance to feel and understands woman's consciousness.

Besides first and third person narration, they have also used oblique narration. In this way their short stories contain multiple voices. They provide readers a chance to analyse things, circumstances, society and self from multiple perspectives of characters.

Short stories by contemporary Indian English women writers contain techniques of drama and poetry. So the use of dialogues and poetic description is visible. As Poe says, “short story is a lyric in prose”. At the level of content and theme, it contains the soul of poetry and the feel of drama. This method is adopted by the women writers of short fiction in order to carry on the narration to make this much more lively and realistic and to avoid monotony. An outstanding feature of their style is that they have used innovative methods of narration instead of the conventional methods of narration.

The survey of pre-independence and post-independence writers depicts the emergence of a positive self-affirmation in female short story writers and also in their characters. The analysis of short stories by various women writers offers a composite picture of Indian society and it helps women to recognize each other through the shared experiences. They inspire each other to break their silence. In the beginning, they imagine a cultural space for themselves inspire others to share their experiences and common vision of going ahead without any support of family or society.

In the decade of the ‘60s when the country was passing through various political, social and economic problems and was in the phase of national reconstruction, women creative writers were taking initiative to expose image of Indian women or her passive femininity as a result of cultural conditioning. These writers have presented the women’s world and voice their concern for education,

economic independence and equality, revisioning traditions, rewriting history and re-existing oppression and they paved the way for others.

The decade of the '70s is known as the Psychological Phase of Indian English fiction. Here focus is shifted from external realities to internal realities. This phase can also be seen in Indian English short stories. The short stories of Anita Desai deal with the problems of alienation, loneliness and materialism arising out of scientific advancement and movements like feminism.

The decades of the '80s and the '90s saw the rise of globalization and its influence on society. Indian English Short story by women writers of this period is marked by boldness, frank assertion of sexuality and the depiction of women's ability to recognize the female 'self'. However, the independence has not affected the existing social and familial structures in most of the writers but some writers have deviated from the norm and have accepted the norm of their Western counterparts. The writers of the last decade of the 20th century, instead of glorifying the inner torment, have broken the silence. Thus, the breaking of silence is a result of transformation. These women writers, providing the changing patterns of female psyche, instead of being perverted and distorted personality, present the real awareness of the female's surroundings. The socio-cultural conditioning of woman, the victimised status of woman and the taboos of society are now replaced by boldness and authentic representation of women in short stories. The socio-cultural changes that have occurred in society have been registered by these women writers in a number of short stories.

Thus, the short stories by women writers offer a critique of the stifling life of women, double moral standards of the patriarchal society, and many dimensional problems of women's existence, and give directions to women to strive for their

identity. Women writers with their creative and imaginative power present the world of women and this world not only contains problems of women, but also shows that women's life is not devoid of happiness and their short stories show elements of fulfilment in the lives of women. Women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Tara Deshpande, Nergis Dalal, Prema Ramakrishnan, Kamala Das, Raji Narasimhan and many others consolidated their positions in their respective fields and writers presented the kaleidoscopic view of Indian woman's life and her stresses, strains, joys and sorrows through the medium of short story.

After a critical assessment of the various aspects of short fiction by contemporary Indian English women writers, it is possible to say that short fiction by them has emerged as a separate genre and that it has merged with the main stream tradition of Indian English Literature. Short fiction by women as a genre presents multiple voices anchored in the experiences of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Indian society in particular and global culture in general. It offers a verbal icon of woman in traditional, modern and contemporary society. Indirectly, it shows the overlapping of conventional and skeptical world orders. Short fiction by contemporary Indian English women writers shows the various facets of life and aspects of society. That is why short stories are violent, tragic as well as funny because they present multiple themes with freshness and new approach. Every woman writer has contributed to the tradition of women writing in particular and Indian English Literature in general but they have marvellous diversity. They have exploited various themes through innovative techniques and this is their major contribution.

As is clear from the preceding discussion, the novel is an 'epic awareness' while the short story is a 'lyric awareness'. So women writers have voiced their silence and revealed their peculiar experiences in their short stories. At this stage it

can largely be said that they have developed it as a genre but this is not the junction point. This genre by contemporary Indian English women writers is developing and progressing and there are so many new emerging voices. This genre has a bright future in women's hands. They have made it a complex purveyor of multi-layered experiences of female's self in relation to the changing socio-cultural norms. They have used it as a vehicle of feminist consciousness. Contemporary Indian English women writers have used the genre as a barometer to capture the changing facets of contemporary socio-cultural norms and the transformation of the women from mere passive mourners of their own destiny to its architects, this kind of reflection is not found in the short stories by male writers whose focus is merely sociological or simply concerns with East-West encounter or superficial aspects of contemporary Indian life. The plethora of women writers today is ample evidence of the female creative bloom in the realm of short fiction with the added advantage of subtle interaction between society and female's self and realisation of the potentialities of Indian women. More and more women writers have been attracted to the genre and the present study establishes this point beyond any doubt.

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