



# English Prose, Poetry *and Perspectives*

◆ *English Course Book for Undergraduate Learners* ◆



**R.B.V.R.R. Women's College,  
Narayanguda, Hyderabad**

*Autonomous and Affiliated to Osmania University*



*Edited by*

**Dr. M. Suchitra Reddy**

*Head and Assistant Professor,  
Department of English and Foreign Languages*



**Jupiter Publications Consortium**



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Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

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# Foreword

Before starting to write this Foreword, I would like to congratulate Dr. M. Suchitra, Assistant Professor RBVRR Women's College for having put this book together. It is a commendable effort and our appreciation of the efforts put in should be placed on record. Not just this, this should become an enviable example for teachers in other autonomous colleges to follow. And all the teachers of this college will forever retain that PIONEER place for the good work, nay begun.

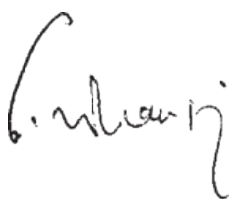
Now let me briefly share with you why this is a unique experiment and how this helps both learners and teachers. During the recent past we have been talking about teacher as a professional. All teachers should strive hard to develop themselves as professionals. Some of the options open for this are to engage ourselves in classroom research or materials production. Teachers in this college have chosen the second option without ignoring the first. The result is the production of three useful books. Let us take a close look at their features.

The main focus of this books is to help learners learn English using literature as the base. This is not a bad idea, for literature is often defined and illustrated as the best use of language. When we say this, we also need to look at the types of texts chosen. Here the authors have done well in choosing the contemporary texts which belong to the 20th century. This ensures that the language we expose our learners to is not archaic and the usage may not be faulted.

The second major feature that attracts our attention is the simplicity of language and familiarity of themes. This helps in grading the texts in such a way that self-study becomes possible. This is further reinforced when we look at the elaborate glossaries appended to each text. Besides glossary, every lesson also has a number of exercises to develop comprehension, grammar, vocabulary and speaking skills. For developing writing skills, separate exercises are included in the appendices.

The fact that each of the books promotes self-learning does not discount the need for a teacher. The teacher's role in the modern sense is perceived as that of a facilitator, who can help the learners with clarification where needed and monitor the discussions that happen in the class. Subscribing to such strategies is found in few places, and a group of teachers committing themselves to adopting such measures is worth appreciating.

Each lesson has a good introduction to the author, followed by a brief summary of the lesson. This point needs to be accepted as a new feature. This provides the learner with a bird's eye view of the text to be read. Given this summary, the learner is forced to anticipate events and happenings in the story, and thus keep the interest in reading the whole story or essay alive. This also helps the learner to see whether her understanding of the text is appropriate in comparison with the summary provided by the editors. I wish the teachers and learners a happy learning time. The books promote good reading habits, and I wish this habit is sustained throughout their lives.



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# Part I

# Introduction

The English course is designed to teach English at undergraduate level.

The main objective in designing the course is to provide the young learner an introduction to new ideas and issues that bear relevance to our everyday life simultaneously initiating the students to various developments in styles, genres and language development activities. Units have been chosen with the aim of providing the starting point for thought-provoking class discussions, debates and brainstorming sessions. Such discussions provide a chance for the student to develop communication skills.

The selections are based on themes that are related to women's situational problems that arise due to the changing nature of the institution of marriage, and challenges faced by women achievers, with anticipation that the selections will encourage students to formulate their opinions about the necessity of adapting themselves in new changing times. Writers from diverse backgrounds, separated by time, space and ideas have been represented in Prose, Short stories and Poetry selections. To accommodate the shift in literary studies, the focus is on types of writing as well as the genres.

The Poetry selections will motivate students to relate the same concerns to modern times. 'Ulysses' by Tennyson embodies man's deepest urge for going forward and braving the struggle of life. Students get an opportunity to evolve values that help them to adapt to the emerging needs of the present world. Besides this the other poem 'Ozymandias' has a theme that can be addressed in tune with the spirit of the modern times.

The language component has been provided at the end of each section. This has been designed with the assumption that basic grammar has been taught as part of course work. The focus is more on written comprehension. Recent trends in Letter writing both formal and informal have been introduced to students. In view of the requirements in future professional careers, the writing tasks at the end of each unit aim to develop functional

writing.

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# Chapter 1

## My Beloved Charioteer

*Shashi Deshpande*

Describe the different roles a woman is expected to play in her life time.

Who is the Charioteer in the Epic Mahabharata?

Can you list the qualities attributed to women as per Indian mythology?

Can women in modern times relate to various people in real-life situations as per these qualities?

Explain Women's Empowerment.

What are the factors that make a woman strong?



About the Author Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka. She published her first collection of short stories in 1978, and her first novel, “The Dark Holds No Terror”, in 1980. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel “That Long Silence” in 1990 and the Padma Shri award in 2009. Her novel Shadow Play was

shortlisted for The Hindu Literary Prize in 2014. Deshpande has written four children's books, several short stories, thirteen novels, and an essay collection entitled *Writing from the Margin and*

*Other Essays*. In 1996, her famous novel "A Matter of Time" was published where she unfolds the different experiences of women in India. Her novels are mainly based on women's lives and their problems, particularly in the Indian context. She raised her voice against the suffering of women and also created mass awareness of this matter through her writings. Her books are being translated into several Indian languages. She currently lives in Bangalore.

Women from the myths are a very powerful influence on us even today. To be as pure as Sita, as loyal as Draupadi, as beautiful as Lakshmi, as bountiful a provider as Annapoorna, as dogged in devotion as Savitri, and as strong as Durga - these are all the ultimate role models, they are the image of perfection

Shashi Deshpande says, "A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated."

## About the Short Story

In this story 'My Beloved Charioteer' Shashi Deshpande portrays the life of women of three different generations struggling to connect with each other. The story focuses on the problem that exists between mother and daughter Aiji and Arti and Priti. It also examines the relationship between mother and daughter at two different levels. Apart from this, the author portrays the special bonding of the Grandmother with her granddaughter.

Shashi Deshpande has thus highlighted the relationships that subsist amongst the members of the family.

In the story, an old widow has adjusted to her lonely life. Her daughter Arti, who has lost her husband, comes to stay with her along with her daughter. Arti is disoriented on account of her sudden loss and lost in her grief to such an extent that she neglects her daughter Priti. However, Arti's mother finds comfort in her granddaughter Priti. She is a ray of hope in her vague life. as a mother, Aiji can't see her grief-stricken Arti suffering alone. She tries hard to bring her back to normal life but all in vain. She hopes that Arti will talk and laugh again one day. The mother wants Arti to share with her sufferings and sorrows. It hurts her that Arti can find her comfort in the picture of her

dead father and not from her living mother and daughter. Mother thinks that the fault lies in her daughter if she hates the people and other couples who are happy. The incident of breaking the glass on her late father's photograph comes like an opportunity for her mother. Arti always loved her father more than her mother. But the mother decides to reveal to Arti her father's hidden traits of character. The mother tells Arti that she was always dominated by her husband. She had to compromise a lot to make her husband contented and her husband has never taken care of her. In the end, the mother is happy because she makes her daughter understand her. She does not bother whether there will be a change in Arti's feelings towards her. She is satisfied because she paved the way for their communication. At last, the mother is successful in bringing back her daughter to accept the reality. Mother feels that the granddaughter is with her, giving her the strength for the battle against her daughter Arti. Thus Priti becomes her beloved charioteer.

The story has "My Beloved Charioteer" as the title, the grandmother calls her grandchild my beloved charioteer – seeing in her the presence of divinity. Lord Krishna became the Charioteer of Arjuna guiding him in the battle against injustice so does the granddaughter giving her strength to continue with her struggle. Gaining strength from that thought she reveals her hardships as a wife to her daughter thus risking her daughter's love that she has towards her. She had decided to save her grief-stricken daughter Aarti from succumbing to obsessive grief at her husband's death and the sad loss of her father. She tells her daughter about her adored father's shortcomings as her husband and also about her miserable marriage. The charioteer Krishna in the form of her granddaughter empowers her with the courage to face the consequences.

### **My Beloved Charioteer (Text)**

I smile as I hear them at last, the sounds I am waiting for. A rush of footsteps, the slam of the bathroom door... I wince as the sound whams through the silent house... and, a minute later, another bang. And then, bare feet running towards me.

'You shouldn't bang the doors that way', I said reproachfully. 'You might wake Mummy.'

She sits opposite me, cross-legged on the low wooden stool, hair tousled, cheeks flushed.

'Oh, she won't wake up for hours yet.' She says cheerfully. 'Have you had your tea, ajji?'

'Our daily

routine. I can never confess to her that I have had a cup an hour earlier. This is her joy, that I wait for her.

‘No, I’ve been waiting for you. Have you brushed your teeth?’

She makes a face. ‘I’ll do it later,’ she says, trying to be brusque and casual. ‘You’ll do no such thing. Go and brush them at once.’

‘Only today, ajji. From tomorrow, I promise, I’ll brush them first,’ she cajoles.

‘Nothing doing.’ I try hard to be firm. But I can’t fool her. She knows I am on her side. She lowers her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. ‘Mummy won’t know. She’s sleeping.’

Now, of course, she leaves me no choice. I have to ask, ‘Did you really brush? Properly? Show me.’

**‘Look.’**

I have to grin back at the grinning, impish face. ‘Now tea forme.’ ‘No,’ I say, ‘tea forme. Milk for you.’

Ultimately, as always, we compromise and her tea is a pale brown. I switch off the Primus and, without the hissing sound, our voices sound loud and clear. We look at each other guiltily, thinking of the sleeper, and try to speak in lowered tones. Happiness can mean so many things to so many people. Forme, it is this. The beginning of a new day with this child. We talk of so many things. But too soon it is time for her to go to school. Bathed and fresh, she sets off.

When she is gone, silence settles on the house. A silence that will not lift till she returns. I had got used to this silence in the last seven years. It had never seemed terrible to me. It was a friendly silence, filled with the ghosts of so many voices in my life. They came back to keep me company when I was alone. . . . my younger brother, my aunt who loved me when I was a child, my two infant sons who never grew up, and even the child Aarti, who seems to have no connection with this thin, bitter woman who shares the silence with me. But since she came, the friendly ghosts have gone.

It is late before she wakes. I have had my bath, finished my puja, and am halfway through cooking lunch, when I hear her stirring. I take down the dal from the fire and put on the tea. By the time tea is ready, she comes into the kitchen. Wordlessly she takes a cup from me. She drinks it in hungry gulps as if she has been thirsting for hours, then thrusts the cup back at me. I pour out some more. I, too, say nothing. Earlier, I used to ask, ‘Slept well?’ And one day, she had put down the cup with a trembling hand and said, ‘Slept well?’ ‘No, I never do that. I haven’t slept well since Madhav died. I’ll never sleep well

again all my life. I have to take something every night so that I can close my eyes for a few hours. Now, never ask me again if I slept well.' Nine months I carried this daughter of mine in my body. I had felt within me every beat of her heart, every movement of her limbs. But... and this my doctor had told me then... my pains and shocks could never penetrate to her, she was so well protected. Even now, she is protected from my pains. I suffer with her, but like all my other emotions, it is a futile suffering. For I cannot help her. I can only fumble and blunder and make things worse.

'Why didn't you let me know earlier?' she had asked me angrily when she had come home after her father's death. 'Why didn't you send forme earlier?'

'Don't tell Aarti yet,' he had said, 'I don't want to frighten her. Not now specially.'

Habits of obedience die harder than any other. I had not dared to inform Aarti. And the next day he had another attack and died instantly. Three months later Priti had been born. She never saw her grandfather.

'Who is that, ajji?' she had asked me once, seeing his photo. 'Your grandfather, Priti.'

'My grandfather,' she had pondered. 'And what was he of yours?' What was he of mine?

The innocent question had released a flood of feelings within me. 'My husband,' I had said bluntly at last.

As I settle down to cooking lunch, I wonder whether Aarti will today like what I am cooking. Whether she will enjoy her food and eat well. I know she will not, but the hope is always in me. Just as I hope that one day she will talk and laugh again. But that day, one day, when she had laughed, she had frightened me. She had burst into loud laughter, shattering the tenuous peace of the house. 'What is it?' I had asked her, wondering whether to smile, to laugh, to respond in some way to her.

'Isn't it gloomy here? The right atmosphere for a pair of desolate widows. That's what we are, aren't we?'

Widows... I remember my mother who was one. She had had a shaven head, worn only coarse red saris, and been shorn of all ornaments all her life after my father's death. And I think of Aarti, who for days neglects herself. And then, one day dresses up, makes up her face and wears flowers in her hair. And yet Aarti it is whose face has the arid look of a desert.

Life has been cruel to her. It was her husband whom she had loved; and he died, while I live. It was her husband whom she had loved even more than the child; and it was he who died, while Priti is left to her. Children are more sensitive than we think. They understand so many things we think they don't. Otherwise, why would she have said one day to me, 'Ajji, can I sleep in your room at night?'

I am old and grey and have lost all that I have loved in life but these two persons... but at her words, my heart had leapt in happiness. Yet, I had restrained my joy and asked her, 'Why, Priti?'

'I'd like to. You can tell me stories at night. And there are so many things. I suddenly remember at night and want to tell you. And...'

'But Mummy is with you.'

The child's face had fallen. But, ajji, if I try to talk to her, she says, "Go to sleep, Priti, and don't bother me."

And she never sleeps at all, but just reads and smokes. And I don't like that smell.'

The child has a high and clear voice and I had hushed her in a sudden fear that she might be overheard. Yes, she smokes incessantly now. Earlier, she had tried to hide it from me. But not for long. When I was a child, in my father's house, it had been considered wrong even for a man to smoke. But today, I would of my own accord let my daughter smoke if I thought it brought

Her happiness. But it doesn't. She puffs out smoke as if she is emitting bitterness. There is an infinity of bitterness in her now. And I cannot help her. I can only try to look after her body. Such a small thing, but even in that I fail. She is thin and brittle. Most of the time she never dresses up. Just goes round in an old gown, her hair tied up with a rubber band. Priti, looking at an old photograph one day, had wistfully said, 'My Mummy was so pretty, wasn't she, ajji?' 'Why don't you go out?' I had asked her once.

**'Where?'**

I had mumbled something she had not heard. 'She had gone on instead.'

'There is nowhere I want to go. Everywhere, I see couples. I can't bear to see them. I could murder them when I see them talking and laughing.'

This talk amazes me. I cannot understand her. My niece had once told me of something

she had read in an American magazine. About children of eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen who stab and throttle and rape and gouge out eyes . . . often for no reason at all. And I had wondered . . . what kind of parents can they be who gave birth to such monsters? Now, I know better. The accident of birth can be cruelly deceiving. We fool ourselves that our children are our own, that we know them. But often, they are alien to us as baby cuckoos born in a crow's nest. And yet we cannot escape the burden of parentage. If my daughter is so empty that she can hate people who are happy, the fault is, to some extent, mine.

These bitter thoughts do not often occupy me. I have my work. The quiet routine of my day is like balm to my soul. Daily chores are not monotonous but soothing. Now that the child is with me, the day is full of meaning. I wait, as eager as a child myself, for her to return from school. When she has a holiday, I don't know who is happier, she or I. If there is an unexpected holiday, we are equally full of glee. But when she, my daughter and her mother, comes to us, we feel guilty and hide our happiness.

'Do you remember your Papa?' Aarti had asked her one day with a sudden harshness. 'Papa?' There had been a moment's hesitation. 'Of course, I remember.'

'I can't imagine you do. You never speak of him.'

The child had stared at her with a frightened face, feeling guilty for she knew not what; and when Aarti had left us, she had burst into sobs, clinging to me. And I had been full of pity, not for me, but for Aarti, who could turn happiness into a wrong. But I can say nothing to her. 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. And I have kept my distance. It was only in my imagination that I shared her happiness and confidences as a young girl. And now I assuage her grief in the same way. 'Look,' I tell myself I will say to her, pouring some water into my cupped palms. 'Look,' I will say as the water seeps through, leaving nothing. 'You cannot hold on. You will have to let it go.'

But I know I'm fooling myself. I have no courage to speak. I am only a foolish, middle-aged woman who has never known how to win anyone's love. Priti's affection . . . that is a gift of Heaven, that ray of sunshine God sends even to the darkest corners. For Aarti, it was always her father. Even now, she spends the whole afternoon prowling in what was his room. It is seven

years since he died, but the room is unchanged. I have kept everything as it was. I dust

and sweep it meticulously myself. But strangely, in spite of this, it has a neglected look like Priti has sometimes. Priti has sometimes. Priti is well-fed and well-dressed, she has her tonics and vitamins and all other things they give children these days. Still, a neglected child peeps out of her eyes at times, filling me with pity and guilt.

Now I can hear Aarti moving round in his room. 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. Suddenly it is unbearable and I go and open the door of his room. She is sitting on his chair, her feet on his table, smoking and staring at nothing. As she hears me, she turns round startled . . . I have never disturbed her till now . . . and with a movement of her feet she knocks down his photograph which stands on the table. Now it lies on the floor, face down. She rushes to pick up. The glass has cracked. Long splinters of glass lie on the floor and the photograph looks somehow naked. She looks up at me, something showing through the deliberate blankness. 'I'm sorry, mother. I'm sorry,' I stared down at the photograph and say nothing. 'I'm sorry,' she repeats. 'Don't look like that.' She passes her hand over the photograph. 'I'll get it fixed tomorrow. I promise I'll do it.'

'No, don't!' My words are harsh and abrupt and she looks at me in surprise. 'I don't care if it's broken. I don't want to see it here. I never want to see it again.'

She looks up at me, stunned, frightened. What's wrong with you? What's happened to you? 'Nothing. I'm all right. But I don't want it. Let it go.'

'What are you saying? What is it?'

'Let it go, let it go,' I repeat. We are speaking in sibilant, strangled whispers. Can he hear us? Can he hear me?

'I don't understand you. Let what go? He is my father.' She is still crouching there on the floor, holding the photograph in her two hands.

'Yes, your father. But what was he to me? The day he died, I let him go. Like that.' Now I make a gesture I had imagined . . . cupping my palms together and then separating them. She stares at my eyes with fascinated eyes.' And there was nothing left. Nothing.'

'But I . . . I am his daughter. And yours. Am I nothing? Am I?' She is panting, her eyes hot and angry.

'What are you then?' I ask her. 'You are just smoke and a bit of ash . . . like these cigarettes you smoke. Like my married life.' Pain lays its talons on her face. Her eyes are

anguished. But I force myself to go on. What have I to lose? Nothing. Only the child's love. And this cannot destroy that. On the contrary, I have a feeling that she is with me now, giving me the strength for the battle, urging me onto it. My beloved charioteer. 'He was your father . . . but what was he of mine? I lived with him for twenty-five years. I know he didn't like unstringed beans and stones in his rice. I know he liked his tea boiling hot and his bath water lukewarm.

I know he didn't like tears. And so, when your baby brothers died, I wept alone and in secret. I combed my hair before he woke up because he didn't like to see women with loosened hair. And I went into the backyard even then, because he hated to find stray hairs anywhere. And

once a year he bought two saris; always colours that I hated. But he never asked me and I never told him. And at night. . . ?

She is still crouching there, her hair falling about her face.

She whimpers like a puppy. 'Don't,' she says. 'Don't tell me. Don't.' With each negative shebangs the photograph she still holds in her hands and the glass splinters again and again. Now, he is totally exposed to both of us. But there is no pity in me. It is not the dead who need your compassion . . . it is the living. Not the dead who crave for loyalty, but the living.

'I don't want to hear,' she says.

How innocent she is in spite of her age, her education, her books, her marriage and child that knowledge can still hurt. It reminds me of the day she had grown up and I had tried to explain. And she had cried out in the same way, 'Don't tell me. Don't!' This is another kind of growing up, when you see your parents as people.

'At night,' I go on relentlessly, 'I scarcely dared to breathe, I was so terrified of disturbing him. And once, when I asked whether I could sleep in another room . . . I don't know how I had the courage . . . he said nothing. But the next day, his mother, your grandmother, told me bluntly about a wife's duties. I must always be available. So, 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 went.' I know these things should not be said to her, his daughter and mine. But I am like the river in the monsoon. I have no control over myself.

‘And one day when you were here . . . you and Madhav . . . I heard you both talking and laughing in your room. And I stood outside and wondered . . . what could you be talking about? I felt like I did when I was a child unable to read, looking at a book. Until then, I had hoped that one day he would say he was pleased with me. That day I knew it would never happen. I would always be outside the room. I would never know what goes on inside. And that day I envied you. And when he died, I felt like Priti does when school is over and the bell rings. You understand, Aarti? You understand?’

Why am I also crying? We look at each other. She looks at me as if she has never seen me before. Then, with a sudden movement, she springs up and glares at me. Whose is the victory? Whose? I have made her look at me. But what, my heart shrivels at the thought, if she does not like what she sees? And as she moves backwards and starts running away from the room, from me, I realize what I have done. And then I hear the cry, ‘Ajji, I’m home. Where are you?’

‘Here,’ I call back loudly. ‘I’m here.’

## Glossary

Wince: flinch, to shrink as in pain or a blow

Whams: loud sound

Reproachfully: to chide, reprove

Tousled: disordered, disheveled

Brusque: rough

Cajole: coax, to persuade by flattery or promise

Conspiratorial: plot, agree together secretly

Grin: smile

Impish: mischievous

Compromise: agree

Futile: useless

Fumble: hesitate

“ The limits of my language  
mean the limits of my world. ”

— Ludwig Wittgenstein

*English Prose, Poetry and Perspectives* is a thoughtfully curated course book for undergraduate learners, designed to enhance language proficiency, critical thinking, and communication skills through a rich blend of prose, poetry, and insights from distinguished writers. The selections explore timeless themes and contemporary issues, encouraging reflection, empathy, and intellectual growth.

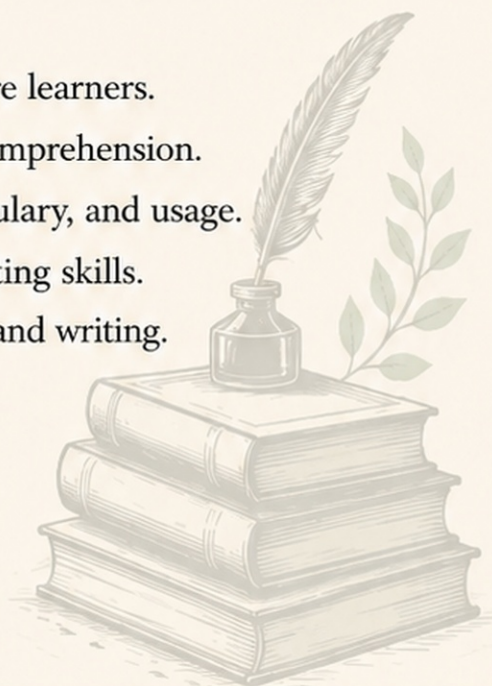
### Key Features

- A balanced mix of prose, poetry, and perspectives from classic and modern authors.
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