Chapter-1

INTRODUCTION
A. The Indian Novel (1970-2000) - The Feminine Stance

It is said that literature of any country is the storehouse of information on the cultural and sociological aspects of its people. Literature and society are reciprocal because both serve as cause and effect to each other. Any literary creation does not come into existence by itself but its emergence is determined by social situations and individual experiences. Literature reflects not only the social reality but also shapes the complex ways in which men and women organize themselves, their interpersonal relationships and their perception of the socio-cultural reality. The changes in the social, cultural and moral norms of the society give birth to the freelance writers who focus on contemporary problems. They not only explore the vital areas of individual consciousness but also project the fascinating images of cultural changes.

The beginning of the Indian novel in English can be traced down from dramatization or penning down thoughts in the poetical format. Initially, Bengali and Hindi novelistic tradition had started in Indian writing. Then the genre of English novels and short stories had become popular after the flourishing of English language during British Rule.

“Indian writing in English has been called "a Janus-faced literature" born by the cross fertilization of two faithful cultures- Indian and European. The contact with the western mind stirred the soul of India ushering in the Renaissance and resulted in an unprecedented thinking
and awakening, thus English education transformed the general outlook of people.”

It is the area of fiction to which Indian writers in English have made the most significant contribution and according to H.M. Williams, it is undoubtedly, "the most popular vehicle for the transmission of Indian ideas to the wider English speaking world."  

Indian English fiction proved to be the major source for a systematic study of cultural contact and cultural change. With Indian world view at the focus, it has definitely enhanced our knowledge of the acculturation process. Even on purely artistic considerations Indian English fiction merits serious in-depth studies from as many angles as possible. Indian feminism is necessarily influenced by its socio-cultural backgrounds prevalent here since ages so Indian feminists are bound together by a common cultural backdrop that is markedly different from that of the western types. We are here concerned mainly with the feminist awareness or consciousness that is revealed in the works of the Indian writers.

The role of a writer is to feel the pulse of the society, know its sickness and suggest such cures that are in consonance with its culture. The attitude of an author towards men and women portrayed by him in his works and the attitude of the characters, male and female, to one another highlight the gender relationships as well as the author's attitude towards these relationships. In this way he explores and examines the relationship of men with fellow men and women.
along with the social forces at work around him, the most significant being the inter-personal relationships. Changes in the socio-economic conditions and the western influence have changed our patriarchal attitudes towards gender and this contemporary change is reflected in literature too.

Indian feminist writing was influenced by the efforts of social reformers to give equal right and freedom to women and the stray ideas of the Western Feminist Movement. As a result, literature in India underwent a significant change. The beginning of Indian Literature in English was traced from the end of eighteenth century and the starting of nineteenth century. The novels of this era started reflecting the sparks of emancipation of women and struggle of realizing them a separate identity. Women who were previously imprisoned in the walls of family shackled by tradition now looked upon themselves from a different angle. Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee played an important role in elaborating on the problems of women of their age through their novels. In his novel ‘Binodini’, Tagore portrayed woman as a passive and reluctant ideal character. He focused on the harrowing and stifling impact of traditional rules and regulations on the psyche of his character ‘Binodini’, who became a subordinate self to the stereotyped socio-cultural values as well as to her male counterpart. Thus, Tagore raised his voice against the suppression of women who have been deprived of their rights as human beings. His writings mainly focused on the plight of widows and the struggle of modern educated women for
equality and freedom. The women in his novels were traditional and comparable to Sita and Savitri, full of motherly affection and faithful wives. His ‘Damini’ became a symbol of feminine values by disowning and defying the orthodox and dogged conventions of a traditional Indian society through her remarriage as a widow.

The image of woman in Bankim Chandra Chattarjee's novel “Rajmohan's Wife” (1864), was that of a typical, long suffering Hindu wife. She was the woman with no identity of her own, representative of her class. Bankim Chandra gave voice to such women who moved out of their cocooned and cloistered selves to the world outside and preferred a life of freedom than a life of bondage.

The emergence of 'The Big Three' - Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan on the literary firmament brought gradual progression from the imitative stage to realistic and from psychological to experimental. After the year 1920, the Indian English novel became more realistic and less idealized. The novelists made deliberate efforts to depict the distress of the downtrodden classes portraying India in its realistic form. The novels written between two world wars were primarily concerned with contemporary social milieu and were greatly influenced by Gandhian ethos. It is the phase when we come across excellent novels for the first time such as Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable (1935), R.K. Narayan's Swami and friends (1935) and Raja Rao's Kanthapura (1938).
Mulk Raj Anand in his novels *Coolie* (1933), *Untouchable* (1935) and *The Woman and the Cow* (1960) revealed his concern for the downtrodden and the under-privileged in India. He has not given any significant portrayal of Indian women in his fictional works. But wherever he has tried to characterise women, it has been in the traditional mould. In the novels of R.K. Narayan, women protagonists were usually from middle class for whom the expression of love outside marital life is a big step. He focused on the women’s dilemma as his women characters dwindled between tradition and modernity. As we see Rosie in his novel ‘*The Guide*’, is a modern woman who defies tradition to get all for what her heart aspire for. She wants to become a dancer for which she leaves her husband and takes help from Raju, the guide. She develops illicit relationship with Raju as she finds the true appreciation of her art of dancing from him. But later she repents at her decision of breaking her marital bond and her conduct towards her husband by admitting, “*After all, after all, he is my husband…… Any other husband would have throttled me then and there.*”

Raja Rao spiritualized and glorified the concept of a mother in his work ‘*The Serpent and the Rope*’; the girls he described bend their will to that of elders. Her women characters both Eastern and Western are troubled as they could not identify themselves with the traditional values without questioning them. They found them misfit when tried to abide by the ideals of Hindu cultural milieu. Thus, he brought out mainly the theme of East-West confrontation in his novels.
The phase (1920-47) before independence witnessed different themes like freedom struggle, Gandhian ideology and its impact on society, need of social reforms, eradication of social evils, India’s modern destiny, the Partition, the emergence of new urban India, the problems of rural India and so on. The writers were full of rich material of socio-cultural relevance.

“It seemed that women had been granted a temporary reprieve from the social restrictions and sanctions normally impose on them and had engaged in the pursuit of a loftier objective, namely the freedom of the nation.”

This phase was a transitory one in which the women characters were the part of the narrative and not the central figures.

In the independent India the topics of literary creation became grave and more serious as the joy of freedom was neutralized by the tragedy of partition. In spite of the freedom there was continuing corruption, inefficiency and poverty. The novelists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh and Manohar Malgontkar dealt with these serious problems and shifted their ideas to social realism. But the upliftment of women and their problems was continued to be the sub-theme in their novels. The silent, suffering nature of woman as a wife is portrayed by Bhabani Bhattacharya in ‘Music for Mohini’. In his novels the traditional qualities of women like gentleness and adaptability were stressed. Khushwant Singh in his novels ‘Train to Pakistan’, ‘I shall not hear the Nightingale’, ‘Delhi and the company of
women’, highlighted the abduction and molestation of the Hindu and Sikh women by the Muslims and vice versa. Manohar Malgontkar focused on the problems faced by women during and after partition of India. In ‘A Bend in the Ganges’, he described women who were rescued from prostitution, restored and accepted by the benevolent men who offered themselves to marry them.

After 1950’s, the interest of Indian novelists moved from the public to the private sphere. The Indian women novelists started making significant contribution in the field of literature. They gave a new dimension to the Indian Literature that developed with East-West encounter. There were many women novelists who enriched Indian fiction in English with their personal experiences such as Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukarjee and so on. The novels of these women writers gave more realistic portrayals of women with special focus on the woman’s point of view. Their novels revolved around average men and women, their economic problems in an urban setting, familial relationships and true portrait of social life. Women in their novels were no longer treated as objects for they became the subjects of these novels. According to K. Meerabai, in 'Tradition and Modernity':

'The Portrayal of Women by Women Writers':

"If traditional women who still retain their individuality make their appearance in the novels of Kamala Marandaya, women who face challenges in their quest for self-fulfillment are seen in the novels of
Nayanatara Sahgal, like wise women who opt for modernity for ‘convenience and not out of conviction are presented by Ruth Prawar Jhabvala. Women who use modernity as a license for licentiousness too can be seen in these novels ...

Women’s issues have been picked by women writers with a lot more enthusiasm than expected in a bid to support the cause of women’s liberation. Through these women writers’ eyes we can see a totally new world. Traditional ways and values and modern life-styles find a prominent place in the portrayal of women characters by these women novelists.

“Women who conform to the existing moral ethics and code and social norms, especially with regard to their relationship with men and reaction to familial frictions, are certainly traditionalists. Those who defy tradition and opt for modernity are non-conformists. Conformity to a pattern does not mean dumb acceptance of all that is thrust on them. It takes for granted a certain degree of willingness and whole-hearted acceptance. Conformists hold on to the set of traditional values; sometimes even at the cost of individual happiness. A tradition abiding woman even sacrifices her happiness for the well-being of the family, but at the same time retains her individuality.”

Kamala Markandaya’s women characters reveal strength of character that enables them to face hurdles in life. They suffer heroically, because they are strong willed. Some of them sublimate their desires in religious faith. She describes the pulls that an Indian
woman has to face between tradition and modernity. Her women characters are both conformists and traditionalists who are characterized by a fine feminine sensibility. She believes that the truth of human relations can be best expressed in the terms of social institutions such as marriage and family. Rukmini in ‘Nectar in a Sieve’ (1955) is passionately attached to her husband and fondly loves her children. Sarojini in ‘A Silence of Desire’ (1961) is a dutiful wife and a responsible mother. She faces her husband’s accusation of infidelity with complete calmness and retains her individuality even in her acceptance of the tradition. Thus, the novels of Kamala Markandaya express her feminist moral concern with women having moral superiority for upholding sanctity of the family.

Ruth Prawar Jhabvala expounds the problems of the white women in India. She describes women who profess to be modern only because it is fashionable to be modern. They are seen to tread a new path for a while, returning to their traditional ways afterwards. They have a fascination for modernity. In ‘Esmond in India’, Shakuntala is crazy about the new English fashion and feels attraction towards Esmond who is already married to another woman Gulab. Shakuntala wants to marry Esmond, the foreigner as a divorcée. According to her perception, to be a divorcée is glamorous and a sign of advancement. Again, Gulab’s character is also very inconsistent. She marries Esmond against her family’s wish. Later her initial attraction wears off when her husband begins to ill-treat her. Ruth Prawar Jhabvala delineates the hypocrisy of nonconformists in a sarcastic but sympathetic
manner; she does not deal with the feminist consciousness in women seriously.

Nayanatara Sahgal’s women characters include divorcees, and suffering wives who herald a new morality. She has a mind of her own and her novels point an accusing finger at smug, chauvinistic Indian society that refuses to recognize the identity of woman as individual. Sahgal’s women are mostly educated, aspiring individuals caged within the confines of a conservative society. The urge to escape from frustrating marriages is therefore a constant craving in Nayantara Sahgal’s women characters.

"What Nayanatara pleads for is not the kind of 'Women's Lib' that Western feminists advocate, but the rightful place for a woman in a man-woman relationship. She does not reject the institution of marriage, but dictates the new terms by which it should be constituted. The image of the New Indian woman that emerges out of her novels is a voice to be reckoned with. She reflects the slow but successful feminist revolution working its way through a conservative male centred and husband oriented society." 7

Anita Desai’s fiction seeks to unravel the complex responses of middle-class women to their domestic world. It is a world that has web-like associations with parents, husband, siblings and children. Such a task involves confronting feminine stereotypes of Indian culture. She also depicts women who consciously rebel against and reject socially-sanctioned codes of feminine behaviour. Cry, the
*Peacock* is the agonized cry of a women’s soul for meaning and fulfillment in life. Maya, the protagonist believes that meaning and fulfillment come through tenderness, mutual sharing and commitment to deeper things in life. On the other hand her husband, Gautama dismisses these feelings as childish sentiments. Anita Desai’s women are sensitive, sometimes emotional always misfit within their world and struggle to preserve their integrity and identity.

This period especially from 1970s to the contemporary fiction, witness an upsurge in fiction written by women who are aware of their individuality, their aspirations, their strengths as well as weaknesses. They begin to delineate in their works the individual's quest for the self in all its varied and complex forms along with her problems and crises. Here we can see woman is all her colours- powerful, courageous as well as helpless and timid. In short these novelists portray "*Women who aspire, attempt and strive to be their true selves.*" These are women novelists dealing with the world of women. Women writers in India are moving forward with their strong and sure strides, matching the pace of the world. We see them bursting out in full bloom spreading their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavor of the soil that they bring to their work.

In the growth and development of Indian novel in English, 1980s occupy a significant position. It is decade in which some very promising novelists have published their works with originality and unprecedented inventiveness. Among male novelists of this time the most talented ones are- Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy,
Upamanyu Chattarjee, Shashi Tharoor, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Firdaus Kanga. With the publication of Salman Rushdie's voluminous novel ‘Midnight's Children’, the scope of Indian writing in English has extended and paved the path for the future course of its development. Another group of women novelists who are known for their meritorious achievements in fiction writing and deserve consideration comprised of novelists like Shashi Deshpande, Dina Mehta, Raji Narasimhan, Nina Sibal and others. They have made significant experiments in fictional form and narrative techniques and are known for their interesting thematic preoccupations. Attempts have been made by these Indian novelists to highlight the features that distinguish Indo-English fiction from other fictions of India and also from the fictions of Western countries.

"The 1980s witnessed efflorescent emergence of new Indian fiction in English heralding a new era of change in its tone, tenor and content ....... produced their maiden works and brought new conventions and maturity in Indian fiction .........."9

The most outstanding woman novelist of the period is Shashi Deshpande, the overarching theme in whose work is a woman’s quest for fulfillment and the way she is thwarted at every stage by the forces of custom and tradition. She regards that Indian woman’s mentality of dependence, nature of submitting and serving male and regarding him the pivot of family, has made her forgetful of her own personality and individuality. Shashi Deshpande makes an appeal to the womenfolk to free themselves from all the chains; they are tethered to in the rotten
social systems. Her novels are true picture of feminine sensibility, and perfect documents of thought pattern and practice prevalent in India. Apart from her own belief in the equality of sexes and in the right of both the sexes to live their lives the way they want, she also believes—

“Until women get over the handicaps imposed by society, outside and inner conditioning, the human race will not realize its full potential.”

In her novel ‘The Dark Holds No Terror’ (1980) Sarita is supposed to be responsible for the death of her younger brother, though actually she is not. She later marries out of her caste, shocking her mother. In Roots and Shadows (1983) young Indu rebels against rural orthodoxy, hoping to find in city life the freedom she longs for; but she finds that urban heterodoxy is as restrictive, as rural orthodoxy. The protagonists of her other novels That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1993), A Matter of Time (1996) and Small Remedies (2000) gather inner strength and struggle against loneliness and sense of dependence and at the same time they respect traditions.

Recent years have witnessed a good number of Indian English novelists who have stunned the literary world with their works. Their works have enriched the world literature but a careful study of their development makes it clear that there are two kinds of writers who contributed to the genre of novel. The first group of writers focused on various social problems of India like poverty, class discrimination, social dogmas, rigid religious norms etc, which has an appeal to the West.
The early fiction written by these novelists represent and portray woman in a one dimensional manner as virgin-heroine or temptress, the dutiful daughter or all sacrificing mother, the pativrata or the redundant widow. The position or the importance of their women characters is determined and restricted by societal norms and they generally present an idealized concept of womanhood. These women characters like women writers themselves belong to,

"a womanhood that has been for centuries - the sacred hearth, at once home-tomb-womb, a woman always being stilled into silence."\(^{1,1}\)

But in the 20th century, women's writing is considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. Today's generation of women writers who have money and mostly western educated.

**The Second group** of writers includes those who are global Indians, who are Indian by birth but they have lived abroad, so they see Indian realities objectively. Thus, a perceptible change can be seen in novels where the political scenario ceases to be an essential part of the milieu. The novelist now wishes,

"to express through his novels and stories the way of life of the group of people with whose psychology and background he is most familiar."\(^{1,2}\) In the last 40 years or so Indo-English fiction has flourished and has come to be recognized as an important source of information on Indian people and their culture.

The importance of focusing on women's issues is clearly seen in the works of Indian woman over the years. The image of Indian woman in the novels of these women novelists is varied, colourful, intense and
wonderfully interesting. This may be because of the fact that these women writers focus mainly on women’s issues of the Indian woman from traditional and modern viewpoints depicting all her desires, anxieties, happiness and sorrow, defeat and victory. They focus the woman’s inner world and her position in the society. Women writers from several regions of India have written evocatively about their society and the way it treats its women. Writers like Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das and Arundhati Roy have boldly come out with intimate details of their lives in their autobiographies. The well-known woman writer Amrita Pritam gives frank and unrestrained account of her intimate relationships with different men at different times in her autobiography, *Revenue Stamp (Raseedi Ticket)*. She boldly accepts her infatuation for the Urdu poet Sahir Ludhianvi and a passionate relation with Sajjad Zahir. Another well-known woman writer Kamla Das narrates in a very intimate manner, in her autobiography, *My Story* (1977), about her engagement and misbehaviour of her fiancé. She tells about the humiliation she faces after his physical assault. One of the latest women writers to join this brigade is Arundhati Roy. Her novel *The God of Small Things* has won the coveted Booker Prize making her the first Indian woman to receive this prize.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy gives a vivid detail of the changing political scene in Kerala, the problems faced by women in a male dominated society, caste taboos, the lives of neglected and directionless children of a broken home, sex and also immensely captivating descriptions of birds, flowers and trees. These examples
show the courage with which the Indian women novelists reveal what a woman has to face in a male-dominated society. Not only in autobiographies, the real picture and the broader view of Indian womanhood can also be seen in the novels written by these women writers.

These women writers have given literary work in India an unmistakable edge. They are able to portray women’s world with a sensitive touch. Their women are real flesh and blood protagonists who make us to look at them with awe with their relationships to their surroundings, their society, their men, their children, their families, their mental make-ups and themselves. Through their novels they spread the message what actually feminism is. These women writers say that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in silence. They try to create awareness that this is the time to proclaim with definite precision. Only the women novelists of India are capable of conveying messages of feminism in an Indian way.

The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English literature. Today is the generation of those women writers who have money and mostly western educated. They described the whole world of women with simply sudden frankness, containing bold and commercial topics. Their write-ups give a glimpse of the unexplored female psyche, which has no accessibility. Their novels consist of the latest burning issues related with women as well as those issues that exist in the society since long. Their writings are thoroughly enjoyed by the masses and the publishers feel that the literature actually survives because of such type of bold topics and commercials used by these women novelists. The list of such Indian
women novelists comprises Dina Mehta, Krishna Sobti, Bharati Mukherjee, Gita Hariharan, Gita Mehta, Indira Ganeshan, Gauri Deshpande, Uma Vasudev, Namita Gokhale, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy and many other popular names. The novelists like Namita Gokhale, Shobha De are considered as out-spoken and are popularly known as the goddesses of Eros. They have brought a stylized pattern in the whole context of Indian writing. They describe the whole world of women with simply stunning frankness. They feel that woman is an equal competent to man. They portray women who are direct money earner and not only confined to household works. Their women of modern era think on different lines and that is what depicted in the novels of the Indian women authors.

These women writers express their opinions freely and boldly on variety of themes pertaining to women’s rights and status in the society. They talk about sex, men and eroticism in no certain terms. They feel the ire of male chauvinism as Shobha De puts it, "the label of a feminist writer is one that marginalises. I for one of being read, judged and perceived differently by male readers on the account of my gender." ¹³

In fact as a writer Shobha De differs considerably from other women novelists. She concentrates on the upper class Indian women and their lifestyles with intimate understanding. Her novels indicate the arrival of a new woman eager to defy rebelliously against the well entrenched moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system. As a result, her women characters are modern, fashionable and they take bold decisions to survive in society.
B. SHOBHA DE – THE SHAPING INFLUENCE, LIFE AND WORKS

Shobha De a super model, celebrity, journalist and best selling author stands as ‘pioneer’ in the field of popular fiction and ranks among the first to explore the world of urban women in India. As a writer she is gifted with extra-ordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life tactfully.

Shobha De, who is often known as Jackie Collins of India, is born as Shobha Rajadhyaksha to the Saraswat Brahmin family of Maharashtra on January 7, 1948. She has completed her graduation from St. Xavier's college, Mumbai and obtained degree in Psychology. She has started her career as a model and after establishing her name in the fashion industry, she moved to Journalism in the year 1970.

She is rarely out of the news, be it as the first editor of gossipy magazine *Stardust* or *Society*, as a socialite or for her best selling novels.

“Using ‘Hinglish’ a peculiar anti-colonial mix of English and Mumbaite Hindi, the magazine ‘Stardust’ won a wide following.” 14

In course of his editing career she found another magazine - *Celebrity*. During 1980s Shobha De used to write for Sunday section of "The Times of India." In that section, she explores the high profile lifestyles of the celebrities of Mumbai. She is working as a freelance columnist for various magazines like 'The Week'. Moreover, she is also involved in writing the scripts for several TV soaps and serials for instance 'Swabhimaan'. Her first novel is "Socialite Evenings" and her very first venture is a bestseller. She has also written some other
novels in which she speaks her mind. Her novels are hugely popular and are critically appreciated but trashed by serious critics as racy and raunchy in style and content. However the numbers they sell make her one of the most widely read English novelists in India.

Considering Shobha De's 'SELECTIVE MEMORY' as an explosive autobiography, we feel that hers is a life larger than life. Born in a middle class Maharastrian family of the magistrate of Satara Rao Saheb in 1948, Shobha's birth was not much welcomed by the women of the family. Her mother and grandmother expected to have a second son in the family. However, her father rejoiced her and considered Shobha as the luckiest child of the family as after her birth her father was appointed as a government official in Delhi.

De had a much pampered humpty-Dumpty childhood. Later on her father was again transferred to Mumbai. Right from her childhood De and her siblings were supposed to follow several codes of conduct prescribed by her father. De maintains that 'being economical' was one of the middle class attitudes she had imbibed.

When De had chosen her career in modelling at the age of eighteen, her father did not approve it but her mother silently supported her. Her father wanted Shobha to study hard and secure success in competitive examinations like his other children. He often scolded her for this.

"It's your attitude. You have aptitude and grasp. But no application. How can you excel with such a lackadaisical approach?"
Her life story perfectly depicts her mental conflict. She pursued her career and didn't surrender to her father's wishes. She remained a super model for five years and changed career when Mr. Nari Hira appointed her as the editor of the 'Stardust'. Later on she also started her own magazine- 'Celebrity'. De has portrayed beautiful pen-pictures of the most of the stars of the Bollywood- the Mumbai film industry. Her tone is simple, straight forward but very effective.

She turned out to be penny-wise and pound foolish when she has to close her magazine-'Celebrity'. Her ten years long marriage was also on rocks. Her father didn't support her to give salary to other staff members working for the magazine. At such a time of crisis her cousin Gautam supported her and she changed her office into his apartment. Shobha didn't complain but accepted that she had tumble down in the hole made by herself. She encountered her circumstances very heroically and divorced Sudhir, her first husband. Meanwhile, Shobha met her second husband Dilip De who was a shipping tycoon and business magnate in 1981. He was a widower with two children, his wife having died in a car crash a couple of years earlier. Shobha (then Shobha Kilachand) was a divorcee with two children of her own – Avantika and Aditya. The pair got married in 1984. Dilip and she later had two more children. At present Shobha is living with her husband and six children in Cuffe Parade, a posh locality in Mumbai. Her cousin Gautam Rajadhyaksha is the ace photographer.

The most striking fact about De's life is her role as a mother of six kids. She turned out to be a mother of Dilip De's children Randeep
and Radhika. In this rapidly developing world where people do not have time to stand and stare and career oriented couples prefer fun oriented childless lives; De’s life with her family is heaven on earth for her. Shobha De has seen it all- life as a model, a copywriter, a Journalist, a socialist, a script writer, a novelist, a busy mother among other things; and will continue to make or report news.

**Works :**

1. Shobha at Sixty-2010
2. Sandhya`s Secret”-2009
3. Superstar India - From Incredible to Unstoppable
4. Strange Obsession
5. Snapshots
6. Spouse: The truth about marriage
8. Surviving Men - Penguin, New Delhi, 1998
Shobha De is one of the India’s bestselling authors. All her books have topped the charts and each of her titles continues to sell well even today. De gives a new definition to the mass market bestseller with her writing in 1990s and all her novels have remained commercial success over the years. As in "The Tribune" she is praised for her works:-

"She slaughters macho males with vengeance, and rattles poison in her gender with disdain and disregard. She is Shobha De, and she is scintillating and straight. She is a ruthless writer with a ramrod of a pen, and a raging urge to kill somebody. She demolishes reputations and civilizations with effortless grace and one thing she doesn't stomach is hypocrisy of any kind. She wields a powerful camera and she needs to keep shooting that way, whether anyone likes to photo frame or not"16

Shobha De is known for her bold and frank style of writing. Love, sex and marriage or its failure are some of the main themes of writing of Shobha De. She mainly deals with the issues concerning the modern society like extra-marital relations and sex in a very bold and unconventional way. She also focuses on the different facets of the urban Indian society. She attempts to project the large society as a whole through her characters. For instance, in her novel "Socialite Evenings", she explored the lives of the bored housewives and their loveless life of rich industrialist families. This book is critically acclaimed and it is still considered as a blockbuster.
In her novel *Starry Nights* this prominent novelist portrays the love story of two popular celluloid stars. It is the story of high class people and it wonderfully depicts the dark side of Hindi film industry. Shobha De illustrates the different characters of her books in a very beautiful and interesting way. She wonderfully presents a picture of a fragmentary world to her readers. The women characters of her novels are shown madly in love with the male characters. Love, Jealousy and manipulation are the prominent themes of her novels.

Shobha De's third novel *Sisters*, published in 1992, draws our attention to the fabulous and intriguing corporate world of business tycoons. The novel has a perfect mixture of suspense, romance, imported locales and sex all needed for a super hit Hindi formula film. It deals with the psychic conflict of a liberated woman protagonist who is caught between a personal self and a societal self.

*Strange Obsession* acquired popularity for depicting lesbian relationship. The story revolves around the life and lustful relationship of two young women Amrita and Meenakshi. It seems to be psychological documentation of sexual obsession.
While in *Sultry Days* she faithfully portrays the diversity of characters both male and female and their individual approaches to life and its challenges. The novel is autobiographical to some extent where she delineates the plights of all other important characters except heroine narrator Nisha, whom she closely knows and most of whom confide in her.

Shobha De’s *Snapshots* unveils the life of six girls of Santa Maria High school. Exploring the lives of six individuals having different mind sets and points of views, De makes up a mosaic that represents her vision of life. She deals with six different women characters as there is no one protagonist but different individuals in different characters. The novel is deeply concerned with alignment of power that exerts physical, political, social and economic control over women in order to fragment her.

‘*Second Thoughts*’ is the novel that deals with the story of a young middle class Bengali girl Maya, who marries a Bombay based foreign returned Bengali Boy. The story very nicely depicts the disillusionment of a married woman and an explosive tale of love and betrayal that exposes the hollowness of Indian marriage system specially arranged marriages.
In *Small Betrayals* and *'Shooting from the Hip'* Shobha De experiments the technique of short story (in the former) and essay writing (in the latter). *'Small Betrayals'* explores the average experiences of betrayal in its infinite variety. Shobha De has viewed the conflicts and contradictions of human existence through multiple angles and reached the core of uncertainties and complexities of life that never dissolve or resolve completely. In *Shooting from the Hip* she touches upon different areas like politics, media, food, festivals, films, books and personalities.

In *'Selective Memory-Stories from My Life'* - an autobiographical work by Shobha De one finds an ample opportunity to know the author more intimately. The book focuses on certain parts of her life and gives an authentic picture of the middle class Maharashtrian woman and her various roles as a model, columnist and writer a daughter, sister, wife and mother. Here she writes poignantly of her childhood and youth and early years of her career and of her relationship with her parents and siblings, her husband, and children. She has keenly observed and astutely chronicled the new India with the description of many movie stars and high society people and celebrities.
In her book 'SPOUSE-The truth about marriage', Shobha De talks about marriage as an adventure which is based on trust, companionship, affection and sharing. In this book she focuses on the institution of marriage and writes about how and why marriages work-or don't. She tries to focus on various things which can disturb a marriage from being successful such as disputes for finance, inter-personal relationships, extended family relationships, too much sex or lack of sex, kids, lack of kids, affairs, jealousy, individuality etc. With her usual disregard for rules, she reinvents tradition and challenges old stereotypes addressing all the issues that are central to most Indian marriages - whether love or arranged. She believes that due to the lack of open communication and recognition of ones own flaws, marriages prove to be failure. Shobha De says,

"Marriage is one of the most enigmatic, most fascinating relationships on earth....is becoming like dinosaur. It is going to be extinct very soon."  

Her book - 'Speedpost' is a luminous record of marvelous tips given to her adolescent kids. Herein we find new woman mingled with new mother varying about the character building of new generation to which her kids belong to. In this book, Shobha De writes a series of letters to her six children on different
concerns like family values and tradition, discipline, harmful affects of late night parties and internet chats, adolescent anxieties about love, sex and friendship etc.

Shobha De on the preparations for 60th birthday of Indian Independence writes about the feelings and attitudes of Indians in her book 'Super star India- from incredible to unstoppable' she puts light on many issues like fleeing/migration to the west for jobs, aping the western culture and yet cling irrationally to tradition. She talks about the rapid changes in India both negative and positive, and the reasons behind them. She says,

"I wrote this at a time when a lot of Indians started coming back from overseas, while my generation had fled the country. I often feel my generation was disillusioned and did not invest enough in India." ¹⁸

In her first book on teenagers "Sandhya's Secret" (2009), she draws the reader into a teenagers whirlwind world of emotions. Hero-worshipping and fantasising world all-too familiar heart breaks and joys of growing up, the endless squabbles with siblings, the urge of rebel against rules, the sweetness of friendship, the yearning of peer approval and above all, the encompassing warmth of family love. On the launch of her book Shobha De said, "I think today's teen in India is quite a confused creature not entirely sure about who they are or what their values are supposed to be, or what's next." ¹⁹
Shobha De tries to convey that parenting is not just sermonising and moralising but the children should be brought out into the open for discussion.

Shobha De's latest work 'Shobha at Sixty' gives a message to all the senior citizens that 'life only begins at sixty.' Declaring sixty the new forty, she comes up with potent exhilar to rejuvenate life and provides practical tips on how to cope with physical and emotional down slides commonly experienced by the post sixty generation.

Shobha De never hesitates in boldly presenting her views and opinions about sex. She writes for the masses and expresses her dissatisfaction concerning the behaviour of the present day generation of women very clearly. According to her, women authors of the past were sidelined and completely ignored and their opinions were restricted within the boundaries created by men. She believes in frank narration of incidents and selections with a touch of open-heartedness. Shobha De gives an exposure towards individual social glamour and spreads a message of revolting back for one's own rights. Most of her women characters use their physical instincts as power window/ladder to achieve their ambitions.

Because of her independent functioning mind and blunt courage to assert herself, Shobha De is often regarded as a rebel. For this she says,
"The image I harbour of a rebel is a negative one. Of a person who determinedly shatters known rules of conduct and upsets everybody around by being impossible and obstinate.... Maybe I didn’t conform to norms laid down by those in authority. I did what came naturally to me without worrying too much about the consequences."20

In her novels she shows a real picture of Indian life style in the high aristocratic society and dazzles the readers with her frank and candid tales of human relationships particularly men-women relationship and old and new value patterns. The changing moral values of people reaching new heights in riches and civilization is given as unrestrained depiction in her novels. She has projected the image of a new woman in her novels with both positive and negative sides of her personality. Her novels are intriguing and blatantly truthful images of the upcoming new women who has her own ambitions and aspirations.

The present study is dealing with Shobha De’s novels with her women characters who aspire for a career as well as rewarding home life. As she deals with elite and wealthy on one side and a marginalised middle class on the other, this study weighs the pros and cons of her writing capability and her talent as a writer.
References


6. Ibid.


11. Indira Nityanandam "Three great Indian women Novelists", p.11.


