CHAPTER- I

Introduction:
Shaping of the novelists
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SHAPING OF THE NOVELISTS

Indian Women writing in English is being recognized as a major contemporary current in English Literature. It is now gaining ground rapidly. In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era and has earned many laurels both at home and abroad. Indian women writers have shown their worth in the field of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing it even today without any hurdle. Now they have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination.

It is probable, however, that both in life and in art the values of man are not the values of woman. Thus, when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values – to make serious what appears insignificant to man, and trivial what is to him important. (Mukherjee 11)

Men historically dominated the role of authors, therefore, a deep rooted gender-bias became a part of our historical and textual tradition. It was in the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century that various issues touching women were considered systematically. A positive sense of feminine identity has found recognition now, and women are stepping out of the rigid sex roles assigned to them traditionally. They are busy in the Western world and the urban patches in India, with “self-actualizing, whose identities are not dependent on men” (Wendy 33). Indian women novelists have concentrated on women’s problems in their works and have given vent to a new approach to and consciousness of the emerging phenomenon.
Today, the works of Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Geetha Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai, Santha Rama Rau, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala and Manju Kapur and many more have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English. Santha Rama Rau's ‘Remember for the House’, (1956), Ruth Prawar Jhabvala’s first novel ‘To Whom She Will’, (1955) and her later novel ‘Heat and Dust’ (1975), Kamla Markandya’s 'Two Virgins' (1973), Rama Mehta's 'Inside the Haveli’ (1977), and Gaeta Hariharan ‘The Thousand Faces of Night’ (1992) are some of the leading novels which have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity.

Indian women writers in English are victims of a second prejudice vis-à-vis their regional counterpart’s. The majority of novels written by Indian women writers depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated homemakers. This subject often considered superficial compared to the depiction of the replaced and oppressed lives of women. A major preoccupation in recent Indian women’s writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. Women’s presentation is more assertive, more liberated in their view and more articulate in their expression than the woman of the past is. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring self-sacrificing women, towards conflicts, female characters searching for identity; no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status.

A number of Indian writers of fiction in English try to explore and manifest Indian reality. In these writers we do not find either the commitment of the earlier period or even the amused narration of the trials of the middle class, trying to unite the past traditional outlook with the fast emerging realities of the modern living conditions. In this effort, the writers of the post-Independence phase move inward.
They get more and more psychologically intended and try to assess the sociological effect on the psyche of their characters. This movement, from the outward gross realities to inward complexities, found as its mouth-piece in number of women novelists who, by the peculiar situation of their existence, have been able to see the Indian complexities from close quarters, where constraints of varied hues and shades work upon the sensitive individuals. Fiction by women writers provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. There has been a growing interest on women's issues and women writers focus on these issues. Many creative writings in English and many writers including Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and Manju Kapur have dealt with such issues. The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades. They are no longer puppets in the hands of man. What was just a beginning in writers like Anita Desai has assumed a strident posture in Shobha De and Namita Gokhale. Both of them deconstruct the idea of feminism in their novels.

Shobha De is one of the most eminent and popular Indian novelists of the present time. She has achieved top most position in the queue of best-selling writers in India. She was born in Maharashtra in 1948 and being the daughter of a top bureaucrat, she enjoyed the privilege of living in different cities. She was educated in Delhi till the age of eight and graduated from St. Xavier’s College, Bombay, with a degree in Psychology. After getting College degree, she plunged into the world of glamour and became a top fashion model at the age of twenty-one. Thus Shobha De’s scintillating career began in unexpected way, starting with her unplanned entry as a teenager into the glamorous world of modelling, and moving to her high profile years as a magazine editor, columnist, social commentator, television script writer, and author. Her conservative Brahmin parents though opposed her modelling career
initially, later they accepted it. De started her career in journalism after three years of modelling. During the year 1971, she edited for the magazines *Stardust, Sunday,* and *Megacity.* Despite the gossip culture it proliferated, the use of Hinglish (mixture of Hindi with English) in the magazine brought tremendous success and popularity among the young generation. She earned both reputation and money while working as a freelance writer and columnist of gossip magazine *Society.* She participates in a regular basis on important T.V. debates, such as “The Editor’s Verdict” on NDTV during the Elections 2009.

Shobha De belongs to a Maharashtrian family. The name of her mother is Indira and Govind Rajadhyaksha is her father. De’s mother was a strong lady. Mandakini and Kunda are De’s two sisters and Ashok is her only brother. Shobha De has been married twice, having two children – Aditya and Avantika from her previous marriage. She is presently married to Dilip De, a shipping tycoon and a widower with two children – Ranadip and Radhika, and now they have their two, Arundhati and Anandita. At present she lives in Mumbai with her children and husband, Dilip. Inspite of all her first importance is for her family. Although she is very busy in her profession but gives much value to her family members. In this way she is a complete mother and wife. De’s *Speedpost* is the collection of her letters to her all the six children and also gives some advice to them for their best future. She knows her duty both as a parent and a writer. Her fiction reflects one or the other aspect of her life and her characters may have been part of her life’s various phases. Like she said about her novel, *Starry Nights,* for which she got the inspiration from the memories she accumulated of the film industry while working for *Stardust.*

Shobha De, as a writer of novels and short stories, has been active on the literary scene for more than twenty years. When she wrote her first novel, the best selling
Socialite Evenings in 1989 about rich housewives bored with their loveless marriages, she shocked the readers and critics alike, who were used to subtleness in the women depicted in Indian novels. Since then, there has been no stopping. In 1990, she published Starry Nights. Her other works are Sisters (1992), Strange Obsession (1992), Uncertain Liaisons (Co-authored with Khushwant Singh)(1993); Sultry Days (1994), Shooting from the Hip (1994); Small Betrayals (1995); Snapshots (1995), Second Thoughts (1996), Surviving Men (1997), Selective Memory: Stories from My Life (1998); Speedpost (1999); Spouse: The Truth About Marriage (2005), Superstar India (2009); Sandhya’s Secret (2009); Shobhaa at Sixty (2010). On the whole, she has written eighteen books and her latest creation is titled Sethji (2012).

She makes available her views on the art of fiction and on the plight of contemporary society to her readers through magazines such as The Week, Femina, Woman’s Era and reputed newspapers like The Times of India, The Hindustan Time, Asia Week. Shobha De as a writer is gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life tactfully. The way she narrates each and every aspect of human relationship in general and man - woman relationship in particular, is really wonderful. The orthodox people in India criticize her for her open discussion of sexual matters. But her fiction has got tremendous responses not only from several European countries but all over the world. All classes of people read and enjoy her fiction. It is no less an achievement. In fact, as a writer she differs considerably from other Indian women novelists writing in English. She is a writer who believes in very frank narration of incidents and absolute open heartedness. We don’t find anything reserved in her fiction from narrative point of view. She is the last person to care for what orthodox readers say about the subject - matter of her fiction. De is as open to hurt and bewilderment as the rest of us. That she has been constantly judged as an
extension of her very glamorous, very frightening personality, is something that causes her some discomfort, though she’s loath to accept it. But the fact is that she deeply feels women’s situation in which:

A feeling of persecution sets in. Every woman is seen as a predatory creature. She has to be tamed and taught a lesson. If she fights back, or displays attitude, her ‘punishment’ has to be severe. If she apologizes for her wayward ways and promises to behave … then, may be, they can work on an acceptable solution to the problem. The problem being gender. *(The Week)*

De’s novels are women centred because she is not satisfied with their condition. Indian fiction depicts three kinds of women. First, the poor women, belonging mostly to the rural class. Secondly, the middle class women, especially the educated and employed and thirdly, the neo rich - aristocrat women depicted by the writes like Namita Gokhale and Shobha De’s. Living almost among the upper class society, she is a keen observer of the foils and foibles of it. One does not wish to enter into forbidden worlds. But De dares to reveal the seamy side of this society. As a writer, De has unravelled the events and happenings of her life through different angles. Her association with magazines like ‘Stardust’, ‘Society’, ‘Celebrity’ and ‘Megacity’ has made her use journalistic jargon in her fiction too. There is a unique sense of freedom, conviction and courage that helps her use the language entirely her own. Her works reveal the transformation of actual feelings, thoughts, experiences and responses into artistic expressions. However, they are not transferred as they might have occurred; De leaves it for her readers to sense them. That is why, as a creative writer, she is becoming immensely popular day by day. Three of her novels have been chosen by the reputed school of Oriental and African studies of London as
course material. If De has been selected by reputed institutions, it is because of her fictional works, which portray the contemporary reality more distinctively than those of other writers. Social concern is the main thrust of all her novels. But the fact can not be denied that the pivotal concern of all her writings is ‘woman’. Shobha De explores the world of the urban women in India through her fiction. She tries to shatter the dominant patriarchal values in the Indian society. If a woman has to establish an indigenous identity of her own, she ought to shatter the economic, social, political and cultural barriers posited by various forces throughout the ages.

*Socialite Evenings*, the first novel of Shobha De, is about the journey of a prominent Bombay socialite Karuna, from a gauche middle class girl to a self sufficient woman. *Socialite Evenings*, the best selling novel of Shobha De, presents the double face of the institution of family and marriage existing in the wealthy class of the Indian society. Outwardly they appear very happy but inwardly they feel very lonely and sad. This book is a critical disaster but a commercial success, likely due in part to its racy and controversial content, something that is unusual in India.

Her second novel *Starry Nights*, is primarily the story of a film star Aasha Rani, who comes from a small town background to the tinsel world of Bombay. When her father left the family she had to struggle hard and for the sake of survival her mother pushed her into the under-world of blue films. Through this novel Shobha De stepped out of the threshold of family and tradition to portray the harsh realities that await a woman outside the four walls of her house. Aasha Rani, the unrivalled, ravishing beauty of Bombay Stardom, is a woman with an insatiable libido, thus susceptible to indiscriminate sex with film people - producers, directors, heroes, cameramen, high society celebrities and other non-filmy people also - everywhere used, soiled and exploited. She hates male world because she had been exploited since
her childhood. It is a best seller in India and cemented its author’s reputation as being a provocative and daring author.

In *Sisters* Shobha De draws our attention neither to the aristocrats of high social circles nor to the glamorous world of Bombay film industry, but to the fabulous and intriguing corporate world of business tycoons. It is the story of two girls - Mallika Hiralal (Mikki) and Alisha Mehta. Alisha is the illegitimate daughter of Mikki’s father. When the story unfolds Mallika’s parents had died in an air crash. Very soon she is exposed to the duplicity of her father when she comes to know about Alisha. While Mallika wants to befriend with Alisha, she finds the latter to be rude, unfriendly, jealous and full of hatred towards her. She hates Mallika because Mallika has the name of father and she doesn’t have. Things are already in a bad shape at her father’s “Hiralal Industries.” The central event of the novel is the quest of Mallika to win her sister Alisha.

The novel *Strange Obsession* is a masterpiece by Shobha De. It highlights lesbian relationship of two women Meenakshi (Minx) and Amrita Agrawal. Minx’s father was an I.G. in police. Her mother’s sickness and her later institutionalization make her psychologically sick. Amrita belongs to a noble family and wants to be a model. While chasing her career in modelling she came into contact with Minx, who behaves like a man and feels crazy about her. Her transformation into a lesbian is due to an Electra Complex. At last Minx died and Amrita feels free. Both Minx and Amrita represent the different type of modern urban set up.

*Uncertain Liaisons* is a combined effort of Khushwant Singh as well as Shobha De. The main subjects that reader will find in this novel includes sex customs that are present in India, relationship in between male and female, surveys on sexual behaviour of India alongwith modern city life. The writer of this novel highlights high
class people and their society. There are many individual articles relating to these subjects that are very significant to one’s life.

Shobha De’s *Shooting from the Hip* established her as a versatile writer. This book contains her views on politics, media, food, festivals, books, films, people travelogues; and a short story. This book strengthens the idea that Shobha De is a very bold writer who exposes the situations around her whether it is related to media, politics or something else.

Shobha De’s fifth novel *Sultry Days* does contain women who are obsessed with men. They, too, indulge in beating men at their own game but here we also come across some glimpses of commitment. This novel is different from her other novels as it has a man as the central character. In the novel, there is one woman character whose experience sums up in a nutshell the cause charted by women characters whom we have called ‘aberrations’. It also shows that the only ray of hope for such women is to return to their roots and join the mainstream.

Shobha De has done an incredible job in *Small Betrayal* in the form of pen downing variety of small stories in a way to bind the people to the finish. It focuses on the matter of little quarrels over nonsense issues and restlessness allied with such conditions. This novel has admitted a great success and appreciation all over the world because of ease in understanding the thoughts of a writer.

Her novel *Snapshots* presents the life story of six friends - Swati, Aparna, Reema, Noor, Surekha and Rashimi. These women of *Snapshots* disregard male power totally by negating the norms of traditional female behaviour. In fact, they prove that things that man can do, woman can do better. They are neither deficient physically nor intellectually. They hold the reins of power firmly in their hands. The novel shows woman power at its worst.
Second Thoughts of Shobha De deals with a young middle-class Bengali girl, born and bred in Calcutta, who makes an arranged matrimonial alliance with a Bombay-based foreign returned Bengali-Ranjan. After her marriage, her disillusionment begins. Her Mother-in-law, Mrs. Malik does not approve working women. But Maya is eager to pursue a career. Ranjan agrees with his mother’s views and declares that he is earning well enough to support a wife and family.

Shobha De’s novels deal with contemporary issues. In this context, Second Thoughts is a realistic representation of the psyche of the traditional Indian men and women. Thus freedom is permitted in a very restricted manner; it is the ancient story of sacrifice and adjustment that a woman is destined to. Maya, too, accepts to remain enveloped in the loneliness and sadness. On second thoughts, she learns to survive the sultriness of not only Bombay, but also of her marriage. She strikes up a friendship with Nikhil, her charming, college-going neighbour leading to love and betrayal.

Her next book Surviving Men is an excellent example of her creativity. This book is divided into four interesting parts. In first part Shobha De defines men with their insecurity, likings, feelings, moral and love etc. In second part De says about the role of men when they are in bed, at work, at home, and on holiday that what they do and in which sense they react. The third part is about men’s mystery, their fantasy, myths and they are as Martyrs, Buddies, Mice and as leaders. The last part is about the use of time in Men’s life, their uses, mother’s role in their life etc.

Selective Memory subtitled as Stories from My Life is, however, not a chronological autobiography of Shobha De as she has always been a private person. But at least, it gives an ample opportunity to her readers to know this popular fiction writer, more intimately. Finally this book serves as a mirror to reflect the author’s
own life and also a lamp which lights others’ ways through the thick and thin of her experiences.

In, this manner, Sagarika Ghose also feels that Shobha De’s work is typical of modern Indian sensibility and brings out the new Indian in print. She comments:

The point is that as far as those hungry to see New India in print are concerned she is a literary and sociological pioneer. De’s work dispenses with the quest for an Indian identity and centres around the world she knows, the people she meets and the conversations she has.

(13)

Spouse: The Truth About Marriage is an examination of the institution of marriage by this renowned writer. In this delightful book Shobha De discusses about how and why marriages work or don’t. It is light-hearted and entertaining book, while at the same time offering deep insight into what makes a relationship work. This book is a good read, for anyone who is contemplating the idea of getting married, or for those who are already married.

In her novel Superstar India Shobha De focuses on Indian people and their place in the larger human society, pointing out her country’s historical failings and equally historical glories. De reasons that the nation has earned superstar status, and with humorous argumentativeness, she convinces the reader that India is not about to lose its glow. David Davidar also feels that her works are serious attempts at “discovering India through Indian eyes” (43).

Her Sandhya’s Secret draws the reader into a teenager’s whirlwind world of emotions. The all-too familiar heartbreaks and joys of growing up - the urge to rebel against rules, the sweetness of friendship and above all, the encompassing warmth of family love. And in Shobhaa At Sixty she lays great emphasis on family values and
ties, and underlines the importance of a spiritual quest-all of which make each passing decade more meaningful and enriching.

Shobha De’s *Sethji* is primarily set in Mumbai, Bihar and Delhi and explores the vicious circle and nexus between politics, business and Bollywood. Of course Bollywood is her forte but to bring together the three biggest talking points in India and carve it into a story is something very few authors have attempted before. Being essentially a media person, she is aware of the inside aspects of Bollywood’s dark secrets, movie stars’ follies, and celebrity neurosis. None of these escape her unsparing eyes while picturing them in her works. De turns the spotlight on the new morality that has finally set in, and on the neo-colonial generation which has no inhibitions or age old cultural bonds manifested in its highly westernized behaviour. In this way, she depicts a realistic picture of the morality and culture of the high and upper middle class societies of contemporary India. As Anwar Alikhan rightly points out:

De’s writings give us a pretty clear read out of the contemporary urban middle class Indian mind, its aspirations, its curiosities, its insecurities and its fantasies. And this is the real importance of Ms. De as a writer.

(24-25)

Shobha De does not present women in her novels for any idealistic purpose or aesthetic effect. She makes her intention clear. Her women are not going to be emotionally subdued and weak ladies of manners. On the contrary, they are to be assertive, pragmatic and strong. Infidelity is not a sin but a routine activity for them for which they have no remorse. As the action of the novel unfolds, her women continue to indulge in their single-minded pursuit which is to lead a life of luxury, wealth, comfort and pleasure, a perception quite alien to those women who seek a
heavenly bliss in the domestic duties and prefer to revel in a spiritual illusion rather than chasing a material reality. Shobha De’s women “Symbolize the overpowering materialism and the lack of spirituality, that characterized modern age”(Swain 135).

Shobha De takes a look at the breaking of the conventional male dominance of the relationship. Wives are no longer the quiet, subservient inferiors, always deferring to their husband’s wishes. The financial independence of women has led to major changes, and this has made the man – women relationship more complex. Shobha De belongs to that group of contemporary writers of English literature who support feminism and equality between a man and a woman. She knows very well that to be a self sufficient woman economic independence is necessary. Her novels have emphasized the value of equivalence of power. She says:

Eventually everything boils down to money-that great leveler. There can be no talk of independence for women, without economic self sufficiency. An independent mind or free spirit is meaningless so long as the body and soul are being kept together by somebody else.(

*Shooting From The Hip* 110)

Shobha De, however while advocating economic independence of women, would not approve of mania for money. According to her-money is significant but living one’s own life is even much more important. In this way she is straightforward and original. She gives absorbing profiles of Khushwant Singh, Vikram Seth, R.K. Laxman, J.R.D. Tata, Amitabh Bachhan, Benazir Bhutto, Asha Bhonsle. Here also we find her work original.

One of the major reasons of Shobha De’s popularity as a writer is her intimate understanding of the psyche of woman and her problems. Her treatment of the contemporary urban woman’s position and the challenges she faces is not without
significance. But Shobha De does not prefer being branded as a feminist. She has once said; “I did write with a great deal of empathy towards women. Without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about the woman’s situation” (The Hindustan Times Magazine, 3).

Even through a quick glance of her works, one can comprehend easily that any study of Shobha De would remain incomplete without the subject of Indian woman. That is why, at present, De is a leading fiction writer. R.S. Pathak also feels that:

Despite their titillating details, what Shobha De’s novels indicate is the arrival of a new Indian woman eager to defy rebelliously against the well entrenched moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system. Her novels are not just a series of “bodice rippers”. (35-36)

Shobha De is a complete feminist writer and projects the minor status of the women in Indian societies. Through her writings, she spreads the message of revolting back for the rights of the women. She concentrates on women’s problems and gives a new approach to them. She is under constant criticism for shattering the patriarchal hegemony and raising a voice of protest against male dominance. About De’s determination as a woman to assert herself, K.K Sinha observes:-

She has an agenda, and she will work towards it single- mindedly and even alone if need be ..... so give her way while there’s time or she will take stock of the situation and strike again and again in different ways to assert her identity. (90-96)

Namita Gokhale is a very popular Indian novelist of the present time. She was born in Lucknow in 1956 and spent her childhood between New Delhi and Nainital, in the foothills of Himalayas. She was married to Rajiv Gokhale, when she was only eighteen and moved to Bombay. Her first publication was the film magazine Super,

Namita Gokhale is one of the founders and co-directors of *Translating Bharat*, a series of conferences and literary events organized by the literary consultancy, *Siyahi*. Publishing is Gokhale’s other love. She is also a Director (with Neena Gupta) at *Yatra Books*, which publishes original and translated works in English, Hindi, Marathi and Urdu, in collaboration with Penguin India. She has also published the *Namita Gokhale Editions* (in association with Roli Books). She is a founder–director of the Jaipur Literature Festival along with the author, William Dalrymple, which started in 2006. She is currently the member-secretary of Indian Literature Abroad (ILA), an initiative by Ministry of Culture, Government of India, to translate and promote contemporary literature from the Indian languages into the major international languages, particularly the six UNESCO languages. She contributes regularly to several newspapers and magazines with focus on women’s issues and current literary criticism. Although she had a passion for Literature, it is ironic that she could not fulfil her dream to study English Literature.
Gokhale’s first novel *Paro* created a stir by its frankness in the early 80s, and pioneered the sexually frank genre which made Shobha De popular. This work is a satire upon a certain class of people living in and around New Delhi and Mumbai. It may be the first Indian novel in English that accurately and unfussily describes and captures the speech of metropolitan, westernized Indian. Elite class received it with much admiration. A lot of critics failed to admire her first attempt as few episodes involving sexual activities were frankly depicted in this novel. Even the London Magazine remarked; “*Paro* is a magnificent creation”. Regarding her career as novelist, in the newspaper *Spectrum*, there was an interview of Namita Gokhale, in which she stated:

Every novel has a life of its own, a kundali of its own, which has very little to do with purely literary merit, a sort of autonomous existence, *Paro*, reached out to a lot of people, and I am grateful that people still remember it so many years later.(web)

Unfortunately, Namita Gokhale was stricken with cancer of the uterus while finishing *Paro*. A few years later her husband died. She fell seriously ill shortly after her husband died and confined to bed for almost two years. She had to look after herself simultaneously; she was bound to fulfil her commitments to society and her two young daughters. John A. Shedy has also told earlier:

“A ship in harbour is safe but that is not

What ships are built for”.(web)

She is also not made only to stand at the edge of the sea but to sail through the world by her excellent gift of writing. After all, how truly our illustrious poet Shri Rabindranath Tagore has remarked:

“You can’t cross the sea by standing and staring
At the water in the beach.” (web)

After a storm trees also take deeper roots. Merely, worrying is the misuse of imagination. She has learnt to survive and to endure the calamities and misfortunes courageously. She accepts that one can be destroyed but should not be defeated. In this life everyone has to toil for him or herself. As the Hebrew sage Hilel has rightly said:

“If I am not for myself
Who will be?
And when I am not for myself,
What am I?
And, if not now, when? (web)

The author is a strong lady. Soon she recovers from illness. She gets optimistic and determined to proceed ahead in the moments of turmoil. And consequently, she enriched English literature with her books of fiction that followed. Now she set forth to write her second book *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* - an ironic fable about street life in Delhi. It was adapted into a musical play. This is the story of Gudiya and her almost aged grandmother (Ammi), who, alongwith Gudiya’s mother fled from their small town to the suburb of a Delhi. Experience of love and passion, illness and death, has shaped Gokhale’s work. For the author, the act of writing implies not only a therapeutic act, but also a general expression of experience in various spheres of life of different characters of her fiction. Gudiya’s picaresque adventures cover a cross-section of Indian society. Gokhale exposes the humorous underbelly of merchandised religiosity. She says that the devaluation of Hinduism from spirituality to mob mentality has hurt her the most. In the book there is element of surprise and suspense
to make the text interesting. It is a gripping and enthralling book that wears its many complexities lightly.

*A Himalayan Love Story* is the fine picture of the lives of Parvati and Mukul. They both grew up in the Himalayan town of Nainital. The beauty of this wistful tale has been stated in a review of the book by *India Today*:

*A Himalayan Love Story* fills by you with all the softness of a Kumaoni shadow yet stays within you with the shy resonance of leaves falling on a sunlit hillside. Gokhale’s characterization is so powerful and real, it seems the writer has a stealthy knack of almost whispering in your ear as you read along, without the subjects ever intruding. The best writers live in the real world of fiction. Namita Gokhale seems to have moved in a long time ago.

Namita Gokhale grew up in Nainital and remains obsessed by the air of the mountains. All her work seems to be stuck with her personality as a Kumaoni Brahmin girl. “In *A Himalayan Love Story*, in which she traced the lives of two-star-crossed lovers who grew up in Nainital, bears testimony to her overpowering sentiment for the region” (Gokhale). Her works are full of passion, where she expresses herself through her writings. Her uninhibited self is projected in her novels as well as in her articles and interviews.

Gokhale’s novel *The Book of Shadows* (1999) is a fine texture of human psychology. This is a compelling story, which consists of strange, disturbing, pleasant and horrifying memories and leaves deep layer of consciousness disturbed by analysis and it remains entangled with the shadows of the past forever. Here the author speaks through Rachita. Under her cosmopolitan manner, Gokhale’s persona remains that of the Kumaoni Brahmin woman as she is a Kumaoni by birth. Living amidst the cool,
beautiful, grand splendour of nature, the author herself has been a witness to several exciting and interesting events that occurred in the hills. This grotesque tale is intimately and vividly narrated. It is partly ghostly story and partly it has romance. The descriptions of the natural beauty of her dwelling place also provide a feel of fragrance of the hilly environment to its readers. Her writing is like a sharp pencil etching out character and briefly highlighting each shadow in turn. Beneath the surface of *The Books of Shadows*, lie a lot of revelations about Gokhale’s personal feelings. This book was written after Gokhale lost her husband Rajiv. Owing to this she had been going through a lot of pain, and the novel was an outcome of the anger and pain that was inside her. She says:

I did not realize that this was a book about pain. It’s only after I finished the book that I saw its purpose. In the book, Rachita the connecting link of the story feels a lot of anger. I had lost my husband some years ago. And although on the surface, I looked graceful, there was a lot of anger inside me. That’s what I fuelled Rachita with. (qtd. in Murry 75)

Gokhale’s next book, *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* (2005), is inspired by the play Abhigyana Shakuntalam, written in Sanskrit by the great Indian Poet Kalidasa in ancient times. It is a delicately woven novel on the life of a rustic belle Shakuntala from the hill forest and draws together religion, myth, philosophy, faith, fears and rich details of customs and rituals of ancient India. Original and heart rending, Shakuntala enthralls in its vivid portrayal of the tragic life of a woman whose desire to live on her own terms is thwarted at every turn by circumstance and the age in which she lives. This novel has been described as the plight of the oppressed woman, by Manjulika Rahman and is gorgeously, touchy-feely tales that bring back
memories of the feminist 1960’s. Namita Gokhale combines her extraordinary gift for storytelling with history, religion and philosophy to craft a timeless tale that transcends its ancient setting. This is a wonderful book as has been stated in a review of the book by *India Today*. “A hauntingly beautiful book”

The seeds of the novel *Priya in Incredible Indyaa* (2011) are to be found in Namita Gokhale’s first novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, published in 1984. Through the eyes of a middle class girl who works her way through social and professional ranks to become the wife of a minister, Gokhale’s novel peeps successfully, the loneliness of a housewife. It is a story about Priya Kaushal, wife of Suresh Kaushal, who in an unexpected windfall turns into a successful minister at the centre. This change in fortune is quite sudden and Priya’s lifestyle transforms overnight. She suddenly finds herself in the midst of political and page 3 glitterati and has new challenges to face everyday.

She has twin sons, Luv and Kush. Luv is more artistically inclined while Kush is the more pragmatic one with aspirations of following his father’s political footsteps. Author has habitually inserted all kinds of Hindi words like ajeeb, adla badla and yaari-type hug as well. Somewhere Suresh talks about India being a serpent with its hood being in the 21st century and tail still being in the dark ages. Gokhale has become a renowned fiction writer, as a renowned publisher like Penguin has published most of her books which speaks about the quality and popularity of her works.

Again we find Gokhale’s non-fictional work *Mountain Echoes: Reminiscences of Kumaoni Women* is set in the Kumaoni hills. This book is a great feminist work of Gokhale. She has dedicated this book to the unsung heroines of the hills, to their stubborn courage and indomitable will for she writes: “In our mountains women are
rarely afraid. They are strong, direct, loyal, and in the most situations, they are free to speak their minds” (Gokhale). It is a book of biography narrating the reminiscences of a generation of older women who belonged to the families of upper middle class are shown contributing to the welfare of the society in their own way. These four ladies affirm the strength and vitality of Kumauni culture. Gokhale’s intention has always been to “turn the stereotypical romantic novel on its head” (Gokhale).

*The Book of Shiva* (2001) is an impassioned narration of the Hindu deity Lord Shiva, who is found presiding among all other deities of Hindu mythology. Gokhale’s deep study about Shiva is admired greatly among her readers, as it is a rare book available on the subject. This is a stupendous effort of Gokhale not attempted by any of her contemporary novelists.

Namita Gokhale had retold the Indian epic—*The Mahabharata*, in an illustrated version to show why the *Mahabharata* is timeless and always relevant. She is also committed to translating and showcasing the best of Indian literature writing and engaging the vibrant languages of Indian sub-continent in an inventive dialogue for connecting with the rest of the world. A long, long time ago, in the ancient lands of India, known in those days as Bharatvarsha, a family quarrel grew into a bloody war. There had been wars before, and there have been wars since, but that mighty battle has become a part of the mythology and history of India.

Namita Gokhale brings alive India’s richest literary treasure with disarming ease and simplicity. She retells this timeless tale of mortals and immortals and stories within stories, of valour, deceit, glory and despair, for today’s young reader in a clear, contemporary style. A brilliant series of evocative and thoughtful illustrations bring the epic to life in a vibrant visual feast. Matchless in its content and presentation it is a book that will be cherished by readers of all ages.
In Search of Sita presents essays, conversation and commentaries that explore different aspects of her life. The book analyzes the various aspects of epic, as written by Valmiki. Sita is an obedient, submissive, ever faithful wife, a woman whose destiny it was to suffer in silence, never getting her due from the one person for whom she goes through it all—her husband, Rama. However she is remembered, revered or written about, Sita continues to exert a powerful influence on the collective Indian psyche. We realize at the end of the book how wrong we were. The Sita we know has been as much a literary victim of patriarchy as women are even today.

Namita Gokhale’s works are exquisite specimens of filigree works as she has written on wide range of subjects. She is a versatile writer with creative genius, who believes in new age fiction. However, regarding her depiction of Indian woman in her fiction, question has often been raised. It can be admitted that every Indian woman does not behave like Paro, Priya and Shakuntala, but the old order is almost dead though the new is yet to be born fully. Her every book is written very sincerely studded with the facts and also certain amount of the paranormal activities, because the aim of the author is to harness a way of seeing things beyond her own limitations and expanding the limits of the reader’s assessment.

Namita Gokhale, in her novels, has tried to illustrate how a woman can use her power to create a space for her existence. Her protagonists have no wish to hurt anyone physically, emotionally or spiritually, but beyond that, life for them is to be lived without any bounds. Even in all her novels Namita Gokhale has been able to project a woman’s vision of freedom and independence. This exceptionally free spirit of theirs gives a lot of energy. Energy flows when one lives freely, without letting others define or limit a person. Though Namita Gokhale believes in rituals to formally invoke energy, even otherwise it is all around her, mainly due to her fiercely
independent spirit. In her novels women characters dominate and are ready to go through life without their men. Vinay Kripal aptly remarks:

Namita Gokhale exhibits an ideology of a sub culture of North Indian upper middle class women, those who need to kill time in dinner parties, gossip about the shared secrecy of sexual escapades look at woman’s world with a vacillation between the woman’s authoritarian world view (feminine) and being an object of man’s world. (78)

Conventionally an Indian woman is placed in second position to male because she remains directly under the protection of a male person since birth to her death. A keen observation of the position of woman in society brings to the fore, the pathetic condition of her being woman, who has been defined, woman, who has been at the centre of all human beings, and has sadly and surreptitiously been robbed of her own individuality. This situation has naturally excited the author and accordingly, her women characters are inclined to deviate from adhering to the male supremacy in Indian society. It is clear from her female characters like Paro, Priya, Rachita, Shakuntala for they have kept themselves at an independent place and advancing towards achieving emancipation individually.

In the book Indian Feminisms, in the chapter titled Women’s Writing, Namita Gokhale has stated that the very phrase women’s writing irritates her. She advocates a free flowing and spontaneous, rather than a rigid and confrontational attitude. According to Gokhale to evolve, women’s writing must learn to rise above the ceiling and observe the joint and mutual predicament of our race. Quoting John Lenon she writes, they must, “join the human race”. Namita Gokhale also has natural, irrepressible ability to write. The stories of Namita Gokhale seem rather fascinating, revolving around the restless and destined turns of the women she portrays. She
herself portrays the picture perfect of a novelist - that restlessness in her eyes holds out even whilst she is talking, walking or just about doing anything. Regarding her writing style and innovative ways Vinay Kripal remarks:

That is what happens to a writer who says something new in an innovative way. That is what happened to Hemingway when he became famous first in France rather than in the U.S.A. what is important is that Namita Gokhale has something to say, her Indian reviewers fail to recognize the technique which her compulsive readers explain as the appetite for a conceptual text peculiar to woman’s mind (82).

Namita Gokhale speaks passionately about the empowerment of women, of the return of female power, thereby empowering the individual. Being a Post – Feminist, the age of the unisex, is accepted as human personality. Thus the relationships between men and women must be complimentary to be strong. She is not so gender obsessed so as to say that women are of a kind and hence must keep to their kind. On the contrary she portrays the idea that women are of everybody; they are of human soul, human strength. Namita Gokhale is also a social critic and uses her novels to criticize the society. The language she uses is lively, sometimes humorous, pathetic, romantic and entirely attracting. Her style is spontaneous and vivid. She is a feminist or rather neo-feminist, as she suggests that women should be ready to work with men in order to bring about remarkable changes in society. R.S. Pathak also says:

Since the novelist has a woman as the central character and the narrative is primarily concerned with what she observes, feels, and experiences, we may be tempted to get the impression that the main
aim of the novel is to project or support some sort of feminist position.

(188)

Thus, Namita Gokhale and Shobha De both are the significant writers of this century and a great supporter of women’s issues. So they can be ranked with Shashi Deshpande, Khushwant Singh, Nina Sibal, V.S. Naipaul, R.K. Narayan and Bhabani Bhattacharya.
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