CHAPTER- II

Feminism: A Survey
FEMINISM: A SURVEY

ONE IS NOT BORN A WOMAN;
ONE BECOMES ONE.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR. (The Second Sex)

The present research work is an endeavour to compare as well as contrast the feminist aspect in the novels of Shobha De and Namita Gokhale. Since these writers belong to the same period and can be considered as the writers of same strain, make their fictional works an interesting study. However, before going to compare their fictional works, it would be apt to survey about feminism.

Woman has always been projected as secondary and inferior. The bias against women can be seen rightway from the day one of creation. It is said that God created man in his own image. The suggestion is that God is male. Further, it is said that God, after creating man, made woman from the rib of man. As Adam the first man on the earth, remarks about Eve; “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man” (Genesis 2:23). The suggestion is that man is created first, and woman is taken out of man. In other words, woman is secondary to man.

“The situation of woman is that she, a free and autonomous being like all creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other” (Beauvoir 29). Women are equally valuable as men but the fact that they do not have equal socio-cultural rights as men have, they, therefore, turn out to be subordinate or oppressed creatures. The cause of such a protest Sarah Grimke traces in a perennial sin the male has ever committed against the female—

Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote
his selfish qualification to minister to his sexual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill.(10)

In short, woman lacked masculine consideration and respect in history. It is against this very suppression of women’s rights that feminism finds its aim and sustenance. Feminism originates in the perception that there is something wrong with society’s treatment of woman. It attempts to analyze the reason for and dimensions of women’s oppression, and to achieve women’s liberation. Basically it is “…an analysis of women’s subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it”(Singh 8). Thus the very basis of feminism is an attempt at reformation in the mindset of the people.

It was the nineteenth century French dramatist Alexander Dumas who first coined the term feminism in 1872. Since then ‘feminism’ has several strands and various connotations but the core idea, however, has always been more or less the same. It has always meant a belief that women should have the same rights, power and opportunity that men have. If we go to define feminism literally we find that the term feminism has its origin from the Latin word “Femina” meaning ‘woman’ and thereby refers to the advocacy of woman’s right, status and power at par with man. It is, in fact, a consciousness and awareness of being victimized by the male dominated society and also an attempt to come out of this centuries old injustice. It does not work to control men, nor do the feminists hate man, but work for men and women to enjoy equal rights. Men may be feminists too, if they wish to support women’s rights. We must accept that feminism is not concerned with a group of people it wants to benefit but with a type of injustice it wants to eliminate. Equally all women’s fiction is not feminist fiction. Feminist literary critics like Toril Moi and Rosalind Coward
have clarified that the words feminist and feminism are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new women’s movement which ideas about women, specific to or emanating from feminists. This emerged in the late 1960’s. Therefore the very fact of being female does not necessarily guarantee a feminist approach. Feminist writing is markedly, characterized by its political commitment to the struggle against all forms of patriarchy and sexism. Toril Moi observes “In a non-sexist, non-patriarchal society, feminism will no longer exist” (5). For the woman of the third world, feminism means a rebellion wherein she struggles to achieve a racial, social, economic and spiritual equality with man. There are those who argue for a much tighter definition of feminism, and as Delmar points out:

There are those who claim that feminism does have a complex of ideas about women, specific to or emanating from feminists. This mean that it should be possible to separate out feminism and feminists from the multiplicity of those concerned with women’s issues. It is by no means absurd to suggest that you don’t have to be a feminist to support women’s rights to equal treatment, and that not all those supportive of women’s demands are feminists. In this light feminism can claim its own history, its own practices, its own ideas, but feminists can make no claim to an exclusive interest in or copyright over problems affecting women. Feminism can thus be established as a field (and this even if scepticism is still needed in the face of claims or demands for a unified feminism), but can not claim women as its domain. (qtd. in Freedman 3)

So far the legal terminology is concerned the term “man” includes the term “woman”. As Redstockings Manifesto states – “We can not rely on existing
ideologies as they are all products of a male supremacist culture”(Singh 13).

Feminism is a complex word and has no precise meaning. What it actually stands for may be easily misunderstood. What exactly do we mean by feminism? Does it merely mean female-ism or femaleness, the qualities which all women possess, not only human females but may be the other females in the non-human world. Though we can’t listen to them, perhaps they also feel the same constraints, same pressure of motherhood and child-bearing. Even unmarried girls feel the constraints of parents, of ethnic communities to which they belong, the social groups in which they live, of the schools they go to. Even in some convent schools the girls who used their left hand to write, received severe punishment from the nuns as they thought the left hand was the hand of devils. Even in one case a girl developed a stammer. Therefore, while talking of feminist tensions, probably we are talking of the tensions of life. The feminist tensions are the tensions of living whether one is a man or a woman. The term ‘feminism’ troubles Alice Jardine:

Who and what, then do we mean by “feminist”? That world…. poses some serious problems. Not that we would want to end up by demanding a definition of what feminism is, and therefore, of what one must do, say, and be, if one is to acquire the epithet; dictionary meanings are suffocating, to say the least.(20)

Feminism is committed to the struggle for equality for women, an effort to make women become like men. Now, the question is whether feminism is some kind of chauvinistic aggressive way of living like dressing up like a man. In 1968, women dressed up like men to assert themselves. Now, in America, men also want to hit back. They argue that if a woman can dress up like man, why can’t a man do so? If there are feminist texts, there are also masculine texts. There is a very fine book by
Norman Mailer called *The Prisoner of Sex* which is his reply to this kind of chauvinistic expression of feminism. But the struggle for equal rights historically, socially and politically emphasizes the value of women as they are. The argument is based on the fact that women are as valuable as men.

One can say that feminism is a kind of social revolt against convention, like living outside marriage. If that is so, is this so very new that we are talking about it today? Even then we have had examples earlier within literature, of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and of George Eliot who in the nineteenth century lived outside marriage.

As a philosophy of life, it opposes women’s subordination to men in the family and society, along with men’s claims to define what is best for women without consulting them; thereby offering a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanism.(Singh 65)

So it can be said that it is not revolutionary rather transformational. Now the question is whether feminism means a sense of personal courage. There are various examples of personal courage shown by women as Rosalind in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*; who puts on man’s attires and goes about looking for her lover. Sita, who is normally viewed as an example of anti-feminism, of submission, must have been very courageous to have resisted a man like Ravana for one full year. Our Puranas present a whole constellation of women like Sita, Savitri, Anasuya and Draupadi who had waged wars and still emerged successfully. Jardine offers a definition when she writes-“feminism is generally understood as a movement from the point of view of, by, and for women”(15).

So far, feminism has not been defined in precise terms, what has been offered is a prescription of feminism. For instance, if we take into account American models,
they are very outspoken and the British models all feminists slowly become respectable, or reclaimed into the male world order. If we take into account the French models of feminism, it would imply the greater sexual expression. For example Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* is very much concerned about the physical suppression of women. Kaern Offen analyzed the concept of feminism when he says:

Feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and movement for sociopolitical change based on critical analyses of male privilege and women’s subordination within any given society.(151)

The word ‘feminism’ however must be understood in its broadest sense as referring to an intense awareness of identity as a woman, and interest in feminine problems. Its meaning should not be restricted to the advocacy of women’s rights. But the word feminism has picked up so many connotations of late that it seems to have no precise meaning and what it stands for may be easily misunderstood. According to Janet Radcliffe Richards, feminism has a strong fundamental case, is intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that “Women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex”(1). The proposition is to be regarded as constituting the essence of feminism. In a nutshell feminism can be defined:

…as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome; whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group, when women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, the idea of feminism materializes.

(Nahal 30)
In the words of Sonia Johnson: “Women can not serve two masters at once who are urgently beaming antithetical orders. Either we believe in patriarchy –the role of men over women-or we believe in equality”? (web)

Now the question arises what are the objectives of feminism. Olsen exemplifies the key interests of many feminist critics in terms of (1) the desire to rediscover the lost work of women writers, while providing a context that would be supportive of contemporary women writers, (2) the wish to declare the experiences and perceptions that have been unheard. Tagore said- “O woman, you are one half woman and one half dream”(LIX).

Feminism attempts not at mere individual awareness but in raising the consciousness of an entire culture. It is a literary, cultural, political and social movement. Elaine Showalter, an American feminist critic, who laid the foundation of the feminist movement, pleaded for one structural framework of the women writers. The credit goes to Showalter for uniformity to the feminist genre of literature. She told the women writers to rely on their personal experience and rewrite, re-examine their cultural and literary history. The development is outlined by Elaine Showalter in her book A Literature Of Their Own (1977), very convincingly, in three stages:

The term ‘Feminine’ is used to identify the writers between the periods of 1840-1880. The period covers writers like George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell who are ‘gentlewomen’. They merely imitate and project the literary and feminine traditions of their times to equal the male intellectual achievement.

The term ‘Feminist’ is used for writers of 1880-1920, for the writers of these times makes a protest against patriarchal modes. Literature is used to present the injustice done to woman and the woman artist considered it her mission and responsibility to champion her suffering sisters.
The term ‘Female’ is used to refer to the phase of 1920 onwards, because it is a phase of self discovery, turning inward, not paying heed to opposition, a search for identity and liberation as manifested in the writings of the representatives of the female phase such as Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson and Rebecca West. Here we find women rejecting both imitation and protest.

For better comprehension of Feminism it is essential to study briefly the arguments of the anti-feminists. The resistance to women’s demands has stemmed from three specific factors in America and England which served as a strong support to the arguments of the anti-feminists in their day especially to the paternalistic notion that women were innately unfit to assume responsibility and require masculine guidance and protection. First, there has been a brutal and unabashed misogyny, which has appeared sporadically in the outbursts of individual men like Jonathan Swift in the eighteenth century and Norman Mailer in our own time. A second and more notable factor is based on the belief that woman’s nature whether divinely ordained or biologically determined, requires her to seek fulfillment in submissive domesticity. A third is based on the belief of the nineteenth-century scientific confirmation of a negative feminine stereotype who interpret that certain biological factors rendered women temporarily insane and made them lifelong invalids. They say that the psychological qualities were rooted in physical properties. Conservatives also emphasis that the care of the female psyche consisted on the one hand of her high and varied emotional life and on the other hand of her restricted and simple mental life. A woman was thus less egoistical and more capable of making personal sacrifices. Later research has disproved these so called scientific ‘facts’.

Some antifeminists opposed women’s entry into the workforce, political office, and the voting process, as well as the lessening of male authority in families.
They argue that the change of women’s roles is a destructive force that endangers the family, or is contrary to religious morals. It is a social disaster that continues to take its toll on the family and contributed to a descent by increasingly disconnected individuals into social chaos. Others argue that the feminist movement has achieved its aims and now seeks higher status for women than for men.

In India we find anti-feminist attitude at the dawn of history when Manu said, centuries back while laying down the social codes:-

Pita Rakshati Koumare, Bharata Rakshati Youvane;

Rakshati Sthavire Putra, Na Stree Svatantra Marhati. (Manusmriti 9:3)
(i.e. the father protects her during adolescence and the husband in her youth, and when she becomes old she is protected by her sons. A woman does not deserve freedom.)

The Bible orders women to submit themselves to their husbands considering them as their Lords. In the Bhagavad-Geeta, women are lumped together with sinners and slaves. The Digambara Jains held the view that women can never attain salvation except by being reborn as men. What has made matters worse is the dichotomy between the idealized image of woman in Literature, i.e. “Yatra naryastu pujyante ramante tatra devatah”(i.e. where females are honoured, there the deities are pleased) and the bitter reality of her position in society. Obscuring the actual predicament of women, the system, instead of working for their liberation, induced them to seek consolation in myths. With such an anti-feminist doctrine, men and governments have argued that when they denied freedom to a woman, they did so with her best interests at heart. Women who were frustrated and dissatisfied with the limits set for them were considered to be subversive or neurotic.
Kate Millett, the main theoretician of new feminism, presents a learned analysis of the political relationship between men and women in *Sexual Politics* (1970). This book is the best analysis of female oppression. Here politics refers to power structured relationships i.e. the arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another. She shows that the myth of the Fall still holds enormous power even in a rationalist era. Adam is forbidden to eat the fruit of life which will mean the knowledge of good and evil. Affected by Satan’s flattery the woman succumbs and eats a simple carnal thing. Eden was a fantasy world without either effort or activity, which was destroyed by the entrance of the female. Only after this does the male fall, and with him the humanity. He is condemned to labour and it is the male toil which results in the building up of civilization. This mythic image of the female as the cause of human suffering and sin is still the foundation of sexual attitudes, for it represents the crucial argument of the patriarchal tradition in the west. She describes sexual politics as the method by which one sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the other subordinate sex. Kate Millett believes that the story is designed in order to blame this entire world’s discomfort on the female. She has presented many grounds to be altered and attenuated to bring about the equality between the sexes in Chapter 2. She has divided *Sexual Politics* as a theory into eight spheres in the relationship between man and woman, where the inequality is the strongest. Namely, it is Ideological, Biological, Sociological, Class, Economic and Educational, Force, Anthropological: Myth and Religion, Psychological.

Feminism deals with gender discrimination. De Beauvoir’s distinction between biological sex and the social creation of the “eternal feminine” is a precursor of the distinction between sex and gender that is common in much feminist theory. As
Ann Oakley, in her book *Sex, Gender and Society*, first published in 1972, explains the distinction between sex and gender:-

> Sex is a word that refers to the biological differences between ‘male’ and ‘female’: the visible difference in genitalice, the related difference in procreative function. ‘Gender’, however, is a matter of culture, it refers to the social classification, into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’.(16)

So the use of gender and more specifically the distinction between sex and gender as a tool of analysis has clearly helped feminist theory to advance on the question of difference, separating the biological from the social and arguing that the two are distinct categories.

Several movements of feminist ideology have developed over the years. If we take the most influential of the current feminist beliefs, one thing becomes clear that specific debates over feminist questions cannot be settled in isolation. It can only be resolved in the context of a theoretical framework derived from the fundamental issues of social and political philosophy. The conservative view is that the social differentiation between the sexes is not unjust as the women are inherently better adapted then men to the traditional female sex role. But at the same time they do not consider the female role inferior to that of the male.

Liberal feminism or Moderate feminism refers to the tradition finding classic expression in John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* and has continued in various moderate groups like the National Organization for Women (NOW), which agitate for legal reforms to improve the status of women. It claims women’s oppression basically lies in the lack of political and civil rights. They claim that all women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality. The function of the state is to ensure that such assertion is fair. It does this by enforcing equality of
opportunity. Issues important to liberal feminists include – reproductive and abortion rights, sexual harassment, voting, and education, equal pay for equal work, affordable child care, affordable health care and bringing to light the frequency of sexual and domestic violence against women.

Socialist feminism connects the oppression of women to Marxist ideas. The classical Marxists believe that women often face the problem of injustice because they live in a society divided into classes. They feel that women’s oppression is mainly due to their traditional position in the family. Socialist feminists focus their energies on broad change that affects society as a whole, rather than on an individual basis. Feminism must be seen as part of a broader struggle to achieve a communist society. As capitalism and male supremacy reinforce each other, Marx felt when class oppression was overcome, gender oppression would vanish as well. The Marxists indicate the direction in which women must move. Only then will a wife cease to be economically dependent on her husband. For woman’s entrance into public industry, certain fundamental social changes are necessary; all the work which women presently do must come within the sphere of public production. Thus the economic functions performed by the family should be undertaken by the state and this is the only way to end the situation.

Kate Millett’s first book *Sexual Politics* gave birth to radical feminism. Early Radical feminism, arising within second-wave feminism in the 1960s, takes the point of view that society under patriarchal rules is necessarily oppressive to women and that gender is entirely a social construct made for the benefit of patriarchy. Radical Feminism opposes patriarchy, not men. They placed more emphasis on institutions, seeing marriage, family, prostitution, and heterosexuality as all existing to perpetuate the sex role system. They saw all of these as institution to be destroyed. Separatist
feminism and Lesbian feminism is a form of radical feminism that does not support heterosexual relationships. They hold the theory that the cause of women’s oppression is biological. It is formulated by such writers as Ti Grace Atkinson and Shulamith Firestone. The origin of women’s subjection lies in the fact that as a result of the weakness caused by childbearing, women become dependent on men for physical survival. Hence, they conclude that women’s liberation requires a biological revolution. They believe that only now through technology women can be liberated from the fundamental inequalities of the bearing and rearing of children. They talk of achieving this through the development of techniques of artificial reproduction.

Many feminists also fought to change perceptions of female sexual behaviour. Since it was often considered more acceptable for men to have multiple sexual partners, many feminists encouraged women into “sexual liberation” and having sex for pleasure with multiple partners. There is so called third wave, but feminists disagree as to its necessity, its benefits, and its ideas. Often also called “post-feminist”, it can possibly be considered to be the advancement of a female discourse in a world where the equality of woman is something that can be assumed- rather than fought for international feminism.

Thus within the framework of these views a very clear distinction between feminine and masculine qualities were drawn. The feminist too accepted the fact that women were quite different from men but the difference between men and women was in physical strength, in some vital function, disposition and personality tracks. Men were superior in those capacities and qualities that were decisively important to a person’s success in the public life-intelligence, courage, perseverance and discipline. They do not deny the biological differences between a male and a female, but there is
no reason to presume, as men do, that these physical differences make them superior to women. The feminist maintain that woman is not born but made by the society.

To the feminist the ideal woman was one whose mental horizon had broadened and who was interested in more than her family, a woman who was capable of bearing social responsibility and who could independently arrive at her own opinion. The rationalistic view was that she was a woman who had developed into a human being in the very highest sense of the word, a woman who had had the opportunity to develop her general human capacities rather than her feminine ones.

(Basavaraj 159)

In the domain of patriarchal culture, woman is a social construct, a site on which masculine meanings get spoken and masculine desires enacted. The factor which changes a girl into a woman with finality is not simply her anatomy, but the process of social conditioning which influences and educates them feminine roles only. Regarding the purpose of education of women, Kate Millett quotes in her book, Rousseau’s prescription:

The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honoured by them, to educate them, when young to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to make life sweet and agreeable to them – these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy. (74)

To change the conventional image of women constructed by the orthodox society it is necessary to discourage the habit of defining woman as an essence whose
nature is determined biologically and whose sole identity is to produce human species. Simone de Beauvoir asserts that:

Marriage is not only an honorable career one less tiring than many others, it alone permits a woman to keep her social dignity intact and at the same time to find sexual fulfillment. (62)

Twentieth century has witnessed a growing awareness among women regarding their desires, sexuality, self-definition, existence and destiny. Women’s efforts to seek their independence and self-identity started a revolution all over the world which was termed by analysts and critics as ‘Feminism’. Feminists like Toril Moi have also used three terms – ‘female’, ‘feminine’ and ‘feminism’ – to describe the condition of women in society. ‘Female’ is a biological term which distinguishes the two sexes – male and female. ‘Feminine’, on the other hand, is a cultural term which stands for qualities that a man-dominated social structure imposed upon its female members. It expected certain behaviour from her and made her believe that these features of personality and character were natural to her. So she should stick to them. ‘Feminism’ finally is a revolt against this conspiracy of the patriarchal society and aims at liberating woman from the bondage of man. It encourages her to live her own life as per her own wishes and ambitions. Feminism, as a philosophy of life, seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep seated causes of women’s oppression. These are to be found, for example, in the legal system, such as unequal labour, marriage, and divorce laws. Other attitudes are more subtle: for example, hoping that a couple’s first child will be a boy, thinking of a wife’s salary as meant to buy ‘extras’ rather than as supporting the family. Even the pronoun structure of the English language suggests that women are different, that they are ‘other’ not fitting the paradigm of man.
Feminist struggles to balance this unequal social structure. In the early stage i.e. of nineteenth and early twentieth century’s feminists struggle for women’s right to vote in the United Kingdom and the United states. It ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919) in 1960, granting women the right to vote in all states. Then feminists came with the ideas and action associated with the women’s liberation movement beginning in the early 1960’s which campaigned for legal and social equality for women. The phrase “Women’s liberation” first appeared in 1964. The book, *The Feminine Mystique*, (1963) by Betty Friedan, criticized the system causes women to completely lose their identity in that of their family.

Throughout centuries women have had to find their place in the society. It took them long time to realize that they need to fight for their rights. In the early stages of the revolution the feminists and suffragists were condemned by the patriarchal society for adulterating the minds of women with the idea of liberation from their suppressed state and encouraging them to eschew the blind subordination to the established traditional dogmas. However, soon it blossomed into a comprehensive ideology and provided a conceptual basis to women’s struggle to overcome all types of exploitation and attain autonomous self-hood. The issues addressed by the feminist movement have also been actively advocated by the literary writers of different countries. Their expository and creative writing has significantly encouraged and shaped the feminists’ struggle to empower women and help them transcend their deprived status which greatly contributed in bringing about a change in the social milieu. Many literary works by men have also treated women as important subjects. Successive writers have raised women’s issues by expostulating and examining their subordinate situation in the contemporary society. They made a
distinctive contribution in highlighting women’s specific experiences in institutions such as the family, drawing attention to the significance of sexual divisions in the workplace and in the home and exploring the interconnections between public and private life. Although the feminists and feminist writers have been successful in achieving the legal rights for women, yet much has to be done at the social level. The contemporary writers are still striving to provide liberation to the female world from the debilitating socio-cultural constraints and oppressive myths of their respective countries. The journey from self-effacement to self actualization is yet to be covered.

Feminist literature is based on the principles of feminism and includes all literary works centering on a woman’s struggle for equality and to be accepted as a human being, before becoming a victim of gender stereotypes. Feminist writing and criticism began from the day when women tried to express their deprived state in writing. It is difficult to trace the first feminist writer because many writings went unnoticed and unpublished. But as Feminism has its root in France, it claims a longer past there and identifies Christine De Pisan (1364-1430) as the first feminist thinker to spark off the four century long debate on women which came to be known as *Querelles Des femmes*. This debate was essentially oppositional to the male dominant culture prevalent in society. We can count Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1928), Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963) as revolutionary feminist texts, which brought about a fundamental change in the perspective of women towards their previous lives.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* has been hailed as a feminist manifesto and it aroused wide and violent response. She raised her voice against the institutions that denied women any other identity except the one they
acquired through men. In her discussion she has included many claims integral to modern feminism co - education, economic independence, the right to vote, the right to own property, admission to professions and legal equality which express her concern for the inferior state of women in contemporary Europe. It is the first document where the full humanity of women is asserted and the author insists upon its recognition and demands that women should be treated as human beings.

In the book Mary Wollstonecraft’s shows her deepest concerns for women’s education. In the letter to M. Talleyrand Period, a French diplomat, which is illustrated in her book, she requests him to respect the “[….] rights of women” (4) whenever the amendments in the constitution are discussed. She writes:-

But, if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of the mankind, prove first, toward injustice and inconsistency, that they want reason – else this flaw in your NEW CONSTITUTION will ever shew that man must in some shape, act like a tyrant, and tyranny, in whatever part of society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality. (3)

Ironically this book, which anticipated virtually all the demands of the woman’s movement, was read by very few in the nineteenth century. Hers is an extreme ironic example of the treatment posterity accords to a feminist writer.

Another feminist writer is Virginia Woolf whose best known non - fiction work A Room of One’s Own, examines the difficulties that female writers and intellectuals face because men hold disproportionate legal and economic power and the future of women in education and society. She points out that the male dominated ideas of the patriarchal society prevented women from realizing their creativity and true potential. She feels that men and women are interrelated and therefore
subjugation of one by the other destroys the harmony and happiness of life. For her, money is the primary element that prevents women from having a room of their own, and thus having money is of the utmost importance. She uses the room as a symbol for many larger issues, such as privacy, leisure time, and financial independence, each of which is as essential component of the countless inequalities are rectified, women will remain second class citizens and their literary achievements will also be branded as such. Virginia Woolf mentions in her book about Shakespeare’s sister Judith to illustrate that a woman with Shakespeare’s gifts would have been denied the same opportunities to develop them because of the doors that were closed to women. She killed herself and her genius went unexpressed and thus “never wrote a word” (105).

She believes that:

[...] this poet who never wrote a word was buried at the cross roads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women [...] for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh (105-106).

Virginia Woolf is one of the successful feminist writers who have given a new image to women of her time.

In 1953 the English translation of French writer Simone De Beauvoir’s *Le Deuxieme Sexe (The Second Sex* written in 1949) published. The book proved a major influence on the liberation movement and reveals the true picture of subservient female, trained deeply to suit the masculine needs. It has to be accepted as a serious treatise on feministic ethos. She writes:
Thus the passivity that is the essential characteristics of the ‘feminine’ women is a trait that develops in her form the earliest years. But it is wrong to assert that a biological datum is concerned; it is in fact a destiny imposed upon her by her teachers and by society. (19)

The chief argument of De’s book is that in patriarchy women have been forced to occupy a secondary position in relation to men and denied individuality so she termed them as the second sex. She holds the society responsible for developing the feminine qualities in women and restricting their talents to a limited frame of family life. These assumptions dominate social, political and cultural life to such an extent that women have come to believe in them, accept them and enact them in real life. She finds the only solution to the problems of man-women relationship is sharing as women are not weak; nor is there eternal hostility between the sexes. In this way women should be free from the bond of slavery.

Betty Friedan, a well known feminist writer in American literary scene, is a founder of her own women’s organization called NOW (National Organization of Women). Betty Friedan’s book The Feminine Mystique (1963) created awareness among women about their deprived state in the post-war society. It is based mainly on interviews with the Friedan’s classmate, fifteen years after graduation from a women’s college. The book challenges the popular belief that a woman’s place is at her home and that she should find fulfilment in motherhood and domesticity. In the preface she writes:

There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the Feminine Mystique. (9)

On the whole the book is a harsh statement of male superiority and female oppression.
One of the strong male supporters of women’s cause was John Stuart Mill who in his *The Subjection Of Women* (1869) showed serious concern over some of the issues earlier raised by Wollstonecraft. A true democrat and a champion of freedom, he believed that women’s oppression was because of the system. He strongly felt the need for women’s education and the power of earning to the dignity of women. In America the black feminists were motivated by the revolutionary ideas of white feminists and subsequently many great black feminist writers like Toni Morrison, Anna Julia Cooper, Alice Walker and Gayl Jones communicated their black feminist impulse through their literature in 1970’s. In their literature they exposed the double slavery of black men and white men by black women.

Thus we see that the aim of different groups or feminist writers is the same, i.e. to liberate women from male oppression and to promote women’s rights. All of them believe that breaking down male and female stereotypes and giving women equality is the only way to the better world. Although the acceptance and popularity of the feminist credo was initially propagated by socio-political factors, yet the important and vital role played by literature in popularizing the idea of female emancipation, equality and empowered can never be undermined. Many other writers must have raised the issue of women emancipation earlier too, but their writings did not receive desired attention, appreciation and consideration. However, all the feminists earlier or later want a humanist and unprejudiced attitude towards women.

Feminism is trying to organize women in such a manner that women from different walks of society may come closer and by developing companionship empower themselves. In fact, the western feminist movement influenced Indian feminist movement. Even in ancient India, women’s lot was no better and they were assigned secondary roles in a male dominated society by religions and conventions.
But it was not so in Vedic age. There are numerous references in Vedic literature to show that women were held in high esteem in society and enjoyed equal rights between men and women. It was only in the latter Vedic period down to the present one that polarized the sexes; males oppressed females and treated them as other or similar to lower caste. History has shown us that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers; since the earliest days. They have thought best to keep women in the state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her. The taboos laid down by Manu were tightened, that followed to restrict women's life to the family. Her position in the family as well as in society kept on changing all through the ages and is almost invariable and inferior one. She is scarcely given any freedom.

If we observe the condition of women invoice India, we find that they are worshipped on one hand and treated badly on the other as Virginia Woolf would put it:-

Imaginevively she is of the highest importance. Practically she is completely insignificant......Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell and was the property of her husband”.(45-46)

Indian women are happy to live in the four walls of their houses, where men kept them to look after their kitchen and the children. As in the poem *The Princess* Tennyson has written:-

Man for the field and women for the hearth
Man for the sword and for the needle she
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey; *(The Princess 5, 427)*

But those were the days when male domination had not grown to monstrous proportion. Women were happy under their protective veil and enjoyed their due respect. The condition of women declined after 5th century in India. After 5th century even the gotras of wives were to be changed accordingly to gotras of the husbands. An ideal kind of marriage was that in which the age of girl should be $1/3$ of the age of bridegroom. Normal age of girls for marriage was eight years. In later Vedic age the position of women declined in society. They were denied the right to enter into Sabha and Samiti. They were deprived of property right in comparison to male successors. Even their birth was being discouraged. According to *Aitereya Brahman* boys were viewed to be the protector of the family, while the girls – sorrow of the family. According to *Maitrayini Sahinta* woman were compared with wine and dice. *Abhijanasakuntalam* of Kalidas mentions a term ‘Avgunthan’ for Pardah system, *Meghadoota* of Kalidas mentions about Davdasi tradition. Davdasi being kept in Mahakala (Ujjain) temple. Thus the status of women in India had reached a low from the point of view of literacy, individuality, health, social status, freedom of movement and economic independence.

In early India a widow was expected to live in austerity, but the Kshatriya caste should preferably immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her husband especially if he had died a hero’s death. This would make her a ‘Sati’. The earliest historical evidence for this practice dates from AD 510, when it was commemorated in an inscription at ‘Earn’. Subsequently, incidents of Sati increased. Intended originally as a ritual death for the Kshatriya wife of the Kshatriya hero dying in battle, the ritual of becoming a Sati was later adopted by other castes as well.
In India feminist movement can be divided into three phases. In the first phase started from 1850 and lasted till 1915 feminist movement was initiated by men to uproot the social evil of Sati, to allow widow remarriage, to forbid child marriage and to reduce illiteracy. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who was also awarded by British ‘The Morning Star of Modern Age’, is the name known to all. He did a lot to uproot all these social evils applied especially on the female members of the society.

During 1915-1947, which can be said II phase of feminist movement, the struggle against colonial rule intensified nations and became the pre-eminent cause. Gandhi legitimized and expanded India women’s public activities by initiating them into the non-violent movement andbestowing them political participation, women’s franchise, communal awards, and leadership roles in political parties. The freedom movement thus brought together for the first time men and women at public meetings, at political rallies and in social work. The Indian women broke the barriers of isolation and seclusion imposed upon her for centuries.

The III phase feminist movement began with Chipko movement of 1974 in which woman played a large part. In recent time too, females are fighting for freedom, equal pay, gender, abortion, breast feeding, co-operation, divorce, independence, maternity leave, non-violence, sexuality, domestic violence, patriarchy, prostitution, working place rights for all legal rights regarding property and against all other forms of discrimination prevailed in society. Today in India ‘Women’s Empowerment’ is a government slogan. In the 1st decade of the 21st century Indian women are seemingly protected by law. The acceptance of Smt. Pratibha Patil as the President of the country is an example of the position of today’s women, although this did not mean emancipation of woman at large. As P.S. Balasubramaniam also said:-
By the beginning of the 19th century women in India were hardly educated. Moreover there was a superstitious feeling among the majority of Hindu families that if a girl was educated she will soon become a widow. (71)

This was according to a report of William Adam on the state of Education in Bengal in 1836. In 1819 Christian Missionaries opened girls’ schools. But the parents were hesitant to send their girl children to school. In addition to this, the fact that parents was subjected to social boycott. There was yet another opinion that those girls who received ‘western education’ would make their husbands slaves. These contradictions can best be understood by examining the Indian social structure which comprises institutions like caste, joint family, religious values and practices consolidating women’s subordinate position. In this respect Maitreyi Mukhopadhyay says:-

It should be emphasized that the poor status of women, their oppression and exploitation cannot be examined as an isolated problem in Indian society. Although the status of women constitutes a problem in most societies in the rigidly hierarchical and inequitable social structure which exists in India, the relative inferiority and superiority of various roles is much more clearly defined. The inequality and subordination of women is an instrument or function of the social structure. (qtd. in Saini 96)

The Church Missionary Society was more successful in South India where it opened its first boarding school for girls in Tirunelveli in 1821. In North India, female education was encouraged by Arya Samaj, a reformist Hindu sect which followed the techings of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. “The Wood’s Dispatch in 1854 was the first
official proclamation pleading for the encouragement of women’s education” (Balasubramaniam 71). In 1850’s Ishwarchand Vidyasagar started many primary schools in the villages of Bengal. John Drinkwater Bethune established the first women’s college in India in Calcutta in 1849. In 1851 Jotiba Phule came forward to educate the scheduled caste girls in Poona. Nevertheless, there was growing awareness among the women themselves about the value of education. In pre-independent India, there used to be a distinct discrimination between boys and girls with regard to education even in upper class families where the value of education was recognized and appreciated. But this situation has changed drastically in the course of time, particularly after independence. To begin with, highly qualified men started showing a preference for educated girls. Since then there has been no looking back, as women also started clamoring for education for which they had been indifferent for ages. Mahtab Giri gives us the old maxim: “When you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman you educate a family and a nation, is not an exaggeration”(79).

These attempts provided the much needed impetus and many Indian women writers like Krupabai Santhianathan, Toru Dutt, Smt. Swarnkumari Ghosal, Shevantibai Nikambe, and Cornelia Sorabji took a hesitant step and highlighted the pathetic condition of women belonging to different sections of society. The change in the social milieu and its affect on the status and psychology of women encouraged the Indian writers to take cognizance of women’s issues. Many regional writers Yashpal Nagar, Ashk, Homen Borgchain, Bimal Mitra, N. Mitra, Prem Chand, Narayan Sanyal, critically analyzed the prevailing inhumane practices and reflected this underprivileged class in their writings. Though the English Prose writing in India was started by Raja Rammohan Roy, the novels of Bankim Chandra and Lal Behari Day
are accepted as the first authentic examples of fictional writing in English. Mantagini, the female protagonist of Bankim Chandra’s *Rajamohan’s Wife* (1864), is a woman who values her feelings and affirms her individuality. She represents those Indian women who protest against conventional mores and break the barriers of self-abnegation and denial. Lal Behari Day’s *Govinda Samanta* is a realistic novel, which describes the socio-economic changes occurring in contemporary society. Women characters of novel – Aduri, a widow who kowtows to evil practices related with women and Malati a rebellious woman who is not ready to succumb to the atrocities of her mother-in-law, form only a part of the plot which adroitly demonstrates the leap from traditional to modern womanhood. The next generation of writers which appeared just before the Second World War, i.e. in the 1930’s, picked up existing social customs and constraints as themes of their work. The first major thrust in Indian English writing came in the mid-1930’s when the big trio- R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao appeared on the scene. Through their writings they turned their attention to the realistic problems of the poor as well as the treatment of woman. Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* and *Coolie* as well as Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* illustrate there tendencies amply, although the ideological leanings of these two authors were markedly different. Mulk Raj Anand combines the reality with ideal in his presentation of down trodden women while Raja Rao’s women are the victims of domestic injustice and tyrannical tradition. In the character of Ratna there is a spirit of revolt against the age old traditional prejudices against the widow:

That young widow, who not only went about the street like a boy, but even more her hair to the lift like concubine, and she still kept her bangles, nose rings and earrings, and when she was asked why she
behaved as though she had not lost her husband, she said that was nobody’s business. (Rao 70)

R.K.Narayan has depicted two kinds of women characters - one group portrays the meek and submissive women as in Margayya’s wife in *The Financial Expert* and Savitri in *The Dark Room*. The others try to assert themselves in their desire for a career or their need for physical gratification like Daisy and Rosie in the novels *The Painter of Signs* and *The Guide* respectively, yet in most of his novels women are not treated with equality. In comparison to him, Bhabhani Bhattacharya’s women characters, though somewhat dominated by their male counterparts and patriarchal customs, are still full of life and hope to have a better future. Kajoli in *So Many Hungers*, Meera in *A Goddess Named Gold*, Sumita in *Shadow from Ladakh* are optimistic women and the epitome of all virtues, but inspite of being pure and noble, they are victimized. To Bhattacharya, women are a source of strength and thus their contribution is significant not only to their families, but also to their country. Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand have not taken up the theme of women’s emancipation independently. One does find authentic portrayals of women in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan, but these women characters are part of the narrative and are not central to it.

After achieving independence, a new sphere of literature appeared when writers like Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Attia Hosein, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Santa Rama Rau, Shobha De, Manju Kapur, Namita Gokhale and Nayantara Sahgal came out with their works that changed the face of Indian English Novel. The mid 1950’s and 1960’s mark the second important stage or second generation of Indian English writing, where the writers focus on themes projecting the miseries and complexities of human lives and concentrating on individual predicament. They have
opened up a new vista of human nature and man-woman relationship. The problems discussed in their novels are individual, rather than universal as they projected the inner psychological turmoil of human beings. But the early soft voices of protest gradually turned into an explicit annoyance and finally took the shape of an open rebellion.

Kamala Markandya is one of those contemporary writers who have tried to define the pathetic condition of Indian women by projecting conventional and unconventional type of women characters. She skillfully portrays the double pulls that the Indian woman is subjected to – between her desire to assert herself as human and her duty as a daughter, wife and mother that she inherits from tradition. Her women characters like Premala, Saojini, Vasantha and Meera distinguish themselves from women characters of other contemporary Indian-English writers for they project the idea that the economic independence of women shall solve most of their problems. Though she has suggested financial independence as a remedy to the doomed feminine world, yet many other problems concerned with women, such as social conditioning, sexual discrimination and forced sex remain unanswered. Still, Kamala Markandaya has successfully propounded her feminist ideas through her female protagonists who are like leaves of grass; the humblest, the most downtrodden, continuously reappearing pushing their way, surviving all pressures and sprouting again with vigour and vitality.

Unlike Markandaya’s females, who are more aware and concerned about their fellow beings, Desai’s women are more involved in their inner world. Anita Desai portrayed the tyrannies, torture and violence faced by women in Indian Society. Her protagonists whether it is Maya in Cry, The Peacock, Monisha and Amla in Voices in The City and Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? all in their attempt to find
emotional fulfillment, end up exhausted on the verge of mental crisis which makes them appear neurotic. Desai’s female characters having highly sensitive nature find it impossible to cope with “the dehumanised human surroundings” (Shirwadkar 44) and suffer helplessly. Most of her women characters lack the spirit of viewing life with optimism and fail to overcome their existing traumas and apprehensions. No woman in Anita Desai’s novels has been fortunate enough to free herself from the shackles of femininity. Her themes are not universal rather they talk about individual women and their plight. Like Anand, she does not dwell on the social problems, but her focus is on the psychological aspect.

Like Desai, Shashi Deshpande, too, explores “feminine suffering in the complex cultural stresses and strains in Indian society” (Tripathi 88). The fiction of Shashi Deshpande not only propagates feminist ideas but also advises women to understand their naked selves. Her heroines are all modern, educated and belong to the middle class society. Her protagonists – Indu in *Roots and Shadow*, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, and Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Savitribai and Leelabai in *Small Remedies* – are all career women who try to make a balance between their family and career. Deshpande’s novels suggest that women should take cognizance of their weaknesses, overcome them and implement their potentials, in order to assert their individuality. The themes in her novels possess universality for they do not refer to a particular woman or a particular section of women in the society but are representative of Indian womanhood. As a creative writer, her major concern is women’s struggle to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and, the most important of all, as a human being. Supporting the autonomous selfhood for women she suggests that substantial and reasonable methods should be employed to improve their conditions. For their freedom her female characters are very often shown
struggling between tradition and modernity. Like Betty Friedan, she too advocates that women should be equivalent to men and their existence should be noticed as human beings and like Virginia Woolf, she feels that women should be allowed to utilize their talents and simultaneously they should fulfil their duties towards their families.

The journey of Indian woman towards the new and wider dimensions is explored further by Ruth Prawar Jhabwala who has portrayed strong women characters in her novels. Her novels project the post-independence Indian society which consisted of Indians as well as Britishers. She has also portrayed the Indian housewives as well as modern, educated women. Jhabwala has given us a glimpse of Indian society in which men hold the place of master and women of slave so men are free to treat them as they like. In *Esmond in India* she writes:-

So like animals like cows…’ he said with sudden revolution ‘beat them, starve them, maltreat them how you like, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a hand to defend themselves, saying do with me what you will, you are my husband, my God, it is my duty to submit to my God. (Jhabwala 78).

Her writings too do not become a part of feminist literature as they relate about women and their plight with no aim of ameliorating their pathetic state. Her themes do not possess a universal appeal as she has limited her writings to this particular time – frame. As compared to the novels of Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and other early writers, we find her fiction giving a more transparent picture of the status of Indian women. If we take into notice Nayantara Sahgal’s females though well – educated, are largely housewives only. Even after divorce they feel rather diffident and depend more on others to help them out their problems.
The profound social changes effected through industrialization, urbanization and secularization have affected women more than men. Though the women’s education and employment is still motivated by her parents’ desire to procure their daughter a prosperous husband, current sociological studies, such as *The Western Education Indian Woman* (1970) by Rama Mehta, *Marriage and Working Women in India* (1970) by Promila Kapoor and *Role Conflict in Working Women* (1976) by Kala Rani, maintain that the impact of education and employment on women is manifold. It exposes them to a set of new values that influence their attitude towards marriage and their status in the family. With the steady increase of women’s education and employment in urban India and the introduction of a number of social and legal rights, women have acquired a new status and a new role.

In modern time too with the exception of some gains in education and employment for middle-class women, the women’s position in practice is still very bad. Even the economically independent women’s condition is no better. She has to bear the double burden of job and household responsibilities. At home her contribution is seldom recognized while at her working place many times she is treated as inferior or is harassed and exploited. Among the cases of dowry deaths, rape and sexual harassment, not infrequently, the educated working women are the victims.

Women’s writing has come of age, overcoming its diffidence as pointed out by Simone de Beauvoir and defying the prediction of the exaltation of a strong man by Wilbur B.Cross, and it has learnt to communicate vociferously its critique of life. Issues of gender construction and its impact on the psyche of the girl child, traditional interpretations of motherhood, exploitation within and outside the
family, influence of gender stereotyping on career/life options, etc. are now being discussed with frankness not found earlier. The vital presence of such themes in the contemporary literary scene highlights the fact that a woman’s journey to autonomous selfhood meanders through various obstacles. (Gaur ‘Preface’).

The societies run on the organized set of ideas established by males. These ideas do not consider the miseries, pains and inner feelings of women. The assessment of a woman’s progress or failure is decided by man. The feminist movement focuses attention on eliminating this existing inequality. It focuses attention not only on liberating women from her conventional image of the caretaker of the family or of the man’s sexual object only; it also tries to establish her identity and her value systems.

Deconstruction or Deconstructionist approach came in vogue in France towards the end of sixties and the beginning of seventies. This approach is in fact a post-structuralist approach. Structuralists approach aimed at objectivity, technicality, precision and real technical analysis of a text. Structuralists presupposed the death of an author. They absolutely denied the context which was not tenable. Deconstructionist is the reversal of structuralist approach. The structuralist approach analyzed the text to bring out a pattern or structure in a work; deconstruction focuses on the ‘absences’ or ‘gaps’ in the text. The former lays bare the present, the latter emphasizes the absent. In this way deconstruction highlights the marginalized in literature. This way this approach has been so useful in modern feminist criticism.” (Kumar 150)
According to structuralists every word is a sign which is made up of two components - signifier and signified. Signifier is a mask which is written or spoken and signified is the concept behind it. According to deconstruction whenever signifier is broken into its concepts, a new set of signified is released. It is just like a chain reaction. This relationship between a signifier and signified is deconstructive in nature. It is not permanent or final but is temporary, arbitrary or relative one. This relationship can be deconstructed and then again reconstructed. Deconstructionists have been greatly influenced by the great philosopher Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s assertion that the same text can have innumerable interpretations, as there is no correct interpretation forms the basic arguments of deconstruction. (Kumar 150-51).

The concept aims neither at construction of a specific meaning nor its deconstruction. Its central argument is that meaning of a particular sign can be deconstructed. There is neither agreement nor disagreement of meaning but there is only postponement of meaning. According to deconstructionists all literary, social and cultural concepts have lost their meaning and are open to deconstruction. Thus all concepts of goodness, purity, naturalness and truth are arbitrary and tentative. All concepts which were earlier assumed to be correct and final are now bound to be deconstructed. So the main stress of deconstruction is the dearth of any final meaning in any text or concept.

All things are arbitrary and can be deconstructed. Therefore while reading, the meaning presented to the text is not final, so the moment one comes to know the meaning, it slips away. As M. H. Abrams points out that while explaining a text, when one is about to understand and grasp a particular meaning “the bottom drops away.”
and one never reaches a final meaning of the text. All ideas and thoughts are arbitrary and open to deconstruction. All separations in the areas of arts, literature, and culture are changeable. Same is the case with gender separations. Categories like ‘man’ and ‘woman’, ‘male’ and ‘female’, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, are all not final and can be changed after a short break. One cannot develop any final meaning out of this sort of categorization. This is so because males being associated with ‘masculinity’ are thought to have power, self-assertion, activity, independence, domination, etc. Femininity, on the other hand is associated with powerlessness, helplessness, passivity, dependence, docility and subservience. Thus femininity has its origin in the historical and social system of patriarchy. Since according to deconstruction all concepts are open, arbitrary and tentative and open to deconstruction, thus femininity defined by timidity, modesty, purity, submissiveness and sacrifice on the part of women are also open to deconstruction.

Nearly in all their novels Shobha De and Namita Gokhale have deconstructed the idea of feminism. The movement, which had started as mere ‘consciousness’ in writers like Kamala Markandaya and others, has now assumed a more empathetic voice in writers like Shobha De and Namita Gokhale. The transcendence of the classically idealized woman in literature, idealized in her forbearance, into an assertive, self willed woman searching to discover her true self has coincided with the emergence of a class-oriented fiction. Thus, current women’s writing in English by virtue of its being dominated by the urban middle classes seems to be primarily concerned with the predicament of the ‘urban middle class woman’.

Shobha De through her fiction unveils the bare truth in the lives of urban aristocratic women. Most of her protagonists are from middle class backgrounds that move upward to socialite society. For them marriage is a convenience for money,
social status and physical gratification, rather than having an emotional and psychological attachment. They are relentlessly in search of a new life-partner instead of analyzing their marital problems. Shobha De portrays women who, while in quest of self-identity, dare to cross all those boundaries, which are not often considered morally correct by conventional society. Her female characters are modern, educated, glamorous, ambitious, money-minded and have thirst for physical gratification. They take their husbands as a thing of pleasure. Her characters do not possess any moral or ethical values the Indian psyche normally associates with marriage. Shobha De focuses on the difference between the older women’s and young women’s attitude to marriage, love and life by juxtaposing the views of Aparna and those of her mother in her novel *Snapshots*. Husband is an awful word for Aparna and marriage is not essential, but for her mother a woman is incomplete without a husband. Aparna’s mother lays emphasis on her views:

Remember, a woman in our society is nothing without a husband. Study as much as you wish. Win prizes, get a good job. But don’t let all these things affect you; give you, a big head. You may be the Prime Minister of India tomorrow, but when you come home, you automatically become your husband’s wife. If you forget that, you are finished, your marriage is finished.(34)

Shobha De is popularly known as Jackie Callins of India. Picaresque elements loom large in her fiction, infact her novels seem a modernized version of the nineteenth century picaresque fiction. The picaro in her fiction is women who wander from place to place in search of more fulfilling experiences. But it is a label she does not want to be associated with. She wants to be an author in her own right.
Grown during the early years of India’s freedom, the impact of metropolitan cities in her upbringing, her unique experience as a journalist, her sharp reaction to urban violence - especially the victimization of women, are drawn in such fine details in her works which give great insight into the understanding of human lives and relationships. Her popularity lies in the contents, mastery over the art of story telling and in her use of language. She may elude labels since she might not prefer to limit her writings beneath a particular brand. But the fact cannot be denied that the pivotal concern of all her writings is ‘woman’. As a writer of women centred fiction Shobha De understands the fact that the most significant difference between man and woman lies in woman’s sexuality.

Within the framework of her novels, De depicts the breaking up of the institution of marriage and love. The new concept of marriage envisages complete sexual freedom where men and women merely become partners in love. Most of the women are married early and get bored with their husbands. They seek new relationships outside marriage, without breaking the family. In twentieth century, our attitude to love and sex has changed radically. Upper class women are no longer shy of speaking about both love and sex even publicly. Infidelity is not a sin but a routine activity for them for which they have no remorse. Shobha De has also projected such women in her novels to show how these women are obsessed with sex and sensual enjoyment in life. Though she takes up some problems related with the lives of women, she fails to suggest any substantial or relevant solutions to them.

The major cause of deliberate neglect shown to her fiction is the treatment of sex in her novels. Her novels have been considered cheap and vulgar and a form of popular fiction only. A critical study of De’s novels, in this context, reveals that De has not only concentrated on the presentation of a strange and startling world making
the emergence of recent trends in society but also shown her concern for the problems faced by contemporary high society women. The way she has presented women’s life and behaviour in her novels brings out her feminist ideas.

Though the characters of Shobha De’s novels are bold but at the same time they can not be considered as immoral. Since ‘sex’ is no longer considered a sin, the idea of constancy in love has been given a go by. Sleeping with men other than the husband is not considered immoral these days by the modern people. She has only depicted a way of life prevalent in the upper class society in the metropolis of our country. So her novels are not gross or trivial and can be termed as moral or a writing which present true picture of society. Life is presented in her novels as it is, not as it should be. For Shobha De the elitist section of Mumbai seems to constitute India and thus minimizes her world. Most of her characters are Bombay-groomed women by birth. Even if they are not born there, it is their ‘Eldorado’ where they ultimately reach. Writers like Shobha De represent a small section of Indian women who get misguided and carried away by their emotional undulations and end their marital knots with no regrets. With her usual disregard for rules, Shobha De reinvents tradition and challenges old stereotypes.

On the other hand Namita Gokhale has written about the western culture and vain traditions followed by them in India. She has not merely discussed incidents but has also carefully insured that such imitation and growth is not forever. What goes up will come down and this compels her readers to prospective thinking and proceeds on towards positive side. Her literary works are like a mirror before the entire society, which tell us that no man can become wise by chance. They have to work hard and shun the unbridled pleasure and move forward in positive direction for a fruitful result. Thus, her works are like a flower with fragrance.
Namita Gokhale takes her characters from the contemporary society and one can easily meet them in the streets of India. As she writes for the magazines too, she describes the people she comes across everyday in various parts of the country. She has seen human life in her novels from the perspective of the woman. Like Shobha De she has also given no forceful and memorable hero in her novels and hence to be blamed for limited range. Like Hardy, She paints the rural people and their rituals in true colours. Like William Makepeace Thackeray, she asserts through *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* that ‘truth is best’ in life. Like Dickens, she portrays urban life of Delhi and Bombay in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*. Like Horace Walpole and Clara Reeve, she portrays the world of Gothic romance and creates the effects of willing suspension of disbelief in *The Book of Shadows*.

Like Shobha De, Gokhale’s female characters are also very frank and full of lust. They do not consider their lustful act immoral. In *Paro: Dreams of Passion* we find Marcus, art teacher of Paro, raping Paro somewhere in a solitary place during Dussehra holidays. This act of romance gets a mention in the newspaper. But Paro admits, she enjoyed her art teacher sexual advance and does not term it as a rape. Paro accepts:

“It was during the Dussehra vacations. My folks were abroad so I stayed back at the hostel. There was no one else around. He was quite young, this art master, and very good-looking in a longhaired way. Anyway, he tells me, “You look like a wood nymph”. Then he starts getting sexy ……you know…. and I don’t know what’s happening but I sort of like it. And then suddenly he’s on top of me, right there in between all those pine and needles, and fucking me right and left, And
there are crows going “caw, caw” in the trees. After a while I liked it. I liked it one hell of a lot.(31-32)

The code and conduct made by the society does not permit such liberty to a student. Paro fails to understand the difference between unlawful sex and luxury and wrongly blames media for her disgrace. The basic theme of Paro is, however, nothing less than human predicament. It would be more correct to look at it not just a feminist work but as a woman’s agonizing search for her true self in the society which is still largely traditional and swayed by cultural and social stereotypes.

Namita Gokhale is a master in the art of narration as well as expression. She creates wonderful situations out of common stuff of life and describes every event meticulously. According to the demand of plot or fictions, she skillfully depicts the characters of different moods, circumstances and events. She is a writer who loves her characters whether they are good or bad, just like a mother who, blindly, bestows equal love to all her children but deprecates their misconduct. She is a journalist who regularly meets people and hence gains the first hand knowledge of the different sections of society and listen to their problems and solutions. Nearly in all her novels like Paro, A Himalayan Love Story, Gods, Grave and Grandmother, A Book of Shadows, Shakuntala: The Play of Memory and Priya: In Incredible Indyaa Gokhale creates a world which is largely dominated by female characters and are very strong statements of feminism. These women command the situation and the men who come in contact are subdued in one way or the other.

It is true that both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale’s lack Indianness in their feministic ideas. It is significant to note that their women hardly care for the institution called ‘society’. It can also be mentioned that feminism which was propagated as a revolution to grant equal rights to women in India, in now being
influenced by the feministic concepts of western culture. The enthusiasm to ameliorate the condition of women in an underprivileged society often overlooks the difference in the plight of Indian and western women. According to the western feminists, women should attain their individuality within or without the family, whereas Indian women want to seek their individuality while remaining within the institution of marriage. They value their family, as well as their individuality. This difference in the temperament of Indian and western women nullifies the adaptation of western feministic ideology in India. Towards the end of the century, twentieth century women writers expanded their subject matter, moving beyond highlighting the lives and hardships suffered by women locked in domestic prisons. Instead, they increasingly express their individualism and demand more equal partnerships – in marriage, public life, law, and politics – with men.

Plato in his book *The Republic* has given a very sound opinion about woman:

The only difference between man and woman is one of physical function – one begets, the other bears children. Apart from that, both can and both should follow the same range of occupation and perform the same functions. They should receive the same education and enable them to do so. In this way society will get best value from both. (225)

The historical and ancient literature throws light on the poor condition of the women in society. Due to this male oppression and lower state of women, feminism comes into existence. Change, it is often said, is a sign of vitality and growth and it is the woman who is almost always working out the changes. There is a paradigm shift in social attitude towards woman today. In the recent Indian English fiction we find that the females are aware of their place in the society and their rights as a human
being in comparison to the women of earlier fiction writers. They are no longer submissive and meek and are quite sure of their existence and individuality.

Thus, Indian woman’s journey till date can be divided into three phases, “Tradition, transition and modernity” (Shirwadkar 153). Starting with the archetypes of Sita and Savitri, who were the established ideals for Indian women guiding them to accept the inferior position and it continued till 1950. The transition phase starts with the fifties when the silent suffering females started becoming aware of their identities. In the third and the assertive phase the theory of feminism and its influence have spread rapidly and a new feminist movement started with the seventies of the last century. This decade was a period of protest movements- civil rights, peace, the New Left, anti poverty. But the revival of feminism was a startling event. The influence of western feminism began inspiring Indian writers to present woman as an independent entity, and not an appendage to the male community. People with traditional views stood aghast, feeling that these must be sick, unbalanced women, or at best, just bored housewives. They were puzzled as to what these women meant by “Liberation” or “Oppression”. Modern writers like Shobha De and Namita Gokhale create bold and assertive female characters to change the society’s treatment of women.

Broadly speaking the contemporary feminist movement worked for female equality as the earlier nineteenth century feminism had done. But the two movements differ significantly in the basic arguments regarding the nature of the biological differences between the sexes. The nineteenth century feminists saw far greater differences between the “male” and “female” nature than their present counterparts do. For contemporary feminist, different processes of socialization account for a larger part of the observed differences in men’s and women’s behaviour, while biology plays only a minor role. Today, feminists protest against the way the social
institutions supported by cultural values and normative expectations force women into an unreasonably narrow role. They object not to marriage and motherhood, but to the excessive restraints these roles involves. They argue that in a society with real equality women would be in a position comparable to that of men who at the recent time are able to combine occupational and other roles with those of husband and father.

The situation of women in any given society can be taken as a mark of the progress of civilization or in the words of Juliet Mitchell, as the “index of human advance”(379). Both man and woman are complementary to each other. If man is a tree, the woman is its shelter. Anees Jung in her book *Unveiling India* says “the blood in one’s vein is the mother, the bones are one’s father. Both are important. But without the mother there is no life, no flowering”(68). Feminism has gradually become more far ranging and subtle in its attacks on male – dominated society. Many injustices still need to be corrected, but equally necessary is a more down – to – earth, tolerant and compassionate view of fellow human beings.

Thus, the present chapter records the journey of female from the phase when she was considered a weaker or second sex, to the present scenario, when she is almost on the verge of being completely emancipated. Since the present research work is a comparative study of the feminism in novels of Shobha De and Namita Gokhale, a detailed survey of feminism is essential for the better comprehension.
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