CHAPTER VI

Conclusion
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An important feature of the Indian English literature after Independence has been the emergence of women novelists who have brought a fresh breath of life to it. Though Indian women novelists writing in English were there in the first half of the twentieth century or even before, it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that women novelists of eminence began enriching Indian fiction in English. Of these writers, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala were the most outstanding. Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal were to follow next. While Nayantara Sahgal wrote novels about Indian politics and man-woman relationship, Anita Desai took readers to the internal world of her characters. These women novelists brought a feminine sensibility to their works. They described what women thought about the world they lived in. In the last two decades of the 20th century a new crop of women novelists came that revolutionized Indian English fiction. The most notable among these writers are Shobha De, Namita Gokhale, Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur. Unlike their earlier counterparts, these novelists are marked feminists. Their writings are generally a protest against the condition of women in a patriarchal society.

The most striking feature of the novels of both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale is their feminism. Both of them focus on the young generation of Indian women who are breaking the shackles of male dominated society which has thwarted their growth for centuries. Their novels proclaim the emergence of liberated women of modern India. Following the trends of feminism that changed the lives of Western women, Indian women in the last thirty or forty years have endeavoured to find their own identity different from their subordinate identity of somebody’s daughter, wife or mother. Feminism is one of the most revolutionary developments that human history
has witnessed in the past hundred years. It has already changed the social, political and economic structure of the Western world and is fast doing so in Asia and Africa. It has brought about a radical change in the perception of relationship between man and woman. Feminism as an ideology is based on two fundamental premises: first, that gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and second, that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by a cultural manipulation. It is a revolt against the exploitation of women in patriarchal society and an assertion that the women should have the same right, power and opportunity that men have. It is in fact an awareness of being victimized by the male-dominated society and also an attempt to come out of this centuries old injustice.

We come across the first notable feminist writing towards the end of the eighteenth century in Mary Wollstonecraft’s book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). In her book she points out the exploitation of women by men. In the 19th century came two important feminist books – J. S. Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* which had come earlier in 1845. It is, however, in the twentieth century that feminism as a movement gained momentum. Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* came out in 1929 and highlighted the unequal treatment of women in literature. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) was perhaps the most important book that revolutionized the feminist thinking. Since 1960 more and more feminist writings have begun to come. Some of the most important recent feminist writers are Kate Millett, Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi. Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*, Toril Moi’s *Sexual/ Textual Politics* and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* are some of the most remarkable texts that have shaped the feminists thoughts today.
Though, over all, feminism deals with the gender discrimination, many distinct ideologies can be discerned within feminism. All beliefs stem from the one fact that justice requires freedom and equality for women. One important early fraction was that of liberal feminists, like J. S. Mill. They agitated for legal reforms to improve the status of women. They held that the reason of woman’s exploitation lay in her lack of political and civil rights. According to liberal feminists, all women are capable of rising to the level of men and claiming their rightful equal place. It is the duty of the state to ensure them an equal status and equal opportunities. Issues important to liberal feminists include right to voting and education, equal pay for equal work, protection against sexual harassment, reproductive and abortion rights, affordable child care and affordable health care. They tried to bring to light the frequency of sexual and domestic violence.

Socialist feminism came into existence under the influence of Marxism. It connects the oppression of women to economic factors described by Karl Marx. The Marxist feminists believe that women face the problem of injustice because they live in a society divided into classes. They hold that women’s oppression is mainly due to their traditional position in the family. As capitalism and patriarchy reinforce each other, the fight for feminism should be fought on both the levels. Only when women cease to be dependent on men economically will they be able to achieve freedom from subjugation and exploitation. According to the Marxists, all the works that women do must come within the sphere of public production. Thus the economic function performed by the family should be undertaken by the state, and this will finally improve the situation of women in family and society.
Radical feminists hold the theory that the cause of women’s oppression is socio-biological. 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 and economic survival. Hence radical feminists believe that the present structure of family needs to be revised. They hold that only through modern technology women can be free from the fundamental inequalities of bearing and rearing of children. Radical feminists defy the necessity of marriage and advocate single life for women.

Whatever might be the ideological differences between different categories of feminists, they are one in their conclusion that the exploitation of women and their position in family and society is the result of the male domination in society. Man for his gain has pushed woman to a secondary position and made her his ‘other’, as Simone de Beauvoir has described it. He has used religion, law, education and economy to dominate woman. He has become the lord and woman is completely dependent on him. Feminists like Toril Moi have 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.

Women writers now project these desires and ambitions of women. Elaine Showalter detects in the history of women’s writings a ‘feminine’ phase in which
women writers imitated dominant male artistic norms and aesthetic standards; then a ‘feminist’ phase in which radical and often separatist positions are maintained; and finally a ‘female’ phase in which the women writers are concerned with female experiences. In the women novelists of today, both in India and outside, we find an expression of both the feminist and female phases as described by Showalter. This is true of the writings of Shobha De and Namita Gokhale also. Their female protagonists both defy the norms of a patriarchal society and endeavour to shape their lives as per their desires.

Though women came out of their homes in the freedom struggle of India, it is after Independence that feminist concerns came to be voiced in India. The changing Indian society has also caused a change in the condition of Indian women. Several laws have been made to safeguard the interest of women. But what has actually changed their life is education, and their entry into different kinds of job has given them financial independence as well as a new identity. They are now occupying jobs which were not accessible to them in the past. Women, particularly urban women, in India are now trying to live their own lives as per their own desires. It is the picture of these women that novelists like Shobha De and Namita Gokhale present in their novels. Both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale started writing in the final decades of the twentieth century and today they are among the foremost women novelists of India. Both of them present the women who have succeeded in asserting their own identity and individuality. Both of them are open and frank in their narration related to sex. Their frank expressions about sexual drives reject the sexual morality essentially ordained for women. This makes their writing skill almost alike and marks them different from the earlier and contemporary Indian English women writers. They are also different from other writers in their feminist prospective as the women
presented in their novels are more concerned with moving their own course of life rather longing for equal treatment from male. Thus in a way they have deconstructed the image of the traditional Indian women who have been known in society and literature as docile, obedient, silent and sacrificing.

Unlike the novels of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya, in all the novels of both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale a woman is the protagonist. Their concentration on modern woman's problems leaves little room for political and historical details in their fiction. They do not create like Kamala Markandaya a novel like *Nectar in a Sieve* which focuses on the changing economic scene of rural India. The life spectacle and world-view presented in their novels is directly or indirectly related to women. Women's behaviour, their thoughts and their responses in different situations form the main concerns of the fictional works of Shobha De and Namita Gokhale.

Both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale have deconstructed the traditional image of the Indian woman as Sita and Savitri. In Shobha De’s novels we come across a variety of women - from extremely modern, assertive, young and liberated women to the traditional Indian housewives. The minute details about women's concerns, their intimate experiences along with their idiosyncrasies have been presented from the point of view of a woman and their marginalization can be ascertained from the way she has arranged and structured her fictional discourse. She is sensitive enough to expose different ways of women's subjugation in a male dominated world. She raises her voice against the male-centered culture and strongly opposes the marginalization of women. She does not believe in describing her women characters as symbols of goodness or submissive helpmates at home. Her works reveal her protest against the
age old image of woman as an appendage or an auxiliary in society as well as in literature. In them Shobha De strives to undo this tilted and distorted image of woman whose cries for freedom and equality still go unheard in the patriarchal society. From this perspective, the women in her works are more powerful than men. Women are essentially represented sexually liberated and free thinking and have become known as the New Women, in latter 20th century fiction.

The novels of Namita Gokhale also present the same feminist concerns as do the novels of Shobha De. Gokhale’s first novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984) had come earlier than the first novel of De, *Socialite Evenings* (1989). It shocked the readers with its frank discussion of sex. When Shobha De’s first novel came, it got the same response. Here also the readers found a frank and free portrayal of sexual desires of women. Thus both these novelists set a new trend with their first novels and gave memorable heroines. In both the novels we come across the rebellion of women against tradition and their bold search for their own life. The central character of *Socialite Evenings*, Karuna has first been a sufferer of do’s and don’ts of the traditional codes made for women in Indian society and enjoined upon the girl child by parents and other elders of the family. After her marriage her husband represents another facet of male-domination as her needs and aspirations are put in a secondary position. But Karuna is not willing to accept submissively the injunctions put upon her. Her reaction to the condition of married women that she observes around her shows her deep dissatisfaction with not only her own life but also with those wives that she knows. She calls them an exhausted generation of wives. With no dreams left, they have clung to the status quo of being the appendages of their husbands. Karuna has caustic remarks for husbands as well. They are unconcerned with responsibilities at home. She refers to their sex life as a listless affair – making love is nothing but
losing calories for them, a matter of nothing more than a vague habit. Karuna’s thoughts about the fateful life of an Indian wife and love making mark a clear shift in the representation of sex in fiction. In Karuna, De presents a woman who is capable of living life on her own terms. Her breaking out of the bonds of matrimony and making her own professional career symbolizes the feminist assertion of a woman’s right to live her own life.

In her first novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Namita Gokhale has also presented a rebellious woman, Paro who defies all the patriarchal codes made for women in Indian society. She is completely concerned only with herself and uses all others as a medium of realizing her own aspirations in life. She does not consider herself subordinate to anyone. This is reflected in her behavior towards her husband B. R. and her father-in-law. The kind of behaviour that she shows on the occasion of her wedding reception is an indication of her defiance of the expected behavior from a newly married woman in Indian society. She unashamedly uses her charm to exploit others. Her independent attitude is reflected when she gets divorce from her husband. She catches him with another woman and does not accept this betrayal without protest as has been the case with Indian women generally. The patriarchal society allows a male to have affairs with other women, betraying his wife, but does not permit a woman to do so. Paro is a modern woman in this sense that she does not accept this partial behavior of the patriarchal society. She defies all social and moral codes and lives life on her own terms. B. R., Bucky Bhandpur, Lenin, Shambhu Nath, Loukas and even Suresh – all these representatives of the patriarchal society fail to dominate this spirited woman and she goes her own way. She has a child outside marriage. She carries on openly an adulterous relationship and then leaves her lover to live with another man. In this novel Priya, who is the narrator, presents another aspect
of the upward moving Indian women. She looked upon Paro as her ideal. It was Paro who gave her the idea that women need not be satisfied with their life and should try to shape their lives as per their desire.

In many ways we find a kind of parallel between this novel and Shobha De’s Socialite Evenings. In Shobha De’s novel Karuna is inspired by Anjali and like her wanted to be in the circle of the rich people. It is because of Anjali that Karuna decides to become a model against the wishes of her parents. In Paro, Priya wants to imitate Paro and to create a place for herself in society. Both Karuna and Priya have a strong desire for luxurious life. Paro is modern, bold and free who tells everything about her life to Priya and always talks about herself as Anjali in Socialite Evenings to Karuna. Paro left B.R. as Anjali left her first husband Abe after catching them with another woman. Karuna is always worried about Anjali as Priya for Paro: “what did she live off? How did she survive?” (Paro : Dreams of Passion 35). Karuna’s dissolution paves the way to write her memoirs in a form of book in the same way Priya’s frustration make her to hold the pen and write autobiography. In this way they both inaugurate of their individual rebellion against patriarchy. Thus both Namita Gokhale and Shobha De presented in their first novels strong, ambitious women who were not bound by the patriarchal rules in their lives.

The presentation of modern, rich, educated and assertive women in the fiction of both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale marks a difference from traditional women’s representation in Indian English fiction. Their problems and concerns are different from those of the ordinary, traditional, middle class women. Being educated and wealthy, they have an easy access to new ways of life declaring women's independence. Most of the women characters depicted by Shobha De are conscious of
their self-respect because they are competent professionals working shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts. Today's women seek equal treatment from men. They resent their neglect at the hands of unresponsive men. These women's main concern is to make their presence felt. The subtle ways that render women’s role insignificant become the major cause of these women's protest. These women being modern, educated and conscious of marginalization resent different behavioral patterns that perpetuate their suppression. They not only resent man's control over money but also challenge man’s monopoly in providing financial security. They assert their right to earn and control money. In order to reject the male claim to provide financial security, women in De’s fiction do not hesitate in adopting even those professions which are not considered ‘good’ or suitable for women. They move in the world of showbiz and industrial struggle. None of these modern, educated and assertive women are economically dependent on men.

In the novels of both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale women assert themselves. Their female protagonists take charge of the situation and try to locate their identity. In this patriarchal society, man can think about his life without a woman but a woman cannot do the same. A wife can do nothing when she is ignored and neglected. Some mutely endure this situation and spend their whole life in suffocating atmosphere, but their women are not ready for this easy acceptance. Their protest against male hegemony takes a different form in matters related to sex. Through their novels, they both seek to establish the fact that a woman has the same feelings, passions, aspirations and values as a man has and she is determined to fight it out for realizing her dreams. Ambition is not the monopoly of men only. Even women can be ambitious and they may also reach dizzy heights should they decide. In Namita Gokhale’s novels the feminist stand is very loud and clear. Her central female
characters do their best to realize their dreams. Her Shakuntala of *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* is a shining example of this attitude. In her ambition to see the world and have new experiences as well as in her attitude towards sex she breaks up the barriers of sexes.

If the *Socialite Evenings* heralded a bold feminist voice, Shobha De’s *Starry Nights* took the public by storm because of its frank and candid expression of love and lust. By choosing a nymphomaniac as the central character of her novel she created a stir in the feminist literature in India. By this novel, De moved far away from depicting characters in the tradition of Indian womanhood. She 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. In this novel, she has graphically depicted the Bombay film world and its world of sex and fleshy pleasures. The heroine of the novel, Aasha Rani, the movie queen of Bollywood and sweetheart of millions, has often been branded as a vamp who, with her illimitable passion for sex, breaks patriarchal andro-centric moral order of the society by embarking upon a bewildering round of multiple sexual encounters. She has no reservations in having sex with the celebrities of Bollywood and others indiscriminately to attain the heights of glory as a film star.

While Shobha De took her readers to the world of glamour in her second novel which followed soon after her first novel, Namita Gokhale presented an altogether different world in her second novel which came after a gap of nine years. The background of *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is Delhi but not the Delhi of power and glamour. However, the feminist concerns of the novelist are the same in this novel also. The novel presents the story of a woman’s courage and determined effort
to surmount all obstacles in life and make her own path in life. Here the woman of courage and grit is not a young, educated and smart woman but a grandmother, Ammi, a former prostitute who has to take care of her grand daughter, Gudiya, whose father is unknown and whose mother has run away with a man. Both come to Delhi and start their life on a pavement. Namita Gokhale shows the ingenuity of a woman to turn the tide in her favour by her intelligence and courage through the encounter of Ammi with Sundar Pahalwan, the ruffian who rules the pavement. She exploits his superstitious fear to establish herself there. Ammi exploits the sentiments of the superstitious, lower and lower middle class people who live in that area not only to survive but to gain strength. She emerges as a spiritual person and the temple that she establishes gives her prestige and financial prosperity. Another woman who displays the will to survive and prosper in life is Phoolwati who after the death of her husband does not break down but starts life afresh. She associates herself with Ammi and her temple. After Ammi’s death she takes care of her temple as well as Gudiya. Thus both the leading women of this novel, though illiterate and belonging to the lower class of society, exhibit the traits of the new woman. They do not surrender before the circumstances of their life or the pressures of the patriarchal society where women without a husband or brother or son to look after them are exploited by society. On the other hand, they exploit the weaknesses of society to prosper in life. Thus though dealing with a different background and theme, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is also a feminist novel where the novelist shows the resilience and pluck of a woman to find her own course of life.

Shobha De’s feminist concerns can be traced in her depiction of women’s maltreatment at the hands of men. Men in her novels generally behave like masters. They have no regard or consideration for women's feelings, emotions and their self
respect. Holding the subject position these men treat women’s concerns to be insignificant. In order to reject the idea of male superiority De exposes the pseudo show of masculinity in man. The qualities of bravery, power—both physical and sexual—are traditionally attributed to man. Woman is considered to be weak, emotional and dependent on man, but in De’s novels these ideas have been put upside down. Women characters, in her novels, show exemplary courage and strength in the times of crisis. Shobha De’s women don’t believe in suffering submissively. They leave no stone unturned to reach the peak of joy and success. Struggling hard with hardships, facing exploitation and defeat at different steps, sometimes with tears filled eyes while at other times like a tigress, they challenge the society to turn the tide in their favour. Brimming with hope and zeal, they lay their hands on hopes on starry nights in their life. Their crusade against slavery, oppression and exploitation is alarming.

In *Starry Nights* Shobha De also stresses a very important fact that mostly, a woman is instrumental in another women’s suffering directly or indirectly. In our society women ill-treat and exploit women instead of showing respect, love, consideration and understanding for their own sex. Generally, in patriarchal society, the emphasis is laid on women’s exploitation by men. But history bears a witness to the fact that women play an important part in the destiny of women in various identities as wife, mother, and mother—ín—law, aunt, sister—ín—law and daughter. The two generations of women that De presents in this novel outline the changes that have taken place in the condition and psyche of Indian women in the 20th century. Geetha Devi, mother of Aasha Rani, had suffered a lot as she was abandoned by her husband to fight with poverty and deprivation with her daughters to bring up. She had even to prostitute to support the family. She lived in slums, faced all kinds of humiliation as well as exploitation. With innate strength to construct her life, she reweaves the fabric
of her life courageously. She, however, does not protect her daughter from being exploited by males in her life. Rather she also becomes instrumental in creating woes in her life. Aasha Rani has to suffer at the hands of her sister as well.

The factor of women ill-treating other women has been highlighted by Namita Gokhale also. In *A Himalayan Love Story* Parvati is ill treated by her mother. She grudges the little amount of money that Parvati’s education costs her and even tells her that it would have been different had she been a boy because in that case she would have looked after her in her old age. In *The Book of Shadows* it is a woman who throws acid on the face of Rachita and spoils her life for ever because she considers her to be responsible for her brother’s suicide. In *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* again it is a woman, that too a mother, who ill treats another woman, her daughter. She does everything for her son but neglects her daughter.

In her novels Shobha De has presented liberated working women -- defiant, wealthy, and brimming with confidence and asserting for their position in society. In novel after novel she has made her intentions clear that her women are not going to be emotional, subdued and weak ladies. On the contrary, they are to be assertive, pragmatic and strong. This comes out strikingly in her novel, *Sisters*. As the action of the novel unfolds, both the major women characters continue to indulge in their single-minded pursuit, which is to lead a life of luxury, wealth, comfort and pleasure. Mikki who loses her father rises up to the challenge of saving his companies. She challenges the stereotyped image of woman in society which considers women to be weak and not able to do a work that needs leadership qualities. In her determination to save her father's companies she tries to borrow money from her fiancé, Navin. When she realizes that Navin is not the right person to carry on her desires, she breaks off
her engagement with him without caring for what people will say. Having faced dissolution from Navin and Shanay, who would not be a suitable husband for her, Mikki turns to Binny Malhotra, enjoys sex before marriage and marries him against the will of others. Thus Shobha De has projected the New Women of India who are capable of facing challenges of all kinds in life. Marriage for them is no longer a sacred obligation but a way to find the right life partner. They do not attach the same kind of importance to sex as their predecessors did. So they are not afraid of breaking the marriage oaths or indulging in extra-marital relations. We come across the same kind of characters in Namita Gokhale’s *Priya in Incredible Indiya*. In this novel Monalisa Das Mann is a powerful character. She is an intelligent, well-read and capable woman. She wants to marry Priya’s son, Lov and chases her for this purpose. Promita is another emancipated girl in the novel. She boldly brings her proposal of marriage with Lov before his mother herself. Thus she does something which is still unheard from an Indian woman.

Shobha De's woman is woman of action ready to break all social orthodoxy, which shows her grit to grab the huge fortune with a strong individualistic identity in a male oriented society. Through the creations of Minx and Amrita in *Strange Obsession*, De is rejecting and deconstructing man made images of women and an alternative female identity is created where a woman sometimes takes the role of man and another takes the role of a 'free woman'. One might say that gender identities cannot be changed or exchanged at will. But Shobha De's women characters are very good specimens which openly establish that reversal of roles are indeed possible for women in the present day society.
*Sultry Days* deduces that a woman with a fully integrated personality can solve many problems in her life and she need not be a victim, a fact demonstrated through the powerfully drawn women characters of this novel. Women in general are considered as the weaker sex by males yet the undeniable fact is that women like Nisha and her mother have a much stronger personality who are steadying and balancing both social and their domestic lives. Shobha De has created many other powerful women characters similar to the women in *Sultry Days* such as; Karuna in *Socialite Evenings*, Amrita in *Strange Obsession*, Mikki in *Sisters*, and Aparna in *Snapshots*.

The women portrayed in *Snapshots* become vehicle of the novelist's preoccupation about Indian society and the status of women. Due to her feminist sympathies Shobha De highlights the harrowing experiences that women undergo in society. These women's pitiable and marginalized existence is not simply due to the inhuman and oppressive attitude of the people related to showbiz or business tycoons, underworld dons and professionals. The conditions of their existence in marriage are in no way favourable. Even husbands take their wives for granted. Sex in marriage is also used as a way to exercise power over women. These women consider their sexuality as an effective weapon in the power game of relationships. Sex no longer remains limited to the body rather it stands for power. Women explore the potential power of sex in man-woman relationship. These women know that men do not seek control over female sexuality just to satisfy their physical needs. Their lust for female body signifies their urge to have power over women. Therefore, these women tend to explore their sexual potential to gain power. Even a brothel owner like Champabai says that men do not value anything they get easily. They go to women not only for sex but also for power.
It is interesting to note that Shobha De's dissatisfaction and dislike for sterile, unhappy marriage does not make her blame only men for this. She is critical of women's unrealistic expectations, their disregard for marital fidelity, their lack of patience and their failure to believe in the sanctity of marriage. Having a different and strange understanding about marriage these women no longer consider it a sacred bond. Their own attitude towards marriage is governed by practical considerations and mercenary designs. For example, Surekha advises Aparna to marry again because for career women it is important to have a man to back them up. Nobody takes them seriously otherwise. Similarly, there are women who treat marriage in functional terms. They tend to take a man for a ride and marriage suits their purpose. For these women a husband is merely the man who pays all the bills. These women keep on with their unhappy marriages for the sake of their comforts and indulge in mechanical relationships treating sex as the ticket to keep the marriage going. Similarly, Gokhale’s women also enter in marriage to solve their purpose. In Gods, Graves and Grandmother after Shambhu’s death Phoolwati realized that to carry on her business, she must have a husband. She is fully aware of the fact that a widowed woman running a tea-stall might have sent the signal that she was a weak woman who could be prevailed upon easily. So, she practically entered into a contract marriage with Sundar.

An analysis of Shobha De's novels reveals that her women characters try to strike balance between instinctual needs and intellectual aspirations. Deeply exhausted by this trapeze act, they are further bewildered when the existential absurdity of life is unmasked before them, when they face loneliness and lack of communication and communality and are finally brought to mental crisis when masculine and institutional pressures are added to exacerbate them further. Women's
subjugation to men and their marginalization is not related to sexual behaviour only. The pattern of women's subordination seems to be all pervasive. Women are relegated to the secondary position in a way that in marriage they do not achieve their rightful place and keep on 'playing wife'. Their inner, private world somehow remains inaccessible to the men they have married. In traditional Indian middle class families women have to depend on men in financial matters also. This financial insecurity makes their condition pathetic. They remain submissive and subdued. The husband controls money and women have to demean themselves and seek husband's permission for their day to day expenses also. They experience humiliation when they are not allowed to spend money and use domestic items as freely and according to their will as their husbands do. These women's dependence on man and their traditional thinking keep them suppressed and they seem to accept their lot without showing any resentment. Financial security is the basis for woman's emancipation. De expresses this view in clear terms that there can be no talk of independence for women, without economic self-sufficiency. Shobha De has successfully depicted the tension arising out of the failure of the Indian women in properly negotiating the conflicting situations emerging from the clash between conservatism and liberalization women in this world lose out by being women. The social inculcation is such as to incline them towards the so-called natural vocation of women i.e. to be a wife and a mother. Subordination or acceptance for male authority, whether of father, husband or son, is a cherished Indian value sanctified by tradition. But with the emergence of a gender oriented fiction, classically idealized woman has transformed into a new woman, eager to discover her true self. Today's educated working women have acquired the long denied respect, esteem and also freedom. They certainly face certain problems arising out of their dual responsibilities. The extra-earning is
accepted no doubt, but the change in life pattern is not welcomed so eagerly by other members of the family. The household responsibilities are still considered as female obligation. As a result, majority of working women suffer from adjustment problems. Shobha De is very frank while expressing her observation about the way women view sex. In her books she makes two central arguments on this. The first is that sex is both a bore and a chore - something to endure rather than enjoy. The second is that sex is a weapon for a woman – to hold and keep a man.

Both the writers deconstruct the very idea of feminism. Marriage which is a “Patriarchal enclosure” can no longer hold woman down. Marriage and motherhood, symbols of parental authority and power are diffused by both the novelists through their female characters. Aparna walks out of her marriage and begins to love another man Prem. Karuna rejects the marriage proposal by Girish and remains single. Rashmi is also not happy even while she is enjoying sexual life. She becomes mother without her marriage and thus she has to face a bitter social criticism. Her lover Pips who is a film maker does not care for her. He leaves her with a baby in her womb. Rashmi is now on the street and becomes a prostitute to support herself and her little baby. Shakuntala discards her marital status and deserts her respectable home to see the world. Rachita also realizes at the end of the novel why not to enjoy life? They deconstruct the concept of womanhood who were traditionally considered to be a weakling and depicts the courage to come out of their catastrophe. They successfully cope up with the real problems of life created by their male counterparts. They are courageous enough to rise if they are made prey by male sex hunters. They are successful in overcoming their financial or other difficulties. As Swati in Snapshots is a bold lady, who never feels any surplus to act in dirty English films as long as she gets her money.
Both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale have not given any memorable hero in their novels. In comparison to women, men are depicted as weaklings. Shakuntala’s brother was a nervous child who woke up at nights with his silly fears. Rachita’s fiancé Anand commits suicide bidding good bye to this cruel world. Pips left all his responsibilities of a father on Rashmi’s shoulder. Both the novelists do not depict men in a favourable light. They are generally incapable of handling their worldly life or they are shown as playboy as B.R. is shown in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, and Abe in *Socialite Evenings*. Both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale use Hinglish, the actual conversational language of the people in writing their novels. Their females also use abusive language as males. In *Sultry Days* Nisha abuses Deb saying Kala Kutta and in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* Paro also uses the same abusive words for Shambhu Nath Mishra. They both have written and reveal the truth of upper middle class drawing rooms to the real world.

Like Shobha De, Namita Gokhale shows a remarkable insight into the lives and problems of contemporary Indian women, whether they live in big cities or in small towns or in remote places on the hills. Her novels show both the constraints of the traditional image of woman in India and the changes that education and economic independence has brought into the lives of women of today. In her frank discussion of female sexuality she shows the same psychological insight that we come across in the novels of Shobha De. Both of them have shown through their female characters like Paro, Priya, Rachita, Parvati, Shakuntala, Aasha Rani, Karuna, Swati, Aparna, Rashmi, Maya, Alisha, Mikki, Sudha and Amrita that unabashed enjoyment of sensuality is not a prerogative of man only. If sex is an important and natural part of life, it surely is so for both men and women. Women cannot be forced to consider it unpleasant and undesirable in the name of womanly virtue and shame. From this
perspective the novels of Namita Gokhale present the same feminist stand as do the novels of Shobha De. It was she, in fact, who started this frank presentation of feminine sexuality in Indian English fiction. But Namita Gokhale is also aware that Indian society is not yet ready to accept this. In *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* when Magoo, a young woman, falls to the charm of Shambhu and has a sexual relationship with him, her husband, Saboo, kills her and Shambhu. In traditional Indian society extramarital relationship on the part of a woman is looked upon as a blot on the honour of the husband. The infidelity of a husband, if not approved, is at least condoned, but in the case of a woman it invites not only condemnation of the whole society but also punishment by the husband. De and Gokhale expose this hypocrisy, meanness, and double – standards of men and society in their novels.

Namita Gokhale shows another aspect of a woman’s dependence on man in her novels. Women in traditional Indian society, particularly in rural or semi-urban India, cannot choose their life partners on their own. It is the males of the family, the father or in his absence the guardian of the family, decide whom a girl shall marry. The wish of the girl is not taken into consideration. In *A Himalayan Love Story* the life of Parvati is ruined because of this. She has to marry Lalit, a boy from her own caste, rather than Mukul, a boy of another caste but the one whom she loved.

Unlike Shobha De, Namita Gokhale has taken up a wider range of themes in her novels. She not only depicts the world of business but also that of politics. Her treatment of the supernatural world is something that we do not find in any other Indian English woman novelist. She is also different from Shobha De as well as most other women novelists in her treatment of different social and geographical backgrounds. She presents not only the background of Delhi and Bombay but also of
the hill towns of Uttarakhand in her novels. She has also gone back to ancient India to present her theme of a woman’s desire of knowing the world.

De’s heroines are generally amoral and can sleep with any man. They have hunger for sex and have no satisfactory relationship with any men. But for Namita Gokhale’s heroines people remember them with the depth of their heart and speak high words after their departure, like Ammi (before and after her death), Paro (before and after her death). They also die majestic death. Further we find philosophical touch in Gokhale’s novel as in the Book of Shadows. Rachita comes to terms with life again after few years of exile in that remote house. This book is replete with philosophical teachings and preaching and this is the thing which is far from Shobha De’s world. In fact, we can say that De’s women are not generally found in India. Most of them are swayed by the message flashed from the west. In this sense Gokhale’s women are more realistic and natural product of India and can be found in Indian society as Priya, Gudiya, Parvati, Shakuntala and Rachita. Only Pooonam in Priya: In Incredible Indyaa and Paro in Paro: Dreams of Passion are nearer to De’s women and Maya in Second Thoughts is closer to Gokhake’s women.

However, De’s women have not yet reached the stage at which they can completely get rid of the traditional community life. Aasha Rani rears her daughter like a traditional Indian mother but does not get that that respect which she should get. Women like Karuna in Socialite Evenings and Minx in Strange obsession indicate the confused state of women’s existence. They seem to bring out the transitional phase in women’s lives. At this level they are neither satisfied with the traditional set-up nor they find a permanently workable new model. De herself admits the complexity in forming women’s position in India that does not allow the acceptance of any
monolithic view of life. She says: “The whole question of the position of females in India is so wonderfully confused that it’s impossible to take any one stand on it”. *(Shooting From The Hip : Selected Writings 108)*

Both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale are the feminist writer of the same period and write about the plight and position of women in Indian society. In all their novels, their protagonists are women and the story is narrated through the eyes of females, only in *A Himalayan Love Story* the second part i.e. *Mukul: Dreams of Reason* has a male narrator. However, in both Shobha De and Namita Gokhale’s novels we find the same feminist concerns. They both protest against the exploitation and subordination of women in the patriarchal Indian society. Both of them present the aspirations and desires of contemporary Indian women in their novels, who no longer want equality with men but are concerned with shaping their own individual course of life and in this way make their presence felt.
Works Cited
