Chapter- V

CONCLUSION
The fictional discourses produced by Indian women writers and also by the women writers from the sub-continent have been directly or indirectly concerned with the delineation of women’s existence with different degrees of emphasis on different nuances of women’s marginalization, their subservience and subjugation. The Indian women novelists of earlier generation and also contemporary women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sehgal, Gita Hariharan, and host of others have continually been making fictional attempts to explore and explicate both the extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions of women’s existence. They have, at times, taken recourse to realistic – naturalistic modes of perception and presentation. These women writers make deliberate attempts to bring the women out from their domestic confinements or from the roles and responsibilities imposed upon them by the patriarchal culture-system.

Unprecedented advancement in the field of science and technology, expansion of the very idea of globalization and internationalization have challenged and drastically changed the notions of life and society and also thereby the status of woman. Earlier, women were considered inferior to man literally and metaphorically. Even these literary discourses relegated, by extension of the consequential reaction and its continuation. The arena of fictional transcription expanded and took into account the subjects and issues that were either considered taboos, or, were
looked down upon, or were considered extremely immoral and even blasphemous.

Western education, exposure to the western life style and style of thought, an awareness of the intellectual transformations, of self-realization and swiftly changing mores and cultural mutations have greatly affected not only Indian women’s perception of their lives and predicaments but also their perception of the flaws in social structure and the patterns of interpersonal and social transactions. The writers chosen here, Namita Gokhale, Shobha De and Tehmina Durrani, primarily keep their pace with the radically changing socio-historical, political and cultural conditions not only in their country and the sub-continent, but also with the occurrences in the west. Their fictional rendering of women’s precarious conditions, their fictional transcriptions of women’s sufferings, their suppression and oppressions unequivocally established them as intellectual novelists essentially interrogating the prevailing status (ironically granted to them).

The fiction of the selected writers therefore should not be taken prima facie as an expression of or narration of women’s sufferings and their problems in their mundane realistic situations, where the narrative strategies and the stylistic nuances intelligently hint at their transcendence of the immediate context of their texts. The selected authors very convincingly go much beyond the immediate and obvious context of their narratives and enter the
debates which very subtly, but at times mercilessly, interrogate the deceptive ideas promoted and even perpetuated by male dominated cultural designs.

Global transformations along with the socio-economic and political changes have also greatly changed women and their socio-economic behavior. This woman no more can be looked upon as domesticated, docile, meek or a submissive. This woman, ‘The New Woman’ is a curious person refusing to accept what is given to her, what is bestowed upon her by the patriarchy. Her sense of dignity and self-respect compels her not to accept what is given to her which she thinks she deserves by way of being a person with an absolute idea of the self. She is painfully aware of the fact that the prevailing male dominated culture is bent upon stifling and strangulating the self. The authors selected here, invariably, right from Namita Gokhale to Shobha De to Pakistani writer Tehmina Durrani, clearly and effectively bring out the fact how women are continuously tortured and tormented. How their dreams are shattered, how their expectations are fragmented and how they are leveled to dust. Each and every woman character delineated by these selected authors is an elegy personified on the miseries, and frustrations of women.

It has been often assumed that to articulate oneself or to assert one’s self has been outside the fold of Indian womanhood. Woman’s life is a constant struggle and the writers chosen for the study emphasise the fact that despite hardships women have evolved
survival strategies. The concept of ‘New Woman’ followed by Shobha De and Namita Gokhale is also an outcome of this. Women writers writing in English have stressed on the concept of bonding. Even though women interact with each other, they are often unable to break the conformist fetters.

Shobha De and Namita Gokhale show how universal human values have been degraded; sex and sexual affairs are now openly discussed and presented. In fact sex has become a sport; it is no longer considered sacred or profane. Sex, therefore, functions with different nuances, different linguistic and metaphorical connotations. In their highly self-conscious and intellectual context, the selected women writers employ sex as a strategy to write bitter critique of exploitation, oppression and suppression of women. In this transaction women appear to have been commodified, relegated to the status of an object of gratification.

Especially in Indian subcontinent marriage and home continue to be the points of interest. Society expects a daughter-in-law to behave in a decorous manner and conform to the norms. These authors have pointed out the dilemma a newly wedded girl faces. She is expected to be a good daughter-in-law, an obedient wife, a loving mother, and an efficient housewife. She is ironically expected to be a ‘superwoman’.

The works of these women novelists in English mirror the exact realistic picture of the contemporary world where innocence is
suffocating in the ‘blood dimmed tide’ of corruption; where women are supposed to be just a doll in the hands of men, where there is a prevailing sense of gender discrimination. In an arranged house of Indian subcontinents the helpless women are portrayed as bearing the brunt of patriarchal domination.

Cultural representations of women in the image of a Sita and Savitri or an Ahilya– still keep appearing in the fictional world. A woman’s voice, even as an author, was considered inferior. During the twentieth century, however, women’s voice started becoming an integral part of the domain of literature. Previously woman was considered an inferior being to man, who was fit to do only household chores and had no potential to participate in literary or other activities.

The modern woman is mentally and physically equipped to take stride with the fast changing values of life. Yet her journey towards liberation cannot reach its zenith. All the three women writers here incessantly portray their failure and frustration because of the sexist bias of the patriarchal society. In the entire body of their fiction these writers microscopically delineate the male design to subjugate women to their will, to use them for the gratification of their carnal desires, for their comforts and luxuries. She has never been more than an object, to be used and discarded. Here the story of modern woman takes a sad twist while she has adorned the mantle of self-emancipation. The selected authors project how man has
subjugated women to his will and power, used her as a means of selfish gratification to minister his sexual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort, but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she deserves as a human being.

Feminism strikes to undo this tilted and distorted image of woman whose cries for freedom and equality have gone, and still go, unheard in a patriarchal social system. The movement of feminism was in its full swing in the 1960s. The chief aim of this movement was to secure equal rights and opportunities for woman in the male dominated society. This required awakening and struggle on the part of woman and she gradually developed it. For a woman, her works are no less a process of self-actualization as her life is, in both she wrestles with a host of obstinate paradigms and syndromes, precipitated by not just the myths, legends or the collective memory of the inherent conservative elements within a community, but equally with the ones thrown up by the movement of feminism itself.

Women are defined not by the struggling development of their brain or their will or their spirit or by their inherent character traits and inner power. It is little wonder that when a woman comes to the task of rendering their experience they come out with a profound sense of their marginalization and distance from having a meaningful impact, or self-defined role in the world. Historically they have been denied opportunities. Connected to this lack of opportunity is the fact that they have been denied judicious objective critical climate.
Further the specter of male judgment along with the active discouragement and thwarting of her need by a culture controlled by males has created problems for women writers, problem of contact with herself, problems of language and style, problems of energy and survival.

The new generation of women writers writes about women’s feelings and their gender related problems. It is to be noted here that earlier women characters were shown as subservient and submissive who never raised a voice against the dominance of male in society. In other words, women were shown as ideal wives. But in modern era, women disapprove the dominance of men in society. They have started demanding their human rights. They also fight against unjust norms and tradition. So the ideal image of woman that disappeared with the arrival of new modern spirited woman. This new woman shatters earlier ideal image of a woman. ‘The New Woman’ in the fiction of De and Gokhale means ‘New literary female-model’ who is assertive, self-willed and self-motivated. This woman generally belongs to an urban middleclass, who does not suffer, but also in silence, she resists and questions.

Shobha De, a subtle soiled psychologist, displays an innate knowledge of women’s psychology and her problems. So she has quite convincingly, brought into light women’s displacement and marginalization at the hands of patriarchal culture and society. One of the major reasons of her popularity is her profound understanding
of contemporary woman’s position and the challenges she faces. She is an avowed feminist.

Feminism as a concept is opposed to the idea of subordination of women in both family as well as society. It challenges the domination of patriarchal which audaciously define woman for herself without any regard for her independence, integrity and identity. Feminism may appear in various forms such as a Radical, Socialist, Marxist, Lesbian and so on and so forth, but at the root it is basically a concept concerned with the question of identity. Traditionally, feminism was a mass movement in the sense that women clamored for political equality, civil rights, job opportunities etc. Today the movement has assumed an individualistic nature where women demand human rights and personal independence dismissing the erstwhile socially defined roles. However, this does not imply that women today wish to disturb the existing social and economic parameters. Contemporary feminist thought is necessarily pro-women but not entirely anti-man, it is a concrete step towards better human relationships.

Women writers in post-colonial India in general and the selected authors have created a literature of their own, so to say, placing women in the context of the changing social scenario, specially concentrating upon the psyche of such women. It’s true that the Indian women have consciously accepted the supremacy of the patriarchal value system by surrendering meekly to their traditionally
assigned roles and allowing themselves to be dominated. But increasing education, better job opportunities and awareness of rights and privileges of woman have forced her to contemplate. Indian women today are exposed to new values with education and economic independence putting them in a rather conflicting state where they desire independence while they dread their traditional role but are still not courageous enough to walk out of the situation. At this juncture the woman has to redefine her status, certainly not an easy task. The Indian women writers here have caught the Indian women in this flux and have portrayed them realistically, both psychologically as well as physically, in their novels. Such literature has certainly contributed to a fresh exploration of the role and status of women in the coetaneous Indian society.

Undeniably, recent years have witnessed the impact of western feminist theories by writers like Simone de Beauvoir (The Second Sex, 1952), Betty Friedan (The Feminine Mystique, 1963), and Kate Millet (Sexual Politics, 1970) and a host of writers like Elaine Showalter (A literature of their own, 1977), Mary Wollstonecraft (A Vindication of the rights of women, 1792). Under these influences the selected writers have successfully attempted to break the literary and social norms of the past. They delve deep into the psyche of their characters and also herald a new concept of morality.

Namita Gokhale’s Paro becomes the symbol of emancipation and individuality due to her courage and conviction. However, later
Paro is doomed to suffer from an atrophy of emotions and cynicism due to unbridled freedom ending up as a disillusioned woman. Priya’s identification with Paro adds to her misfortunes. The novel reflects esoteric strata of Indian society gaining its strength from the interplay of reality and fantasy. Gokhale’s other novels like A Himalayan Love Story; Shakuntala depict the marginalization of women and the search of identity of women characters. Parvati in A Himalayan Love Story tries to explore her identity with reference to her roles but her quest at last ends in insanity. She achieves this state due to perpetual marginalization of her emotional and physical demands by Salman, her uncle, her husband and Mukul. She could not emancipate herself from the conventional social pressures and seeks refuge in insanity.

On the contrary Shakuntala achieves what she wants to achieve in her life. As a free bird she is successful in breaking the shackles of conventionality and asserting her true spirit of freedom. Even if marginalized she spiritedly explores herself. God, Graves and Grandmother brings out the concept of “New Woman” through the characters like Ammi, Phulwati and Gudiya. They defy the conventional social pressures of womanhood and enjoy their life through adverse conditions of life by treading the path of their own and not the path set by conventions.

The authors chosen for the study deal with three different strata of society: Shobha De writes about the elite class. The
problems of the women of this class are more psychological and related to their quest for identity or a status quo. Namita Gokhale deals with the middle class or poor people. The women in this class struggle for survival. Tehmina Durrani’s concern is quite different from the other two authors as she depicts the Pakistani society and corruptions prevailing in the Muslim society. The problems of the women depicted by Durrani are concerned with the basic level of existence. The women are denied the basic rights to live; they are treated as cattle or slaves. We can see the highest level of marginalization of women in Tehmina Durrani. Thus, thematically these writers have concentrated on the female issues but they are not prejudicial. On the other hand the women characters in their works are drawn from a wide variety of female population placing them in their proper context and background revealing how they suffer or prosper, win or lose, get mentally disoriented or overpower their neurosis but in each and every case never sacrifice the bondage and norms of society, no matter how progressive they may be.

Like post-colonial authors, the women novelists here have not only exhorted an exposition of the patriarchal ideologies and their oppressive tendencies towards feminist growth and expression but have also envisioned ways of counteracting those attitudes. They analyze their varying ideas of feminist emancipation in relation to the roles that communities play in aiding or in obstructing feminist freedom.
The post independent era marks a striking departure from the traditional depiction of female as but a weak, dependent adjunct to her counterparts in society. Namita Gokhale, Shobha De and Tehmina Durrani have consistently dealt with all these dimensions of women’s issues in a manner quite appropriate to the contextualization of fictional locale and demeanor of their women characters against the backdrop of the cultural mutations and psychosociological imitations. A sensitive reader can easily trace out the implicit or explicit incorporation of, at times confirmative and at times radical and resistant viewpoints advanced and advocated by a variety of feminist thinkers, critics like Kate Millet, Helene Cixous, Sandra Krupp and many others.

The Smritis, Puranas, epics speak of woman’s lower position. It is a man-made world, and women are bound within the narrow confines prescribed by man. This kind of male chauvinism resulting in female enslavement has been a set feature of Indian society, since ages and which constitutes the crux of their indictment.

These Women writers have explored the stance of male chauvinism and atrocities committed against women. Victimized women in their fictional discourses, asserted themselves in different ways according to their perception of right and wrong, which itself has undergone a change, resulting in a changed attitude towards morality and modalities of life which came to be called as modern;
women either succumb to victimization, rebel against it or learn to accept it.

A society may be progressive apparently advocating women’s liberation but beneath the surface of the woman’s status remains unchanged everywhere. She has to encounter solitude, acerbity, frustration and alienation in a male dominated value structure. Shobha De has dealt with this theme in most of her novels with the reluctant inference that familial and societal maladjustments lead to inner fragmentation thereby forcing women to seek emotional outlets elsewhere. Shobha De agrees that marriage, is a compromise no doubt, but the woman should be aware of her economic independence before she takes any decision regarding her marital status. For a comfortable existence there has to be a proper turning between the self and the pressure of society.

Shobha De was invited to participate in a discussion on the occasion of International Women’s Day at Allahabad. She spoke out boldly against women who consider themselves to be modern in a different sense. She said “Wine and cigarettes do not make a modern woman. It is the attitude that matters and the rest, to say the least are pseudo projections, most unimpressive.”

The novels of Namita Gokhale reveal her keen concern for welfare of women. Her first novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* centers round the lives of two women characters, Paro and Priya. Both of these women make an attempt to shake off the shackles of social
conventions. But it is only Paro who actually unloosens herself from the shackles. Though Priya also tries to liberate herself from her middle class mental and moral frame of mind, she cannot reach the same level of emancipation as Paro does. Both the women use the same technique – manipulating the opposite sexes to achieve their ends.

*A Himalaya Love story* presents Parvati as the frail, poor and neglected daughter of a poor widow growing up in one of the most backward areas of Kumaon. She is human, fragile, stubborn and hungry for justice in an unjust introverted and decadent society of Kumaoni Brahmin. *Gods, Graves and Grandmother,* is a novel populated by women characters with male characters existing as performers of secondary roles. There is the grandmother (Ammi), the grand-daughter (Gudiya). Gudiya’s comparatively insignificant mother Mrs. Lamba and indomitable Phulwati. Ammi, Phulwati emerge as ‘The New Women’ who do not conform to any conventional code of conduct.

Feminist writers refuse to accept the “Images of women” as portrayed by male writers. They are of the view that women characters projected by men in literature lack authenticity. In other words men have portrayed women as they find them and not as ‘women’ would have perceived themselves. The very concepts of masculinity and feminity are social constructs. Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics* maintaining that sexual politics is a process
whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex. She suggests that social and cultural contexts of a work of art should be taken into account in order to understand in its proper perspective. The fictional writing of Namita Gokhale and Shobha De masterfully dramatizes these issues.

While analysing Tehmina Durrani’s novels, it is essential to consider the social dynamics of religion and culture in Pakistan. In order to highlight the sufferings and the struggle of women she makes her female characters to undergo a difficult set of circumstances which finally train them in the art of living and loving. These women find themselves disillusioned and dejected and hence liberate themselves from the unnecessary restrictions posed on them by the traditional social system.

The novels of Durrani reveal the hegemonic assault. Her women characters find themselves in confrontation with the manifestation of the state and religious authority in their spouses or fathers. The aggressor is the immediate patriarch who polices the woman’s sexuality through repressive tactics of physical, psychic and sexual abuse. Basically the silence of the women characters cannot be taken as an acceptance of norms. It veils alternate forms of resistance which requires a less obvious form of a dialogue. *Blasphemy* is a powerful testimony of the way women can be suppressed and dehumanized. It succeeds in generating a sense of disgust, anger and outrage powerfully in readers towards the extents
in which male injustice is tolerated against women in traditional societies like that of rural Pakistan.

Muslim women writers have mapped a long distance in raising a voice against male domination and injustice. As repression and discrimination against women continues in Indian subcontinent, many Pakistani and Bangladeshi writers like Durrani and Taslima Nasreen have protested for a more and just order for women. Their voices are far more powerful than many of the European or American theories of feminism because these voices are the cry of women who have suffered or witnessed the suffering of other women. It’s a need to realize that the vital feminist concern in the Indian subcontinent relates to minority women, Dalits and a vast section of rural illiterate Indian women who do not even have the means to raise a voice against the injustice faced by them. Ostracism, social expectations of ideal chastity and beauty, sexual abuse, discriminating religious injunctions, subjection to male supremacy and will, denial of fundamental rights as human beings –are the vital issues at the heart of South Asian Muslim feminism.

The single image that emerges of the woman characters depicted by Muslim women is that of a silent woman, derided, absurd, denied and neglected. She is the victim of a social order in which the woman is expected to be a model of virtues while being kept firmly under male control, their weapon of resistance is passive shield of silence. It is noteworthy that subtlety is the hallmark of
these women writers. What is unspoken is acquiring significance and speaks volumes. These writers quite convincingly choose a form of low key representation of the injustice of which they are the victims. Depiction rather than protest seems to be their creative outlet. Whatever Gayatri Chakravarti may have to say or philosophize, the power and authenticity of her logic and intellectual logistics, certainly, command conformation. ‘Subaltern’, however, does speak in the fictional discourses of Namita Gokhale, Shobha De and Tehmina Durrani in their specific socio-historical and cultural context.