The present study, by applying the Freudian techniques of psychoanalysis, has tried to analyze the neurotic women characters as portrayed by the Indian women novelists of the second generation. It has tried to identify the different courses taken by the women protagonists under the influence of neurosis. Neurosis, as seen, is the result of the conflict between the Ego and the Id and it is a state in which a person is at war with himself or herself. While psychosis is the outcome of a similar disturbance between the ego and the outside world; and the libido is the driving energy of the life instinct in the Freudian frame. Sexual difference plays a central role in the Freudian model. In Freud, though there are some notions that the male or female distinction is based on biological difference, it is generally construed as a distinction based on socio-cultural forces. According to Freud, anatomy acquires meaning and value as the consequence of intense cultural mediation; so, what is at issue is not the superiority of the male biology or the inferiority of the female anatomy, but the symbolic exclusion or marginalization, i.e. her isolation, from the socio-cultural privileges which define male superiority.
This issue is taken quite seriously and handled effectively by the Indian women novelists in their portrayal of the women protagonists. Emotionally, it is a natural gift for women novelists to expose themselves to their own problems more insightfully. Vimala Rao explains this gift in a very articulate manner:

Women by nature, see, hear and talk more exuberantly than the men. Being at the centre of the vaities of life nothing escapes them. Keen observation, a quick perception, a fine sensibility and an intuitive insight into life are the strong points of any novelist. Women novelists have made use of some of these natural gifts in the writings of their novels (LHY 7.1, 1966:47).

The women novelists dealt with in the study, ie. Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande, are emotionally and intellectually equipped to offer an authentic treatment of the problems of man-woman relationship in terms of marital dissonance, socio-cultural issues, socio-political and socio-economical problems. In the novels of these writers, there is a welcome shift in the focus of the themes of psycho-social issues. These novelists seem to have been greatly influenced by Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Marxism. They begin
with the primary group of the most intimate interaction, i.e., family. Family is man’s immediate fragment of society: “For man does not live in cosmos, he lives in microcosm” (Krech 1962:383).

As a psychological group, the family is significant as in its structure are involved three fundamental bonds: the marital, parental and sibling. Even this small group offers challenging possibilities of complex ties. Notwithstanding our weaknesses and strengths, predilections and aversions, we all are influenced and constrained by family relationships. The important institution besides family is marriage. Whereas all other animals enter into mating relationships, human beings go through a procedure of marriage to establish a family: “Marriage in the biological sense is a sexual relationship entered into with the intention of making it permanent, even apart from whether or not it has sanction of law or the church” (Sur 1973:2).

Therefore, Alexander Walker says: “History proves that marriage is essential to the well being of human society and that celibacy brings ruins upon states” (1987:78).
In most societies throughout the world, marriage is considered as a permanent life-long and sacred union: “In spite of all these dicta and slogans supporting the indissolubility of marriage, there are factors, internal as well as external, working to undermine the stability of marital ties. Such a situation is called ‘marital dissonance’ which may be manifested in various forms, divorce being the final” (Pothen : 1987 : 2).

In the rich stratum of Indian society the institutions of marriage and family have come under tremendous strain in modern times. Temperamental properties influence even basic human relationships. New definitions of marriage have been propounded. Radical changes have affected the society. Yet, most people still favour a happy, life-long marriage characterized by love and understanding. Some would see the perfect relationship as a merger of two selves, ‘a marriage of two minds’. This is, however, something really unattainable. In fact, people can fall out of love, remain locked in unhappy marriages or seek divorce. One of the problems is that situations change and so people change. It requires effort and commitment on the part of the spouses to maintain their marital relationship. This is what the Indian
women novelists in question seem to suggest when they focus on the inner sensibilities of their characters. As has been remarked by A V Krishna Rao that Kamala Markandaya’s fictional focus in *A Silence of Desire* is “on the psychological adjustment of an urban middle class family” (1987:220).

On the other hand, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, in her attempt to decide who she really is, rejects her name Suhasini which symbolizes submission and seeks her individuality to be valued equally with that of man. She is confident of her individuality and hopeful of a change in Mohan’s attitude. Such an optimistic ending of the novel shows that the day is not far off when men and women will be valued equally, ensuring unsullied dignity, individuality and self-respect to women. Similarly, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* suffers at the hands of her husband but in true spirit of Indian tradition comprises with the practical situation and adjusts with her husband. Her marital relation with her husband moves from compliance to rebellion and then back to compliance again. Sarojini, Jaya and Sita ultimately accept their lot in life after undergoing a sobering experience. Besides, there are characters like Sarla Devi and Simrit, who possess extraordinary
will power and appear to transcend the limitations of society and advance to their set goals. Sarla Devi, in *Get Ready for Battle*, accepts the marital disharmony which results from the ignorance of the fact that ideals cannot be thrust down the throats of people. She also fails miserably in helping the poor people from being ‘railroaded’ by her husband. She accepts the marital wreckage for the sake of ideals and goes to the red light area in order to realize her idealistic ambitions. Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* breaks the barriers and customs that prevent her emancipation and lifestyle. She gets a divorce and seeks extra-marital relationship, feeling a sense of release from ancient pain and suppression. The prominent theme in the two novels seems to be a lack of communication between individuals, specially husband and wife. Sahgal and Jhabvala, desire and plead for a truly mature and harmonious union between the sexes. Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee too endorse this view in their portrayal of Maya and Dimple whose frustration leads to death. Maya and Dimple in their psychotic violence kill their husbands. In the deaths of Gautam and Amit, their marital dissonance reaches the climax. But it is not the end of the problem for Maya. The agony and frustration experienced by
Maya due to marital dissonance finds its logical end in her own tragic suicide. The impact of marital dissonance is greater on Maya than on Dimple. Dimple’s psychic troubles, especially her ‘impulse towards self-destruction’, could be related to her inability to ‘voice’ the agony she ‘scarcely understands’. Jasbir Jain observes that Bharati Mukherjee’s characters suffer from ‘isolation’, Dimple’s being routed in her “estrangement from her own past and her own inner being” (JIWE 13.2 : 1985 : 17).

These women novelists have very ably dealt with the neurotic phenomena in the Indian context by creating proper women protagonists and making use of the findings and theories of Freud, Erik Erikson, Erich Fromm, and Sudhir Kakar. Neurosis, at least in the Indian context, has a close relation with feminine sensibility. It always results from a compulsion to repress one’s feelings and desires because they are not in consonance with the accepted norms of society. Indian women are denied opportunities for open expression of the feelings. Of the above factors women become neurotic. Neurosis is the result of strong reaction to the hostile conditions of their surrounding. The women novelists in India, particularly of the second generation, have
felt the need to change the established social structure dominated by negative women life. These Indian novelists have taken serious pains to show realistic picture of Indian society. The message of the novelists is to replace old social practices and to introduce new, healthy and positive values which may promote happiness. From different perspectives they have emphasized the role of harmonious familial ties.

Moreover, at the present moment, when a cynical could-not-care-less attitude is fast developing to corrode the foundations of marriage, these novels of the Indian women novelists can definitely serve as eye-openers. They inspire one to cherish these bonds and maintain their harmony. The artistic value of their writings is validated by their sociological and psychological aims to right the wrongs. They deserve admiration for their deep insight into the Indian female psyche. This does not mean that they fictionalize only women’s problems or the female psyche. They also hold a mirror to women’s reaction to men, society and vice-versa. They discuss new themes, the complexities of man-woman relationship and provide a penetrating analysis of the female world.
Yet, in the present study, the characters have not been studied from the feminist perspective because it is believed:

The application of feminist theories to the study of the neurotic characters in fact proves to be counter – productive. It helps neither in studying the characters at a deeper level nor in examining the real issues (Rajeshwar, 1999 : 109).

Furthermore, though the six Indian women novelists selected for study resent being labeled as feminists, they agree that they explore the problems of being a woman. They may not be avowed feminist writers, but they are certainly interested in women’s experiences. They are, in a way, spokespersons for the new Indian woman and the psychoanalytic approach alone, to their mind, would create a new milestone in attempting to find out some feasible solutions to these problems. It would not be inadequate to ventilate the opinion of Rajeshwar who has highlighted the relevance and usefulness of psychoanalytic study:
Psychoanalytic approach thus helps us with a better appreciation of the human situation of the characters of the women novelists and sharpens our understanding of and enhances our sympathy for them. At a time when the opinion that one has reached the limits of critical possibility in the field of Indian writing in English on gradually settling, the endeavor to study the neurotic characters using psychoanalytic insights promises to reveal the new depths in the fiction of Indian English women writers. These depths need to be further fathomed and critically accounted for (Ibid : 111).

It depends much on how readers apply this mode of interpretation to enhance their understanding and appreciation of life and literature. But one can be sure that this interpretation can afford many profound clues toward solving a work’s thematic and symbolic mysteries. It is an excellent tool for reading beneath the lines and understanding not only literature but human nature and the individual selves as well.