The postmodern Indian writing in English in novel, drama and poetry is gaining ground and making a separate and independent entity of its own. Now the age of obscurity and oblivion has reached completely to an end and the withered and uprooted tree, once again, has taken its roots in the solid ground of Indian culture and tradition. In its early stages, the Indian writings in English were heavily influenced by the Western art form of the novel. It was typical for the early Indian English language writers to use English unadulterated by Indian words to convey experiences that were primarily Indian. The core reason behind this step was the fact that most of the readers were either British or British educated Indians. In the twentieth century, the writings were largely confined to writing history chronicles and government gazettes.

In the early 20th century, when the British conquest of India was achieved, a new breed of writers started to emerge on the block. These writers were essentially British who were born or brought up or both in India. Their writing consisted of Indian themes and sentiments but the way of storytelling was primarily western. They had no reservation in using native words, though, to signify the context. This group consisted of Rudyard Kipling, Jim Corbett and George Orwell among others. Books such as *Kim*, *The Jungle Book*, 1984, *Animal Farm* and *The man-eaters of Kumaon* etc were liked and read all over the English-speaking world. In fact, some of the writings of that era are still considered to be the masterpieces of English literature. In those periods, natives were represented by writers like Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu. In fact, *Geetanjali* helped Tagore win Nobel Prize for literature in the year 1913.

The year (1827) is generally accepted as the date of the commencement of the literature, but it is at least a few decades late. The pamphlets of no less a person than Raja Rammohan Roy began being
published some twenty years earlier, in 1816, while the every first pamphlet written in English by an Indian appears to have been published in 1806. The first book to be published in English by an Indian appeared before the end of the eighteen century, in 1794. It has no time to discuss the fascinating man who wrote that volume, Sake Deen Mahomed, but he was only one of many Indians who were writing in English before the end of the eighteenth century. Though they do not seem to have published any volumes of work, they contributed to Calcutta periodicals at a time when Calcutta was second only to London in its importance in the Empire.

The revolution in Indian intellectual life was so complete by the 1830s that the first autobiography had already been published in English—Raja Rammohan Roy’s. Why it is the genre of autobiography that so demonstrates this mental revolution will be instantly clear to anyone acquainted with vedantic philosophy, which believes that our consciousness of being individuals, separate from each other and from nature around us, is not only an illusion, but constitutes precisely that illusion which prevents us from ‘realising’ the absolute Brahman. To be so absorbed in this ignorant and illusionary self as to actually want to recall, and then pass on to others, the wretchedly transitory details of life in this illusory world ought to come as close as possible to the unforgivable in atavistic belief. It had been written by an eminent Indian in the 1830s, and an increasing number of Indians, eminent and not-so- eminent, every year. The first play in English, Krishan Mohan Banerjea’s The Persecuted was published in 1831, and the first novel in English, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Rajmohan’s wife was published in 1864. Indian writings in English go back to some two hundred years, and all the major literary forms have begun being practiced from some one hundred and twenty years onwards.
By contrast Australian literature is generally agreed to begin with the stories of Charles Rowcroft in 1800s, Canadian literature with T.C Haliburton’s *The Clockmaker* in 1836, and New Zealand literature with two volumes published separately by Samuel Butler and F.E. Maning in 1863. White South African literature, again, begins in the 1800s, but black African literature begins very late- unless one includes the work of black British writers such as Equiano and Sancho in the eighteenth century. Caribbean literature, if one excludes the seemingly solitary exception of Mary Seacole really begins in the inter-war period in the twentieth century. India was therefore one of the first countries outside Britain and America to adopt English for literary purposes.

We come, next, to the question of the volume of the literature. Prose was the first of the literary forms in Indian English literature, and it continues to be the largest and most vigorous form. Born properly with the reforming zeal of Raja Rammohan Roy, and aimed at educated people all over the country, the astonishing and irritating flexibility of the language was hammered into an effective weapon of exposition, argument, and exhortation against the British by a long line of eminent patriots such as Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Mahatma Gandhi. More recent practitioners, such as Mr. Chaudhari and Ved Mehta, have used it at least as effectively and creatively, if to quite different purposes. As might be expected, poetry was the most important literary form of the nineteenth century, and though it is not of such central importance now, an ever-increasing number of Indian poets are writing and publishing in English. Fiction in English presents an opposite sort of line on the graph, compared to poetry, for it shows a steadily increasing popularity at first, and now an algebraic growth rate, both in the number of works published, and in the print runs of individual titles.
Drama in English is of course the last of the literary forms to flower and there have been only some two hundred plays published in English over a period of 150 years. But if drama is to thrive, it is self-evident that it needs greater institutional and public support than any other form of literature. It is also possible to examine the quantity of Indian literature in English by the historical periods into which it naturally falls. The first of these is roughly up to 1816, what might be called the ‘Pre-Roy’ period. It is during this period that the use of English by Indians was an individual aberration or indulgence. The second begins with Roy and is typified by him: it is marked by steadily increasing use of the language on the part of growing nationalist class which was, during this period, entirely English – educated.

The third period begins in the 1930s with the arrival of the three major Indo-Anglian novelists, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. This coincides with the final phase of the nationalist movement which for the first time in Indian history awoke the masses of our people to their political rights and responsibilities. During this time, India’s conception of caste, which had strangled social behavior for some thousands of years, was revolutionized, and Mahatma Gandhi’s Christianised and individual version of *Karma* and *Bhakti* was gradually replaced by the philosophical and practical materialism and individualism typified by the urbanizing and industrializing instincts of Jawaharlal Nehru, our first Prime Minister.

So powerful has Indian English literature become, that novelists who have won prizes for their works in Indian regional languages, such as Narendarpal Singh, have started writing in English: an exact reversal of the situation a hundred years ago when M.M Dutt and Bankim Chander Chatterjee flirted with English before returning faithfully to Bengali. Indian writers in English have now won every major literary prize: the Nobel Prize was won by Rabindranath Tagore in 1913; the Booker M.C. Connell Prize 1981 was won by Salman Rushdie. The Hawthornden Prize, The
Commonwealth Poetry Price, the Duff Cooper Memorial Award, the Winifred Holtby Award of the Royal Society for Literature, the English-speaking union’s Prize for the best novel of the year—all these have been won by Indians.

If Indian literature in English is of such quantity, variety, antiquity and quality, why is it so little known and recognized in the West? One reason is the self-interest of Western individuals and publishing companies. After independence, the number of opportunities for Western individuals and corporations multiplied in Africa and the Caribbean. By contrast, opportunities for Westerners in India disappeared almost overnight. It is therefore understandable that few Western literary scholars are interested in Indian English literature as there are fewer career opportunities. Indian legislation combined with India’s own vigorous publishing industry means that the market available in India to Western publishers is negligible. India publishers themselves have only recently made any substantial attempts to promote their books in Britain.

The trends in English literature written by Indians have undergone vast changes over the years. Earlier it was more influenced by colonial and western philosophy. Also the genre of novel and short stories had become hugely popular and writers were exploring themes within this genre. The advent of the printing press had ensured a vast readership and also encouraged writers to explore their talent. Indian English writing started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. This great poetess charmed the readers with her writings. Feminist themes have also been used by authors like Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta. Regional fiction theme has been aptly used by Kamala Das, Anita Nair and Susan Viswanathan. Novelists like Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai captured the spirit of Indian culture and its traditional values. During the 1990’s India became a popular literary nation
as a number of women authors made their debut in this era. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Suniti Namjoshi and Anuradha Marwah Roy used realism as main theme of their novels. The western influence in Indian literature is undeniable. It inspired the writers to think beyond their own little world of vernacular language and absorb ideas that were revolutionizing the western world; it also forced them to question the orthodox norms in their works. The literary world was instrumental in effecting a social emancipation in India, for example; the abolishment of sati pratha, education of women, ban against child marriage etc. The substantial rise of Indian writing in English and the novelistic tradition in the English language is a subject matter that had arrived much later, precisely just after the British Raj and consequent Indian Independence. Leaving out the rise of Hindu ruling dynasties during the ancient to late ancient period, the medieval period, to some extent had witnessed the development of novel and prose writing. However, a considerable historical period for Indian novels was ushered in, a kind of ‘renaissance’ in a rather high-flying sense, with the birth of the Indian independence movement under the British Empire.

The novel- the long sustained piece of prose fiction- has occurred and taken root in India in twentieth century. One might, of course, protest and say that Sanskrit works like Bana’s Kadambari and Subandha’s Vasavadatta are also novels, but the description would not really fit; and, besides, these were isolated marvels. For the novel, properly so called, we had to wait till the latter half of the nineteenth century when the Western impact on India’s cultural front had resulted, among other things, in the development of formal written prose in the regional languages, first as a functional, and presently as an artistic medium. Perhaps the first novel written in Bengali was Alaler Gharer Dulal which came out in 1858. “The wastrel elder brother, the redeeming younger brother, and the deceitful uncle keep up the interest of
the story, and the novel itself seems to have been a sort of Jack Wilton in the history of the novel in India, a pioneering work if nothing else.”¹ Indian fiction in English is its philosophic mode, well integrated with the artistic frame- work. This is clearly brought out in Manmohan K. Bhatnagar’s Janus-faced Art: A Study of the coalescing of the political and the personal in Indian English novel. Indian English novel has incontrovertibly had umbilical links with politics, for as M. K. Naik has convincingly argued it was the intense phase of the national movement for independence, launched by Mahatma Gandhi in the nineteen thirties that gave a virtual lease of life to Indian English fiction. The immediate pre- and post- independence novels in English in particular are imbued with an intense consciousness of the immediate social, political and cultural problems faced by the country at large, the story of the Indian English novel is really the story of a changing India. There was a time when education was a rare opportunity and speaking English was unnecessary. The stories were already there- in the myths, in the folklore and the umpteen languages and cultures that gossiped, conversed, laughed and cried all over the subcontinent. India has always been a land of stories, the demarcation between ritual and reality being very narrow.

History of Indian novels is grossly and sublimely based upon and interlinked with the definition and delineation of the Indian writers, is it in regional or the English language. The modern Indian writers writing in English have been well-bred and mannered to richly represent the historical incidents and events in their works time and again. Now, it is difficult for a writer to escape the major historical events. Historical events and momentous happenings are one such domain, which have firstly been mirrored in literature, mostly through treatises, essays and of course, novels. As such, Indian novels and their history had begun to already happen since
the pre-historic ages, when novel writing was still very much in its nascent, toddler state.

In spite of such stellar accounts of the history of novels in India, there still exists great deal of room for debate in the ‘conventional account’ of the emergence of the novel in pre-independent Indian scenario. Life may indeed have become more “settled” with the passing of the Mutiny of 1857-58, to that extent that departures from stated policy were rendered less in the inconsistent manner and the administration had assumed a more even note. As is said, the post-sepoy Mutiny period was characterized by the emergence of British ascendancy and dominance over the most intimate aspects of the everyday lives of ordinary natives. However ‘civilized’ or ‘well-mannered’ the British Crown had called themselves, there was, in the long run, absolutely null use for the Indians in matters of privacy in both familial and commercial issues. And such governance was very much and integrally visible in the novels that came out in the dark, with British authorities trying every motion to curb such publishing in the light of day.

As such, with respect to the thesis that the history of the Indian novel owed a good deal to the development of a market economy, one can hardly question that new forms of commerce arose with the advent and fanning out of British dominion. Such shrewd modes of mixing art with commerce had significantly given rise-especially in the port cities of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras--to a whole new class of shipping agents, customs functionaries, middlemen and merchants. Whatever might have been that unseen force of the ‘Sociological explanation’ in helping one comprehends the historical growth of the novel in India, it has also been reasoned that by the mid-nineteenth century, English novels were widely available in India. This very fact exist authenticated testimony of writers like Bankim Chandra himself. The novels of Walter Scott and Edward Bulwer Lytton may not have been as
fervently anticipated in India as they were in the United Kingdom, but they were nevertheless to leave an indelible mark on the Indian novel and its historical perspective. To place rather concisely, the novel in India must, on the conventional opinion, be an ‘alien import’.

In literature it is thus a matter more of links and continuities with the past than of making a clean break with it. It is only in this limited sense, without dogmatism--and, one might add, with considerable trepidation--that one can venture to speak of trends in modern Indian fiction. It is, by no means, as if in modern Indian fiction earlier concerns and preoccupations have been abruptly and completely replaced by new ones. In fact, many old trends continue to lead a vigorous life exploration of the experience of love in all its richness, complexity, and variety; delicate play of individual sensibility; preoccupation with the self and with one’s moods and emotions and, above all, a brooding concern with historical, legendary, and mythical themes--these have remained strong and effective as in the past. Still, even as these trends have continued, others, making a tentative appearance at first, have acquired a new energy, a new shape and form, sometimes a new context, and have become dominant, more articulate, asserting themselves more strenuously.

A major development in modern Indian fiction has been the growth of a feminist or woman-centered approach, an approach which seeks to project and interpret experience from the viewpoint of a feminine consciousness and sensibility. Feminism assumes that women experience the world differently from men and write out of their different perspective. As Patricia Meyer specks remarks There seems to be something that we might call a woman’s point of view, an outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the centuries.
Indian English literature has a rich and long tradition of women novelists going back to the Nineteenth Century. The first English novel by an Indian woman is The Hindu Wife: The Enchanted Fruit 1876.  

It must not be imagined that feminism suddenly burst upon the Indian literary scene in recent years. Rather, it has grown slowly and steadily, some of its features having been anticipated by earlier writers. Thus what may be called the faint foreshadowing and premonitions of feminism become visible in Indian fiction as early as in the 1920s and 1930s. It is, however, only in the post-independence period, and especially since the 1960s, that Indian novelists have begun to question seriously and systematically, and at times to reject outright, traditional interpretations of women’s role and status in society. Ideals of womanhood firmly entrenched—often imposed by men and unconsciously internalized by women—are now losing their sanctity and are being critically assessed.

Oppression and exploitation of women in what is now often called a patriarchal society has been an ever-present theme in Indian fiction. The theme is a recurrent one in Premchand and Saratchandra Chatterji, although in Saratchandra it is often suffused in a romantic glow which blunts its sharp edge. Whereas earlier writers had often glorified women’s suffering, however, Indian novelists in the last two or three decades have on the whole presented it unpalliatively, with much greater realism, and without minimizing its impact by giving it the halo of noble self-sacrifice. Recent Indian novelists tend to present oppression of women with greater self-consciousness, a deeper sense of involvement, and not infrequently a sense of outrage. The theme takes on sharpness and urgency, and is developed with great diversity of situations and characters, in Nayantara Sahgal’s novels the day in shadow and rich like us.
Mrinal Pande’s story ‘Girls’ brings out the discrimination women themselves practice in the upbringing of girls and boys. The unnamed eight-year-old narrator is told by a female relative you are born a girl and you will have to bend for the rest of your life, so you might as well learn. In Shashi Deshpande’s justly celebrated English novel That Long Silence, the matric-failed Dilip is given a favored position over his much more talented sister Kusum. Manorama Mathai’s story ‘The Marriage of Aley’ in her collection of short prose in English Lilies That Fester, shows the unenviable fate of even well-educated Christian women of Kerala, and the writer Kamala Das recalls how even in her matriarchal society a man could force his niece to divorce her husband, whom she loved, and marry another man.

The celebrated Oriya writer Binapani Mohanty, whose avowed aim is to uphold ‘femininity’ and ‘woman-consciousness’ and who excels in presenting the plight of village women, and the leading Gujarati novelist Kundanika Kapadia, who has taken a sustained interest in the Women’s liberation movement, graphically and at times polemically depict the fate of women wronged by men. More restrained is the Assam’s writer Sneha Devi, whose collection of stories Sneha Devir Ekunki Galpa is remarkable for its presentation of images of women’s life with insight and sensitivity. As such the Partition of India into two separate countries, post Indian independence and its bloody aftermath, had arrested the attention of a major cluster of Indian writers, bringing in the history of novel writing in India towards glorious light and global accolade. There has since emerged a host of writers concentrating on history and history alone. Among the writers of this post independence, ‘stream of consciousness’ and post-colonialism genre, umpteen crucial names figure predominantly. These writers have dynamically surveyed the decisive outcomes in the history of India. Three novelists, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar and Chaman Nahal, have
time and again proved this in their writings. Just like its English counterpart in the 18th century, in India the novels. Beginnings are believed and imagined to be associated with the ‘diffusion’ of the ‘market economy’ into the countryside, the clandestine emergence of a bourgeoisie conception and, eventually, the advent of other forces of ‘Modernisation’ and ‘Westernization’. With the consolidation of British rule and the changeover of authoritarian power from the east India company with its fallible ways to the crown - theoretically the very quintessence of the ‘rule of law’, both the rulers and the ruled could commit more concentration to the much touted moralities of ‘improvement’, and life became more settled and conventional due to the emergence of the bourgeois society in the British Indian scenario, history of novel writing in India began to take up pace, with various households solemnly making endeavors to make their outcry known to the worldwide populace.

The Indian English novel evolved as a subaltern consciousness; as a reaction to break away from the colonial literature. Hence the post colonial literature in India witnessed a revolution against the idiom which the colonial writers followed. Gradually the Indian English authors began employing the techniques of hybrid language, magic realism peppered with native themes. Thus from a post colonial era Indian literature ushered into the modern and then the post-modern era. The saga of the Indian English novel therefore stands as the tale of changing tradition, the story of a changing India.

The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English literature. Today is the generation of those women writers who have money and are mostly western educated. Their novels consist of the latest burning issues related with women as well as those issues that exist in the society since long. These books are thoroughly enjoyed by the masses and the publishers make easy money out of them. The
publishers feel that the literature actually survives because of these types of bold topics and commercials used by the women novelists. Their novels encourage the women freedom to flirt. They describe the whole world of women with simply stunning frankness. Their write-ups give a glimpse of the unexplored female psyche, which has no accessibility.

In the present age women have realized that they are not helpless and are not dependent. They feel that a woman is an equal competent just like a man. Today, a woman has also become a direct money earner and she is not only confined to household works. The women of modern era think on different lines and that is what is depicted in the novels of the Indian women authors. These facts are incorporated by the women writers. Indian women writers explore the feminine subjectivity and apply the theme that ranges from childhood to complete womanhood. Through their novels they spread the message of what actually feminism is, which actually is very broad. These women writers say that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in silence.

The theme of east-west encounter is continued in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s Heat and Dust (1975). Again two generations, this time British, must come to terms with an alien culture. Whilst Olivia’s adventures are romanticized, Jhabvala attempts to explore in a more sophisticated manner the social outlay of Anglo-Indian relations with the higher Muslim classes and Olivia’s step-grand-daughter is confronted with an India that remains hidden in the works of Kipling, Forster or Narayan. Leelavati the beggar-woman’s life, if not her behavior, demonstrates an unusual social awareness of the lowest castes. It is to be noted that the east-west dichotomy within the later generation has become less strained modern Britain is expected now to accept India on its own terms.
If we take into consideration historical factors related to intra-regional relations, that is, within each of these two zones, together with inter-regional relations between east and west, we could in no way contrast east with west categorically.³

In the past, the work by the Indian women authors has always been undervalued because of some patriarchal assumptions. Indian societies gave priorities to the worth of male experiences. In those days, women used to write about a woman’s perception and experiences within the enclosed domestic arena. On the other hand, male authors used to deal with heavy themes. Thus, it was assumed that their work would get more priority and acceptance in the society. During the 18th century, these factors led towards the decline of Indian women writing. And with all these factors, production of women’s literature declined further. In the 19th century, more and more women actively participated in India’s reformist movement against the British rule. It again led to the women’s literature. At that time, their write-ups mainly concentrated on the country’s freedom struggle. Over the years, the world of feminist ideologies began to influence the English literature of India.

The list of Indian women novelists also comprises popular names such as Bharati Mukherjee, Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Malati Chendur, Gauri Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Ruth Jhabvala, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more. They are known for the contemporary approach in their novels. The novels of authors like Namita Gokhale or Shobha De are really out-spoken. Most of these female novelists are known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. Basically, these are the novels of protest and an outburst of reservations and contaminations. Unlike the past, where the works of women
novelists were given less priority and were actually undervalued, classification of feministic or male writings hardly makes any sense today.

Majority of the Indian readers comprising both male and female read the novels of the Indian women authors with certain expectations. They look for some “Indian-ness” in the write-ups. Only the women novelists of India are capable of conveying the messages of feminism in an Indian way. There was a lull for more than three decades when India was passing through the era of aspiration and reconstruction. Some sporadic works such as *A Passage to India* by E M Foster, *The Wonder that was India* by E. L. Basham and *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* by Nirad. C. Chaudhuri though set the stage on fire but was unsuccessful in catalyzing and explosion. It would perhaps be just not a mere overstatement if stated that literature and history are very much intimately linked. Literature is known to represent history without any exaggeration or a biasness of the mind set-up. And history is no better portrayed in Indian literature than the novels that have been rendered life with much pain, love, affection and respect. The history of Indian novels is almost the personified flowering of Indian history itself.

It was in late seventies that a new breed of convent boarding school educated and elite class of novelists and writers started to come on block. The likes of Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitabh Ghosh and Dominique Lepierre set the literary world on fire. Rushdie’s *Midnight Children*’ won Booker in 1981 and sent the message loud and clear that Indians are here to stay. “Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai repeated the feat when they won Man Booker in the years 1997 and 2006, respectively.” In the mean time, a new group of authors such as Pankaj Misra, Chetan Bhagat, Jhumpa Lahiri, William Dalrymple, and Hari Kunzuru have arrived on the international scene and their writings are being appreciated round the globe.
Women writers explore old wives tales, condemn exploitation and try to make sense of the fast changing pace of the new world. Kamala Das explores women’s plight in India and the world and others like Shashi Deshpande paint characters who blame their own complacence for their sorry condition. Arundhati Roy begins her story without a beginning and does not really end it while Jhumpa Lahiri’s well-crafted tales move at a perfect pace. The cobweb of romance, the strange mind of the women and the very ideal that women need something more than just food and shelter are ideally portrayed by the women writers while making Indian English novel to take that final step towards maturity. The fast changing pace of the new India is thus ideally painted by the female writers. The history of Indian English novel, a journey which began long back has witnessed a lot of alteration to gain today’s chic contour more on Indian English novels.

Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. In the past, people used to enjoy the ‘desi’ versions of English magazines like ‘Playboy’ with a sense of shame and guiltiness. But, today the case is different. The Indian literature has gifted several talented women novelists who present the Indian version of such books and that too within the limits of dignity and decency. They are popularly known as the goddesses of Eros! They have brought a stylized pattern in the whole context of Indian writing. Nowadays, people enjoy reading the anglicized novels presented by the new age women writers. Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today’s male dominated world as the main theme of their books, for instance in some of the novels of Anita Desai like *Voices in the City* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* She has portrayed the complexities between a man and woman relationship. She has tried to explore the psychological aspects of the protagonists. The women novelists
try to create awareness that this is the time to proclaim with definite precision. In India, the women writers are doing very well and their contribution is immense.

The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status.\(^5\)

Majority of the Indian readers comprising both male and female read the novels of the Indian women authors with certain expectations. They look for some Indianness in the write-ups. Only the women novelists of India are capable of conveying the messages of feminism in an Indian way. Indian literature in English which is accessible to us in the West still has its roots in colonial literature and the tensions between east and west. A European naturalism is often present; a concern to posit India as an arena within which Western readers can identify realities is inherent within much of this writing.

**Biographical Sketch of Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De:**

Deshpande was born in Dharwad in 1938. She was a student at the University of Mysore. She graduated from the university diploma in Journalism in 1970 and M.A in English. Shashi Deshpande, a woman novelist of the younger generation, is preoccupied with the interest of women and their state in Indian society and large traditional joint families. Supremacy of male children and men in Indian families arouses a mild sense of anger and feminist anger in most of her novels. Though no writer in India can get away from the idea of social commitment or social responsibility, committed writing has always seemed to her dubious literary values. Her writing comes out of a deep involvement with women. Shashi Deshpande a
prominent and up-coming Indo Anglian writer has delineated the undulations of the female ego or self under the pressure of critical human predicaments and emotional affinities. Her attention is focused on feminine sufferings in Indian Society, out of the anxieties of women’s life. The very basis of feminism is reformist. The fundamental reality of women’s life situation is ‘interrupted’. Nature perhaps is the reason for a close connection between women and fiction writing. Most definitions about women’s behavior and existence were given by men. The old conventional notions of male dominated society were so rude, unbearable, suppressive, oppressive and depressive that women’s discourse takes a shape of movement. Their consciousness seeks to analyze and understand the material conditions through which gender has been constructed within specific language and bodies of literature and its outcome is that the strong wave of new women in 1960s and 1970s took place for women’s liberations:

Liberation, in its true sense, means to free someone or something from rigid social conventions. Civilizations, world over, have undertaken various liberation movements to free themselves from oppression. Oppression, here could take on different meanings right from the pressures of an enemy nation in the case of warring countries to rigid ideologies and conventions followed blindly by society. History has been witness to several liberation movements that have helped mankind free themselves from the shackles of oppression. 6

The concept of new woman will be justified itself only by bringing about a radical change in public attitude towards man-woman relationships. The general perspectives about woman as a shadow-figure to a male caretaker be he a father, a husband or a son continue to persist man’s affinity with woman is most often the bond that exists between a master and a slave.
This state calls for a concerted effort to demolish such notions and to assert the dignity and equality of women in the family as well as in the wider social life. Shashi Deshpande’s novels reveal the women’s quest for self, an exploration into the female psyche and an awareness of the mysteries of life and the protagonists place in it. Her all novels indicate the initial quest of women for her existence, glorifying the stereotypical virtues of the Indian women like patience, devotion and object acceptance of whatever is meted out to her. Suman Bala observes:

Shashi Deshpande’s novels represent the contemporary woman’s struggle to define and attain an autonomous self-hood. Her female protagonists are able to free themselves from the stultifying traditional constraints after a long and bitter struggle.7

Shobha De is an eminent Indian novelist, who is often known as India’s Jackie Collins. She was born as Shobha Rajadhyaksha to the Saraswat Brahmin family of Maharashtra on January 7, 1947. She completed her graduation from St. Xavier’s College, Mumbai and obtained degree in Psychology. At present, Shobha De is working as a columnist and writes for a fortnight magazine The Week. In this periodical, she writes on varied issues concerning the society. She speaks her mind in her writings. She often expresses her dissatisfaction with respect to the behavior exhibited by the present day generation. Many a times, she has been held responsible for accelerating the pace and bringing about a sexual revolution through her writings in the column ‘The Sexes’ of the magazine The Week. She has also written a couple of erotic novels

Shobha De’s fiction gives the treatment of the contemporary urban woman’s challenges; predicament, values and life-style which are surely not without significance. Through her novels and essays, she has tried to shatter
patriarchal hegemony, by vociferously drawing attention to women’s exploitation, discrimination and commoditization in the Indian ethos. De herself would consider the treatment of the woman question as the most significant contribution made by her work. She said: “I write with a great deal of empathy towards women. Without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about the woman’s situation.”

Indian contemporary writing owes a depth of substance to this enterprising lady who has taken off from the literary launch pad and is soaring comfortably in the world of serious readers. At the end of it all, I wonder why Shobha De portrays herself as a woman with sharp fangs, obsessed with you know what, when she is actually a soft, gentle, often ethical human being and, above all, a caring mother and a doting wife. Maybe, if all writers were writing serious, straight-laced, conformist stuff, life would be dull; an occasional jester with a capacity to expose society is the most wanted person.

It is said that those who rule the word rule the world and since men historically dominated the role of authors, therefore, a deep-rooted gender-bias became a part of our historical and textual tradition. The significance of the immense potential of women would have remained confined to the margins had the world not produced reformers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, J.S. Mill, Simon de Beauvoir and the likes of them, whose persistent efforts gradually shifted the emphasis from andro-texts to gyno texts.

Consequently feminist consciousness emerged as the new spirit of the age. No doubt, in the beginning it was an individual trend, but it has global relevance now and, in most cases, it’s coming out of a genuine desire to make a difference. Indian women novelists too have concentrated on women’s problem in their work and are expressing themselves freely and boldly and on a variety of themes from a feminine eye without adopting feminist postures. What was just a beginning in writers like Anita Desai,
Kamala Das and Amrita Pritam has assumed a strident posture in Shobha De and others. Shobha De one of India’s bestselling authors, presents the modern Indian woman at the centre of her fiction. She clarifies however that her brand of feminism is not about women getting up and fighting for their rights, but is more sly and subversive. Swain observes:

De’s novel shows the struggle of woman of against the predatory male-dominated society. But her vamp ideology of feminism provides no redemption for the deviant and fallen women who in their frantic struggle to escape male-domination and attain individuality, meet with failure and are victimized in one way or the other.

Women writers have given literary work in India an unmistakable edge. They are able to sensitively portray a world that has in it women rich in substance. Their women are real flesh-and- blood protagonists who make you look at them with awe with their relationships to their surroundings, their society, their men, their children, their families; their mental make-ups and themselves.

Now writing in India has not been treated as a medium for entertainment alone. We have a vast storehouse as far as non-fiction is concerned. Women writers in India do not merely write jet-set tales of intrigue and fantasy. Shobha De has moved away from the beaten path and has actually undertaken a serious analysis of the man-woman relationship in marriages. She has made certain insightful comments that will do the average Indian woman a lot of good. For instance, she advises that a woman ought to announce to her partner right at the beginning of the relationship that she too has a set of priorities and prerogatives other than him because men don’t like to be taken by surprise.
Women writers in India not only sweep you off your feet with just their down-to-earth attitudes, but they also have you nodding with wisdom and agreement. Their leading ladies jerk the average Indian readers out of their typical Indian complacency regarding gender issues. One might tend to think of women writers only in a Mills and Boon context, but women writers in India have proved that they are made of sterner and more serious stuff than that. Our women writers have grappled with complex issues such as sensuality, servility, subjugation and society. They have handled them with a sense of balance, never disregarding our Indian traditions, yet discovering that there is more in the offing.
References:


