Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION
Shobha De, a popular Indian novelist who has touched the boundary of higher human concerns is a budding flower in the realm of modern English literature in India. She is the best seller novelist and a free lance writer for several newspaper and magazines. As a writer she is gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss sensitive aspects of human life. She believes in frankness and open-heartedness in the narration of incidents. She understands the psyche of a woman and masterfully handles it. She is thus a feminist writer who concentrates on women's problems and gives a new approach to them. It is no exaggeration to say that her revolutionary theme of the secret depths of the human psyche, particularly of woman, have heralded a new conception in the realm of traditional thinking. In 1989, she wrote her first novel 'Socialite Evenings'. Her other works include 'Starry Nights', 'Sisters', 'Sultry Days', 'Strange Obsession', 'Snapshots', 'Second Thoughts', 'Uncertain Liaisons', 'Shooting from the Hip', 'Small Betrayals', 'Surviving Men', 'Selective Memory: Stories from my Life', 'Speed Post', 'Spouse' and 'Superstar India: From Incredible to Unstoppable'.

Indian English literature has a relatively recent history. It originated in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a direct result of the British Raj in India. Eminent men notably Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Lord Bentick and Lord Macaulay propagated and accelerated English education in India. It can be said that the greatest gift of the British Raj to the Indian subcontinent was probably the English language and its rich, varied literature. Indian English literature has become a new form of Indian culture, and voice in which Indian authors- poets, novelists, essayists, dramatists- have been making significant contributions to world literature since the pre-independence era. Much water has flown since the first tentative steps by Indians and today this literature has become a vibrant body of writing with a distinct identity and a global recognition. The East India Company
came to India as traders in the early years of the seventeenth century during the reign of Jahangir. This Company had become a potent force by 1757 and they defeated the Nawab of Bengal at Plassey. This was a turning point and the Englishmen became the rulers of Bengal and eventually they spread their tentacles all over India.

The Englishmen introduced English education in India as they wanted to raise a local work force. In 1784, Charles Grant, one of the directors of the East India Company pleaded for the English language to be used as a vehicle for imparting Western ideas to the locals. This was soon supported by Indian patriots and intellectuals like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, the illustrious grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore and other reformers. This resulted in the introduction of English in schools and colleges. Another important factor in this direction was the work of Christian missionaries. They started many English medium colleges and printing presses. Hicky’s ‘Bengal Gazette’, the first newspaper of modern India was founded in 1780 at Calcutta by James Hicky. The reading public demanded more and more and this provided a great scope for English educated Indians and Indian English writers. So the English language and its literature, which was confined to Bengal in the beginning, now spread to the whole of India. Many Indians were attracted to write in English as it helped them to impress the British and gave them a wider international reading public. Moreover the multiplicity of languages in India made English a common language. The earliest form of English writing was limited to prose and the drafting of speeches or pamphlets. Meanwhile in 1835, Lord Macaulay’s ‘minute’ paved the way for English being given prominence in government jobs. So, more and more people gradually came in contact of the English language and literature. Thus, after a humble beginning, Indian English literature started consolidating its
position. At first, a clear cut western influence was evident as these early writers imitated the writers of English literature. These early writers were either patriots or belonged to highly westernized families. Most of the early English creative writing by Indians was done in verse although other genres also started becoming popular.

The first Indian English novel ‘Rajmohan’s Wife’ was written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 1864. It is generally agreed that the novel is the most suitable literary form for the exploration of experiences and ideas in the context of our time, and Indian English fiction occupies its proper place in the field of literature. As a distinct literary form, the novel is undoubtedly of recent birth. It is in fact the latest of literary forms to be evolved and the most dominant in twentieth century. A sizeable number of novelists, on the literary horizon, have given vent to their creative urge in no other language than English and earned credulity to establish Indian English fiction as a prime force in the world fiction. They received national and international recognition, fabulous royalties and prestigious awards. The Indian English fiction, though the last to make its standing among various branches of Indian English literature, first made a diffident appearance in the nineteen twenties, but later on gradually gathered confidence, and established itself in the next two decades. The momentum it gained has not subsided, and more novels have been published in the sixties than ever before. This increase in number baffles and dazzles us in the light of the fact that there were hardly half a dozen Indian English novels before 1920 and a few more before independence. The pre-independence Indian English fiction subtly depicts the great national movements, the struggle for independence, the patriotic fervour and reformatory zeal of many Indian social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, K.C. Sen, Dayanand Saraswati, Annie Besant and Surendra Nath Bannerjee etc. The
novelists like Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan espoused the cause of nationalism and patriotic feeling. Gandhiji’s call for struggle was significantly reflected in the novels of pre-independence India. As the period was marked by changing literary characteristics and varying themes and tones, the literature of protest, of dissent, of unrest and of remonstrance naturally came into being.

Ever since, the publication of Bankim Chandra Chaterjee’s novel 'Rajmohan's Wife' in 1864 Indian novel in English has grown considerably in bulk, variety and maturity. Its main achievement lies in the fact that in spite of the Indian cultural background it has succeeded in evoking a universal appeal. Its growth has corresponded with social development and the evolving form of narrative fiction in India and abroad. The contemporary Indian -English novelists have maintained the artistic excellence and standard set by earlier writers -- more variegated, multi-dimensional and complex. The correspondence between narrative developments and contemporary social reality illustrates the global awareness that informs the content and form of Indian fiction in English. In this context, the contribution of a contemporary novelist like Shobha De and her place in the field of Indo-English fiction can be ascertained after a proper perspective is built on its gradual development through different stages of its progress to the present times.

Most of the early exponents of English Literature in India were British though. The likes of George Orwell, Rudyard Kipling and Jim Corbett gave the initial push that was later carried on by several British authors. But with the emergence of the Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, the triumvirate on the literary firmament brought new hopes about the creative activity in the form of fiction. They were the harbingers of the true Indo-English novel. William Walsh
maintains that, "It was in 1930s that the Indians began what has now turned out to be their very substantial contribution to the novel in English and one peculiarly suited to their talents."¹ M.K Naik, highlighting the place of the early novelists in the development of Indo-English fiction, remarks, "The most significant event in the history of Indian-English fiction in the nineteen thirties was the appearance on the scene of its major trio: Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan and Raja Rao."² Similar observation is made by K.R.S Iyengar when he applauds the achievements of these writers in his popular book on Indo-English literature. According to Madhusudan Prasad, the foundation laid by these writers won them the place of being the "pioneers of Indian-English fiction."³ The writing of these novelists moved the Indian English fiction in the right direction. They discovered a whole new world in Indo-English fiction and the Indian novel owes much to their efforts for gaining solid ground and achieving an identity of its own. They defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate, and brought the Indo-Anglian novel within hailing distance of the latest novels of the west. They established the suppositions, the manner, the concept of character, and the nature of the themes which were to give the Indian novel its particular distinctiveness. Apart from these three novelists, other writers (not necessarily of fiction) of the earlier period included names like A.S.P Ayyar, K.Nagaranjan, K.A.Abbas, Dhan Gopal Mukherji, Iqbal Unnisa Mussain, Humayun Kabir, Aamir Ali, L.S.Rau, Ram Narain, H.Kaveribai, C.N. Zutshi, Purshotamdas Tricundas, and N.S Phadke etc.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905) has been the most prolific of the trio. His contribution to the Indian English fiction of social realism is incontrovertibly great. Through his subtle style and delicate sense of form he brought the western technique and form to perfection in his fiction. He employs a dramatic method of
story telling. He is best known for his short story 'The Lost Child' and has written numerous works of prose, poetry and drama. His novels 'Cooie' (1933), 'Untouchable' (1935) and 'The Woman and the Cow' (1960) reveal his concern for the downtrodden and underprivileged in India. Anand's novels portray vividly the wretched condition of Indian rural society. He is considered the Indian version of Charles Dickens as far as the treatment of social themes is considered.

R.K.Narayan, another prolific figure in Indian English writing enthralled the readers with his portrayal of contemporary society in a language that was lucid and simple. Like Hardy's Wessex, Narayan created the fictitious town of Malgudi where he set his novels. His popular novels were 'Swami and Friends' (1935), 'Bachelor of Arts' (1937), 'The Financial Experts' (1952), 'The Guide' (1959) and 'Waiting For the Mahatma' (1955) et.al. His descriptions of small town life through the eyes and experiences of child protagonist Swaminathan in 'Swami and his Friends' depicts the Indian culture and philosophy to the world with an ease and charm that mesmerizes his readers.

The last of the harbingers of Indian English literature is Raja Rao, whose "advent on the literary scene has been described as the appearance of a new star shining bright". He is one of the most significant writers of modern India. His novel 'Kanthapura' (1938), set in rural India, established him as a major figure on the Indian literary scene. Raja Rao's other novels are 'The Serpent and the Rope' 1960 and 'The Cat and Shakespeare' 1965. Thus the evolving form of novel at this stage was concerned mainly to depict the distress of the downtrodden classes, portraying India as she really was, wart and all. The novelists were primarily concerned with the contemporary social milieu and were greatly influenced by the Gandhian ethos. Talking about the common grounds shared by most of the writers of these formative years M.K.Naik remarks, "In fact
it was during this age that Indian English fiction discovered some of its most compelling themes: The Ordeal of the freedom struggle, east-west relationship, the communal problem and the plight of the untouchables, the landless poor, the downtrodden, the economically exploited and the oppressed.\textsuperscript{5}

The Indo-English fictional scene was enriched and variegated with the appearance of more novelists after these writers, usually considered to be the first generation of Indo-English fiction. Some of these new writers who have been called the writers of "the younger generation"\textsuperscript{6} in comparison to the earlier novelists are Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Khushwant Singh, Balachandra Rajan, Sudhindra Nath Ghose, G.B.Desani, Arun Joshi, Chaman Nahal and the women novelists like R.P.Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Santha Rama Rau, Nergis Dalal. These novelists and many other minor writers (between 1950 and 1970) are agreeably considered the writers of the second generation of Indo-English novelists. The critics like K.R.S.Iyengar, H.M.Williams, Jasbir Jain and eminent modern novelist Salman Rushdie, referred to these writers as the writers of the "middle generation"\textsuperscript{7}.

The interest of the second-generation writers moved from the public to the private sphere. The novelists began to delineate in their works the individual's quest for the self in all its varied and complex forms along with his problems and crises. Hence, Indian English Fiction has evoked a widespread interest in India and abroad during the recent decades. Similarly, the emergence of women novelists on the Indo-English fictional scene marked the beginning of a new trend with a single emphasis on feminist concerns and hope of a new world order. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. Women writers explore old wives' tales, condemn exploitation and
try to make sense of the fast changing pace of the new world. Apart from projecting traditional themes, the women novelists also register the modern conflicts in the urbanized middle class families. The women writers along with their male counterparts emphatically present an existential view of life and alienation is a major theme in their works. The theme of alienation, particularly for women novelists, becomes a powerful tool to question the social restrictions and gender bias. These women novelists seek to expose the traditional value system and the social structure with a view to showing its futility and urgency to redefine it.

With the third generation writers, India emerged as a major literary nation. It is during this period that Indian English novelists and novels earned unheard of honours and distinctions in the western academic world. It is, again, during this period that a team of highly talented novelists have each produced what Anthony Burgess would call some great unexpected masterpiece which will burn up the world by its meritorious achievements. With the advent of these third generation writers new themes and techniques were introduced in the realm of Indian English fiction. The writers have boldly experimented with language and technique. Salman Rushdie’s ‘Midnight Children’ became a rage around the world, even winning the Booker Prize. The worldwide success of Vikram Seth's 'The Golden Gate' made him the first writer of the Indian Diaspora to enter the sphere of international writers and leave an indelible mark on the global literary scene. The writers of Indian Diaspora have been in the living contact with the English language. Most of them have settled in Britain, U.S.A. or Canada. Others who haven’t done so are frequent visitors to the West. Moreover, most of these writers belong to that section of society where English is used as a means of social communication. Thus their English is not stilted, learnt-from-books English. There
is a vigour and flow in their language. The contemporary Indian English novelists have made a very evocative use of language by breaking, inverting and twisting the language. Other novelists of repute of the contemporary times include Shobha De, G.V. Desani, M. Ananthanarayanan, Arun Joshi, Khushwant Singh, O.V. Vijayan, Allan Sealy (The Trotternama), Shashi Tharoor (Shoe Business, The Great Indian Novel), Amitav Ghosh (Circle of Reason, Shadow Lines), Upamanyu Chatterjee (English August, The Mammarys of the Welfare State), Raj Kamal Jha (The Blue Bedspread) Amit Chaudhuri (A New World), Pankaj Mishra (Butter Chicken in Ludhiana, The Romantics) and Vikram Chandra (Red Earth and Pouring Rain, Love and Longing in Bombay). Arundhati Roy, whose 'The God of Small Things' won the 1997 Booker Prize and became an international best seller. Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Kiran Desai, Sudhir Kakar, Ardeshir Vakil and Jhumpa Lahiri are some other renowned writers of Indian origin.

The writings of the novelists belonging to the third phase of Indo-English fiction do not follow a set pattern of themes. There is the broadening of the thematic range of Indian English novels. There is a shift in emphasis- we have moved away from the Gandhian era of village centricism to the city centricism of the Post-Emergency era. Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children' can be said to be the epoch- making book that has revolutionized Indian English fiction in the post-modern period. And the ideas often expressed about this work inform the direction that Indian English fiction has taken in recent years. "This work (Midnight's Children) heralds the arrival of the post-modernist sensibility in the Indian literary scene and is characterized by the artistic license in use of language and form which Rushdie and others like Vikram Seth allowed themselves. Seeking inspiration not only from Britain, but also from Europe, U.S.A, Russia, Latin America etc. and the best of world literature it reflects
the cosmopolitan spirit in India and reveals the extent to which the literary and intellectual spirit has become globalized.\textsuperscript{8}

The novelists of the third phase do not exhibit a set pattern in the themes and other fictional concerns in their writings. The rapid development of the mass media and shrinking of the globe in the past few years has provided them immense variety of subject matter and highly interesting ideas. East-West encounter which is explained in terms of hybridity in relationship by Post Colonial critics, takes 'a space' in Post-Modern Indian English fiction. When the world has become 'a global village,' no culture, or society is pure or insular today. That is why Indian English fiction now takes characters, situations both from inside the country and abroad into its orbit and develops them. In this era love, sex and marriage or the failure of it is some of the leading themes in Indian English novel. The description of love and sex is very bold and rather unconventional.

In the last two decades there has been an astonishing flowering of Indian women writers in English. With these writers a major development in modern Indian fiction has been the growth of a feminist or women centered approach, an approach that 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. The term feminism has its origin from the Latin word 'Femina' meaning 'Woman', and there by refers to the advocacy of woman's right, status and power at par with men on the grounds of 'equality of sexes'. In other words, it relates to the belief that woman should have the same social, economic and political rights as men.

Feminism in literature is essentially concerned with the representation of women in society and their corresponding fluid position. The basic function of
feminism is to liberate women from the man's domination to make them realize their status in society, to diagnose the forces and factors which made them responsible for the subordination. Men, right from the beginning, have had every advantage in telling us their own stories. They had education and a much higher degree to articulate and voice their dominance. But, Women had no education, nor were they strong to voice. Women have been denied full justice- social, economic and constitutional and largely ignored as the "Weaker sex". The mid-twentieth century saw the upsurge of a new awareness about the women's marginalized position resulting into the birth of women's Liberation Movement. Literature, being the mirror of society, does not remain unaffected but explores the "Woman's questions"—extensively and vociferously. Right from Christine de Pisan to Mary Wollstonecraft, from Simone de Beauvoir to Jane Austen and beyond, women have been demanding their rights in a male centric world. Feminism is a protest movement launched by women of the west for equal social, political, legal, moral, cultural rights with men. It is an anti-masculinist movement of the women, by the women and for the women. For a correct comprehension of the emergence of feminism as a self-conscious and concerted approach to life and literature during the past four decades or so it is necessary to have the historical perspective of it. The outburst of feminism in 1960s throughout the world, particularly in the advanced west was not a matter of chance but the natural corollary of centuries of struggle for women's rights. In this context, Mary Wollstonecraft's- 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' (1792) is the first landmark, which can be regarded as the manifesto of modern feminism. Incidentally, in the same period some women writers in England- Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen and others-came out of the obscure, suffocating feminine shell and presented life and art from the point of view of women. Margaret Filler's 'Woman in the Nineteenth Century' (1845) and John Stuart Mill's
'The Subjection of Women' (1869) are other milestones of modern women's path for emancipation, for self-realization, self-definition and self-assertion. In the twentieth century Virginia Woolf can be regarded as the first avowed champion of feminism. 'A Room Of One's Own' (1929) and her numerous essays collected later on under the title 'Women and Writing' are an open attack on patriarchal society, which, in her views, is the root cause of educational, economic and cultural backwardness and disabilities hampering women's creative, cultural and social growth and stature. However, it was 'The Second Sex' (1949) by the French woman writer, Simone de Beauvoir, which brought about a revolution and a sea change in western society, and thus it can be rightly regarded as the true foundation of the present day feminism. In her book 'The Second Sex' (1949), Simone de Beauvoir criticized patriarchal culture and analyzed the marginal position of women in society and arts. As she comments, "This has always been a man's world; History has shown as that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers; since the earliest days of the patriarchate they have thought best to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law have always been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as the Other." The traditional-minded women accept their 'false conditioning into subordination and dependence without demur, the sensitive and aware women realize their need for individuality and revolt against the established norms by "leaving a marriage that had become an emotional wasteland" for them. Simone de Beauvoir in 'The Second Sex' argues: "She is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex-absolute sex, no less... she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other."
Another important feminist Betty Freidan opines that the core problem for women is not sex but identity which has always been denied to them. Freidan finally declares that "for woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment-autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization is an important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted". These feminists want a humanist and unprejudiced attitude towards women.

Thus the feminists felt that women had been poor victims of male oppression and exploitation and expressed anger and strong resentment against injustice done to womankind. From demonstrative protests on the streets against oppression of women, feminism soon entered the academic circles, and became an important subject of literary debate and discussion. The persistent efforts of these reformers gradually shifted the emphasis from andro-texts to gyno-texts. They aim at bringing about a moral revolution for the betterment of the world, and see more meaningful relationship based on trust and companionship rather than on power politics where one sex dominated the other. Consequently feminist consciousness emerged as the new spirit of the age.

Feminist consciousness has certainly given a fresh ardor and excitement to literary studies. It has carved a niche for itself in the Indian literary scene with its peculiar flavours and nuances unique to the Indian soil. In the pre-Independence era, the woman who knew that as a female child she was an unwanted creature had tried to efface herself or accepted a shadowy existence or faced suffering stoically. Ideas and taboos instilled in her mind from childhood had resulted in woman's acceptance of an inferior position. She had neither desire nor the strength to revolt. The only way left for the woman till the early twentieth century was to suppress or spiritualize her natural desires. This is reflected as it is in the
Indian fiction of the first half of the twentieth century. But today, no longer do our women endorse the Tennysonian view:

*Man for the field and women for the hearth;*  
*Man for the sword and for the needle she.*”

("The Princess" V, 427)

In the wake of feminist movement in India, themes like woman's search of identity, quest for selfhood, relocating the self and awareness to seek balance between tradition and modernity became popular in the works of male as well as female writers of the Post-Colonial Indian English Fiction. Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity that is not imposed by a patriarchal society. Through women writers eyes we can see a different world, with their assistance we can seek to realize the potential of human achievement. Indian women novelists have concentrated on women's problems in their work and are expressing themselves freely and boldly and on a variety of themes from a feminine eye. They also portray a very deep analysis of the sufferings and persecutions of the miserable women living under veil and wall in a society of cruel and conservative patriarchal domination—a society which seldom allows a woman to express her views in full-fledged way; a society which has deliberately put various intolerable bumps and hurdles in the smooth path of her progress; a society which never hesitates in torturing women without any rhyme or reason. Kamala Das, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy are a few prominent names in this field. These women novelists have awareness which comes because of their wide acquaintance with the nuances of life in the East as well as the West. Their high educational and intellectual standards have sharpened their observation of life and have imparted a psychological depth to their writings. Feminism, free sex,
isolation, alienation, identity crisis or an individual struggling to be oneself are some of the major thematic concerns of these women novelists today. These novelists through the portrayal of women and their stories reflect a variety of shades of a woman’s plight with the consciousness of the injustice being meted out to women by society. If we look at these fictional female characters, a large number of them rebel against the existing social set up. They discard the idea of being submissive, suffering and sacrificing.

Among the women novelists Kamala Markandaya deserves a special mention because she is gifted with extraordinary vision of life. In her novels, she depicts race conflicts, temperamental disparities, cultural conflicts and sexual person as factors working in the form of barriers of communication. As a writer, she has the practical experience of life in rural area as well as in urban area. In the writings of Kamala Markandaya the female characters are subjected to binary pulls torn between tradition and modernity, between the desire for autonomy and emancipation and her need for nurturance; between her duty as a daughter, a wife and a mother and her dignity as a human being. Women in the novels of Kamala Markandaya are beyond doubt victims of social and economic pressures and disparities. However, they raise above all these and cross the barriers of discrimination only for the larger concepts of universal love and concord. Indeed, their vitality, both physical and emotional is appreciable.

Anita Desai, one of the literary luminaries of contemporary Indian fiction writing in English, is the most prominent among the Indian English novelists who have tried to portray the tragedy of human souls trapped in the circumstances of life. She has touched the nuances and subtleties of fiction hitherto unknown in Indian fiction in English. An intimate study of her works reveals her struggle for female autonomy played out against the backdrop of the patriarchal cultural
pattern. She has created an intricate and sensitive style of her own to suggest the frustrations of her hypersensitive characters. There are echoes of Virginia Woolf in the reactions and ruminations of her characters and also in the fact that the mind—conscious and unconscious—is the chief theme of her novels. The bored, lonely wife in the urban complex; the unbearably restrictive family and society attitudes towards women (incidentally, Desai’s women are more convincing than her men); the wish to revert back to childhood and the suicidal or murderous inclinations of an ultra sensitive mind—such is the material for her novels. Almost all her women are not only liberated but go much beyond to the region of psychological and philosophical depths. For example, Nanda Kaul in ‘Fire on the Mountain’ is fully and painfully conscious of her need to live for herself. All her life she has lived in mock pleasure and pseudo status. She is enjoying the bliss of silence and an existence entirely for herself. But the point is that her story does not stop here, it goes far beyond into intellectual regions. So it is with almost all women portrayed by Desai. Her concern does not lie with radical feminism and women’s liberation. She lives and paints a scene where women can be presumed to be liberated. The narration starts after the independent identity is established. Whether it is Maya in ‘Cry, the Peacock’ or Monisha in ‘Voices in the City’, the women of Anita Desai are mentally advanced in the real sense of the word. Thus her profound intellectual maturity provides a literary landscape based on the ideological and theoretical formulation for the understanding of society in general.

Ruth Prawer Jhabwala is indeed a very talented artist who leaves her international reputation as a novelist. She projects on her experience, her awareness of man, society, human and moral dilemmas. Her first novel, ‘To Whom She Will Describe’ is about the protagonist of the novel, Amrita, a modern Bengali girl, who falls in love with a Punjabi youth, Hari Sahni. Both of them aspire
for each other and seriously consider themselves to be fully capable of marrying for each other. Amrita, though apparently more stable and determined in love, yields herself to be tied in a nuptial bond to any person. She is overjoyed to get a letter from Krishna. The love of Amrita and Hari, like a radio play has several sound effects. However, this love-making scene ends on a note of frustration which is partly comic and partly pathetic.

Jhabwala in 'Esmond in India' has developed the clash between materialism and idealism of the middle class people. Gulab, like every Hindu girl, respects her husband, but the moment she feels, that her husband has failed to give her protection, she has no social obligation. As a matter of fact, the conjugal life finds a jerk at every step due to the low and mean morality, behaviour, sexuality, modernity and social sophistication. Prof. Shahane rightly remarks:

"Gulab marries for love and she does not find it at all Shakuntala too, succumbs to her passion without evoking any positive fulfillment, Esmond is frustrated in his marriage to Gulab. He allows his sexuality to get the letter of him in his escapades with Shakuntala and his flirtations with Betty without realizing and discovering the internal center which will give him fulfillment of self."  

Shashi Deshpande is one novelist who is rising like a star feminist among women novelists of India. She is the confident voice, who explores individual and universal female psyche. She has gained reputation as a serious writer with tremendous potential. Her women protagonists are educated, self-conscious, sensitive and exposed to Western ideas. Their revolt against the rigid social and family set up comes out of necessity. Saru in 'The Dark Holds no Terror' pays the price in terms of being brutally insulted by her husband simply because she is superior to him mentally as well as socially. She goes through traumatic
experiences simply because she is a woman and is highly skilled, intelligent and competent. Her novels also tend to suggest a conflict between tradition and modernity. Her other work ‘The Binding Vine’ is a novel of feminist significance. It presents woman as a spineless wooden creature subjected to male domination. In the novel ‘That Long Silence’ Shashi voices her feeling in favour of emancipation of women from the conventional male control. In all her novels she concentrates on the portrayal of pathetic and heart rending condition of Indian women in the male dominated society.

Mahasweta Devi got the prestigious “Jyanpeeth” and “Magsasay” Award for literature. In her novel, ‘Mother of 1084’ she describes... the Naxalite movements in its urban phase in the seventies, eighties. This novel is considered a significant milestone in her literary career. The novel ‘Mother of 1084’ focuses on the psychological and emotional crisis of a mother who awakens one morning to the heart-rendering news that her dear son is lying dead in the police morgue, and is demeaned to a mere numeral—Corpse No. 1084 like ‘An Unknown Citizen’, a poem of W.H.Auden. This incident leads her to a journey of discovery, in the course of which, struggling to understand her Naxalite son’s revolutionary commitment, she begins to recognize her own alienation, as a woman and wife, from the complacent, hypocritical, bourgeois society against which her son had rebelled. Mahashweta Devi herself quotes in this novel....

“I set an apolitical mother’s quest to know her martyred Naxalite son, to know what he stood for; for she had not known true Barti ever, as long as he had been alive.”14

Nayantara Sahgal, daughter of Vijaylakshami Pandit and niece of Jawaharlal Nehru, is undoubtedly an outstanding Indian English writer and an established political columnist. Sahgal’s literary canon consists of several novels,
autobiographies, some non-fictional works, articles and short stories published in newspaper magazines of repute. Though Nayantara Sahgal has been hailed chiefly as a political novelist, her feminist concern is quite overt and her fighter spirit quite vocal in her fiction. The central preoccupation of Nayantara Sehgal's novels is the suffering caused to woman in the prison house of loveless marriage and her suffering when she makes a breakaway. Women in her novels are liberal and unconventional. Saroj in 'Storm in Chandigarh' refuses to succumb to socially acceptable norms of feminine behavior. She craves to establish herself as an individual whereas for her husband Inder, she is a mere wife. A woman's longing for love and understanding is beautifully depicted in the novel.

The Indian woman is well on her way to move from the feminine or feminist phase to the phase of displacement and self-discovery. Self-assertion seems to have become the keynote of the expressions of the evolving woman. To escape the deadlock perpetrated by the unilateral dictates of a perniciously effective patriarchal form of society, the New Woman comes out in more prominent contours in succeeding works. This centrifugal revolt takes definite shape in Nayantara Sahgal's novels. Divorce has been depicted as an alternative way of life to escape the drudgery perpetrated through discriminatory laws promulgated by lawmakers like Manu and enthusiastically supported and implemented by the succeeding generations of men deeply steeped in their complacence to toe the line. Three of her novels, 'This Time of Morning' (1966), 'Storm in Chandigarh' (1969), and 'The Day in Shadow' (1971) need special mention in this regard. Sahgal is an iconoclast in her own right as she succeeds in demolishing the hitherto held myths and images of the Indian woman: the 'patiparmeshwar' image: the husband is God.
Arundhati Roy got Booker Prize on her famous novel The God of Small Things which is concerned with the socio-political condition of Indian women with special attention to Kerala family life. This caste origin plays innumerable lives of down trodden poor villagers like paravans, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. She portrays the ill treatment of a comrade K.N.M. Pillai who attempted to rape Amma Kotti who loved him at the core of her heart. She also deals with the miserable condition of untouchables. To quote:

"In Mammachi’s time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to cover their upper bodies, nor allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed." 

Pappachi’s treatment of his daughter really highlights how intensely his brutishness has affected Amma’s psyche. Daughter of a Syrian Christian family, she is compelled to have an early taste of male chauvinistic brutality and hypocrisy through her own father. Amma is forced to crop her education the year her father retires. This novel is immensely replete with the vivid descriptions of the sexual act. However, it barely dips low to touch the level of vulgar writing. To her, the act of sex is not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies and the ecstatic pleasures serve the purpose of self-exploration. For she never considers sex as a hush-hush matter.

Many works in the recent past have shown that the definitions of virtuous woman have been modified considerably. Pre-marital sex and extramarital-sex have received sympathetic treatment. Sex is no more a taboo. Modern society seems to be awakening to the fact that sex does act as a rejuvenating force in a relationship that has become eclipsed by the mechanical and dreary routine of the
hectic life. Namita Gokhale presents the world of the rich and affluent people. Women characters have the full appetite for life and the capacity to take in the odd swigs and swags that fall to her lot in the course of her winning spree. Her novel 'Paro' shows a reckless disposition to live life as fully as she can—she seems to have a sexual appetite so ravenous as to prove a potential incinerator on contact.

The women novelists mentioned have definitely challenged the male culture that prevails in our country. But the early soft voices of protest gradually turned into an explicit annoyance and finally took the shape of an open rebellion. Feminism is the belief in the principle that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. From this point of view Shobha De, a modern woman novelist recognizes the displacement and marginalisation of women and attempts to turn this pattern upside down through her works. As a writer she is gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life tactfully. The way she narrates each and every aspect of human relationships is really wonderful. In fact, as a writer she differs considerably from other Indian women novelists. With her vigorous pieces during the 1990s she gave new dimensions to Indian literary scene. Her more than a dozen books have topped the charts and have remained perennial favorites with readers. Popularly known as the Jackie Collins of India, her popularity lies in the contents, mastery over the art of story telling and ease in her use of the language. Picaresque element looms large in her fiction. In fact her novels seem a modernized version of the nineteenth century picaresque fiction. The picaro in her fiction is a woman who wanders from place to place in search of more fulfilling experiences.

She is undoubtedly one of the best female writers India has ever produced. Her fiction has got tremendous response not only from several European
countries but all over the world. She writes racy thrillers set in urban India. The erotic content of her novels has been somewhat controversial, with some reviewers being contemptuous of her work, while others suggest that she is challenging the taboos observed by many women writers. Whatever the case may be, the truth is this: she is in large part responsible for the speeding up of the pace and promotion of the sexual revolution in India with her sensuous novels and western outlook. She is a writer who believes in very frank narration of incidents and absolute open-heartedness. As a creative writer, she is becoming immensely popular day by day.

Shobha De was born in 1948 in a typical Maharashtrian Saraswat Brahmin family. Earlier known as Shobha Rajadhyaksha, she had to suffer the pangs of divorce. After her second marriage with Dilip De, a very supporting husband, she realized her full potential—becoming a successful writer popularly known, as Shobha De. She was educated in Delhi and Bombay graduating from St. Xavier's College, Bombay with a degree in Psychology. She began a career in journalism in 1970 in the course of which she founded and edited three popular magazines, Stardust, Society and Celebrity and was consulting Editor to Sunday and Megacity. Shobha De is the author of more than a dozen titles. In 1989, she wrote her first novel- the best selling 'Socialite Evenings' and in 1990 she published 'Starry Nights'. Her other works are 'Sisters', 'Sultry Days', 'Strange Obsession', 'Snapshots', 'Second Thoughts', 'Uncertain Liaisons' (co-authored with Khushwant Singh), 'Shooting from the Hip', 'Small Betrayals', 'Surviving Men', 'Selective Memories: Stories from My Life', 'Speedpost' and 'Spouse'. All of her works have been phenomenal bestsellers, not only in India but worldwide. Her 'Starry Nights' is a best seller in Hindi as well. Four of her novels are featured in the post-graduate popular culture curriculum of the University of London. Shobha
De has been actively writing scripts for popular T.V soaps eg. Swabhiman and her columns in leading newspapers like The Times of India are widely read and appreciated. In spite of her celebrity status she is basically a family woman presently staying with her husband and their six children in Cuffe Parade, Mumbai. Shobha De possesses multi-dimensional talents. She is now one of India's most widely read columnists; she writes for several newspapers and magazines, including The Times of India, The Statesman, and The Sunday Observer. Moreover, she is one of India's biggest cultural icons. Despite her busy schedule and "deadlines for completing allotted work", her first priority is her family. She writes from home—she is deeply attached to her children and family. Through her novels, De seeks to establish the fact that a woman has the same feelings, passions, aspirations and values as a man and she is determined to fight it out for realizing her dreams.

Shobha De has often been considered not worthy of academic research and study because of the doubts raised by certain critics about the literary merit of her fiction. Her novels—racy and raunchy in style and content are trashed by serious critics for her open discussion of sexual matters. Shobha De has often been criticized as "the highest priestess of gossip and innuendo".16 Her popularity makes writers of any language envious; reviews add to her stature. While Ira Pande accuses her of vulgarizing the printed word with dilettante dabbling of vapid mind; Sunil Sethi considers her works as "Bodice Ripper."17 Sunanda Swarup considers her works "equivalent to Hindi films with their peephole Voyeurism."18 Some critics have been so harsh against her that they deny the obvious fact of her being amongst one of the best-selling writers in India. Such critics attribute all of Shobha De's success to her treatment of sex only; "One discovery De has obviously made is that the route to readers' heart
and pockets, and of late, university curricula, is through orgasms." But these are merely biased and unjustified views. Her literary merits could not be denied on the grounds that she has treated sex in her fiction. Even the earlier writers like Sasthi Brata and Khushwant Singh have been criticized for the same reason. The use of vulgar language and obscenity has been a charge against Mulk Raj Anand's fiction also. Even in British and American literature several writers eg. D.H.Lawrence, Philip Roth and Erica Jong, though patently recognized as indecent, have not been discarded from literary studies. The fact is that Shobha De is preoccupied with sexuality because she feels that this is an area in which women have been repressed and perhaps this is an area, which is the best for rediscovering their individuality as human beings.

Shobha De, who has been variously designated as "the Pasha of Pulp", "a vamp of feminist ideals," "an experimenter of feminism" or "a mere peddler of pornographic fiction" and so on, represents the ferociously militant phase of feminism in Indian English writing. Through her novels and essays, she has tried to shatter the patriarchal hegemony in the Indian society fed on well-known injunctions of Manusmriti:

Pita rakshati kaumarye, bharta rakshati yauvane
Rakshanti sthavire putrah, na stri svatantryam arhati

(“Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males of their families…. Her father protects her during her childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and when she becomes old she is protected by her sons. A woman does not deserve freedom.) Her work is a revolt against society and social norms laid down to underestimate woman. Her novels are largely peopled with women and explore their attendant physical and mental agonies. So the intrusion of
feminist concerns is almost an imperative. De's thoughts about women's problems, as presented in her fiction, demand a special attention as they are expressed equally well in her prose writings. For example, in 'Shooting from the Hip', a collection of articles, she says, "Women the world over are given a raw deal. A rotten one. For this second sex, second class citizen status has always been the system."  

The central theme of De's novels is woman and her relation with the family and society; her trials and tribulations, fret and fever in an uncongenial atmosphere; her tireless efforts to make an identity in a hypocritical and callous society. She seems to fling hot and cold, irony and innuendo on the ostentation and artificiality of modern man. The Tribune rightly observes:

"She slaughters macho males with vengeance and rattle poisons her gender with disdain and disregard. She is Shobha De, and she is scintillating and straight. She is a ruthless writer with a ramrod of a pen, and a raging urge to kill somebody. She demolishes reputations and civilizations with effortless grace, and one thing she doesn't stomach is hypocrisy of any kind. She wields a powerful camera, and she needs to keep shooting that way whether anyone likes to photograph or not."  

Her women characters are not only "the sex-starved unsociables" as S.P. Swain observes but they are also sensitive and sensible human beings of metropolitan society with a cosmopolitan culture. As critical opinion has it, there is in De "much that is amusing, outrageous, thought-provoking, even shocking" and "rarely does one see an Indian author writing with such frankness and obvious feeling."  

25
The novelist has touched upon different facets of an urban woman's life and her plight. It is true that no other issue has received the same kind of full-throated expression as the question of matrimony and sex. Attention has been drawn by others also to women's exploitation, discrimination and co-modification, but De's voice is the most vociferous and striking. She lashes at hypocrisy with all her might whether she is taking up the issue of arranged marriage or interference from the relatives. She narrates the liaison of man-woman in a decent way. In fact, by describing this relationship she has off and on been criticized but she doesn't take this criticism to heart and continues in her writing. In fact, by bold and charming expressions, she is making place in hearts and minds of the readers. That is to say that frank and bold expressions of sex doesn't create an adverse effect on her popularity.

The present study has been designed to examine the element of feminine sensibility in Shobha De's novels. The study will explore her feminist stance by categorizing her fiction within two groups namely: early and later fiction. Her early fictional works will cover 'Socialite Evenings', 'Starry Nights', 'Sisters', 'Strange Obsessions', 'Uncertain Liaisons', 'Sultry Days' and 'Shooting From the Hip' and her later fictional works will cover 'Snapshots', 'Small Betrayals', 'Second Thoughts', 'Selective Memory', 'Speed Post' (De's letters to her children) and 'Spouse: The Truth About Marriage.' In her effort to exhibit different aspects of women's world, Shobha De tries to portray them from one extreme of highly conservative women, who accept the traditional Indian culture to the radically modern, uninhibited and assertive women, who challenge the patriarchal view of male hegemony and attempt to establish their own supremacy. One noticeable view that keeps recurring in her different fictional and prose works is that man-woman relationships need to be redefined.
A casual reading of Shobha De's works may give the impression that she doesn't have any serious concerns, but a careful investigation reveals that the reality is different. Her prime concern is to expose the futility and meaninglessness of pseudo feminist behaviour. In this context, these ideas expressing Shobha De's real concern related to the modern women's behaviour in her fiction are worth quoting, "We are dying of cardiac arrest because we are foolishly cloning male behaviour. And paying a heavy price for our cheap mimicry. Look around, you. See all those macho women? See how desperate they are to out macho the man? To prove themselves? To establish their killer instincts? To win? Nothing wrong with any of this. Provide that women watch out for themselves. Protect themselves." In reality Shobha De is quite often misunderstood by many of her readers due to the irony involved in the narrative stance and her clever handling of the subject matter. A careful exploration of her language and style reveals that Shobha De is not only a popular writer but also a writer having social opinion that demands a careful analysis and evaluation. She undoubtedly is a talented writer and one comes across some original insights and brilliant strokes in her works. Although De is a popular fiction writer, yet her writings cannot be understood in crass commercial terms only. Her artistic, creative and literary concerns deserve serious and close look. Her fiction does not attempt to reform the society but presents it amusingly in naturalistic terms along with its idiosyncrasies. A study of Shobha De's fiction is, therefore, likely to yield us new perspectives on the expanding literary horizon of the contemporary Indo-English fiction.
Notes and References


10. Sahgal, Nayantara, “The Virtuous Woman”, The Tribune (Saturday Plus), Dec. 24, 1988, P.1


(Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1997) p. 39
73-74
(March 31, 1995), p. 207
20. C.P. Surendran, “Just Another De,” *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 6
Publishers and Distributors, 1994),p.110
Distributors Ltd., 5, Ansari Road, New Delhi, p.3.
27. Business Standard
28. Shobha De, “Time to be Women Again,” *The Week* (January 17, 1999),
p. 10